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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 25 April 2005

Lundi 25 avril 2005

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 25 April 2005

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 25 avril 2005

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke):

Imagine my shock this past Friday when I received a copy of a Liberal Party press release stating that our leader, John Tory, was calling for a funding cut to Ontario municipalities and that I was calling for a cut to municipalities in my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The press release was targeted at PC-held ridings and quoted the member for Perth–Middlesex in an attempt to deflect some of the heat that he is taking in his own riding for the beatings some of his own communities are taking under this Liberal government plan that actually reduces grants to municipalities by \$47 million.

I reiterate the challenge issued by our leader, John Tory, that the member for Perth–Middlesex produce one quote that supports his claim or issue a retraction immediately. We know that municipal governments across the province are extremely upset with the impact these Liberal cuts are going to have on their ability to provide service to their ratepayers. We also know that politics can sometimes be rough. But spreading this kind of misinformation is a new low even for the McGuinty Liberals. Our party is committed to fighting for a fair deal for municipalities. We have continually urged the government to honour its promise to communities.

As for the member for Perth–Middlesex, I would urge him to return to those principles of truth and honesty. At the end of the day, they are far more important than a taxpayer-funded car and driver as a reward for blind obedience.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): I would just caution members about unparliamentary wording as they express themselves in statements.

HOT DOCS
FILM FESTIVAL

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): I have two statements to make today. My mother turned 94

today. If I'm as healthy as my mother, hopefully, I will reach that fine, ripe old age.

My second statement: I rise today to recognize the Hot Docs international documentary film festival, which is celebrating its 12th year showcasing the best in documentary film from Canada and around the world. Hot Docs has built a strong international audience over the years with a solid reputation for excellence in documentary programming. In 2004, attendance grew to more than 37,000 people. It is currently being hailed as one of the world's A-list documentary festivals. Public interest in documentaries has exploded in the past few years. The quality of work at Hot Docs showcases the full range of cultural landscape in Canada and internationally.

I ask you to join me in commending the work of the Hot Docs festival organizers and their commitment to showcasing excellence in documentary production, reflecting the true voices of people whose everyday lives are reflected in the stories. The Hot Docs international documentary film festival runs from April 22 until May 1, 2005. For more information, call 416-203-2155.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): Last Friday at the Bill 164 hearings in Oshawa, my colleagues and I had the opportunity to listen to Heather Crowe tell her story. A non-smoker who worked for decades in a smoky Ottawa restaurant area, Heather Crowe now suffers from lung cancer. Her time is now spent educating other Canadians about the dangers of second-hand smoke.

Meanwhile, the opposition and their friends in the tobacco lobby continue to try to refute the evidence that second-hand smoke kills and to argue for designated smoking rooms and things that only go halfway in protecting Ontarians from the kinds of complications that Heather Crowe suffers. They're still looking for the line on the autopsy that says, "Cause of death: second-hand smoke."

I was part of the city of Ottawa council that brought in a no-smoking bylaw that did not permit designated smoking rooms. We made the right decision in going all the way with that legislation; I continue to be thanked for it. It was an easy choice for me. My son, a non-smoker, used to work evenings as a doorman at a downtown Ottawa club. Over time, he developed a chronic cough and ended up at the doctor's office. The doctor initially thought he was a heavy smoker and told him that he really should quit. My son quit his job, and the cough disappeared.

When people like Heather Crowe testify to the harms of second-hand smoke, when they offer up their bodies as evidence of its horrible side effects, we should all sit up straight and listen carefully. Heather Crowe, thank you for helping Ontarians to protect each other from second-hand smoke.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): Canada's justice system continues to fail Canadians. Mind-boggling decisions by judges that seem to completely lack common sense and blithely ignore victims occur all too frequently, feeding the disillusionment of Canadians. A case in point was a sentence handed down in Ottawa court by Judge Roydon Kealey for one Henry Danninger. Danninger, initially charged with second-degree murder, was ultimately convicted of manslaughter in the stabbing death of Andrew Moffitt, a 23-year-old University of Ottawa student. Andrew had attempted to act as a peacemaker during a bar fight and was fatally stabbed.

Prior to his trial, Danninger was released on bail under conditions that restricted his movements and obligated him to keep the peace and be of good behaviour. During that time, Danninger ran a terror campaign against one of his neighbours, dumping feces and urine on the neighbour's car and driveway on an almost nightly basis. The neighbour ultimately installed a video camera, and Danninger was caught on tape on 24 separate occasions. When the tapes were turned over to police, Danninger's bail was pulled and he was locked up.

At sentencing, Justice Kealey unbelievably awarded Danninger two-for-one credit for his time on bail, time that included his almost nightly prowls to pour urine and feces over his neighbour's car. I ask the Attorney General to request that the prosecuting crown submit his views for consideration in Mr. Danninger's upcoming parole board hearing. Hopefully such a submission will assist Andy's family and friends to right the wrong imposed by Justice Kealey's sentencing decision and keep Mr. Danninger in jail.

EARTH WEEK

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I'm proud to speak to the House today on the good work that the community of Thornhill is putting forth in regard to Earth Week, and how we are putting the three principles, "reduce, reuse and recycle," to good use.

I had the pleasure of speaking to the students of Brownridge Public School on April 15 to kick off their environmental cleanup day. I spoke about the importance of keeping our community clean and the importance of the three Rs. Afterwards, we gathered outside to clean up the school park. In the past, the students have planted on the school property as well as participating in the school's environmental club for grades 1, 2 and 5 students. I would like to thank Ms. Strachan and Ms.

Lostritto of Brownridge Public School for organizing the Earth Month events.

1340

Charlton Public School in my riding has a routine litter cleanup campaign by taking the initiative of assigning a month to each grade to clean up the school area. They also have a Charlton environmental leadership team made up of grades 4, 5 and 6 students. The school plants flowers on the school property, composts waste, and puts out a bi-yearly environmental news publication. I would like to congratulate Mr. James Craig of Charlton Public School for heading up the environmental team.

Last Friday, I took part in the 20-minute Vaughan makeover at Dufferin Clark Community Centre, as well as in the Concord West Ratepayer Association park cleanup at Southview Park. I will also take part in the Pomona Park cleanup in the town of Markham on Saturday, April 30, at 9:30 am.

I encourage the residents in my riding and those in the province to participate in their local Earth Week events so that we can ensure that the message to keep our community clean is heard and—

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

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. John R. Baird (Nepean–Carleton): It is with a great deal of sadness that I rise in the House to read a clipping that I took out of the Toronto Sun this morning. It says, "Dalton Backs Off." Let me read:

"Premier Dalton McGuinty has blinked in his fight with the federal government" over the huge discrepancy in the amount of money that Ontario taxpayers put in versus what they take out.

"Apparently heeding the call of his federal Liberal cousins to cool the rhetoric, McGuinty said Friday he was temporarily putting aside his funding fight and pledging support" for the minority Martin government.

"...As Conservative MPP Tim Hudak pointed out, 'Paul Martin's in trouble.... It's the right time to put the knockout punch out there.'"

I want to encourage the McGuinty government to stay on track. Keep up the fight for Ontario's hospitals, for Ontario's nurses, for Ontario's immigrants. When you fight for the good people of Ontario against this corrupt government, you'll have the support of hard-working men and women, hard-working Conservatives, and even a few New Democrats, I might add.

So if you could call on your federal cousins to keep up the fight, to ensure that Ontario gets its fair share. If Paul Martin and the goons in his office would spend as much time listening and talking to the Ontario government and Ontario political parties, if they would spend half the amount of time they did—instead of maligning Warren Kinsella and smearing Warren Kinsella, as they did at the public accounts committee, they should be talking with the Ontario government on how to adequately fund health care in this province.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Order. Just keep the language a bit parliamentary for me, please.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge):

Two quick announcements this morning, the first also to acknowledge a media clip and to hope that the member for Nepean–Carleton reaches his goal of early retirement in the not-too-distant future.

I rise today more formally to speak about the economic record of the McGuinty government. We came to office with a commitment to make Ontario the best place in North America to build a business and raise a family, and we're delivering on that commitment.

You just have to look at the numbers. Between March 2004 and March 2005, we've created 79,700 new jobs in the province of Ontario. Of those, some 6,300 are in the northern part of the province, and northern unemployment has fallen from 7.7% in November 2003 to 6.8% in March 2005.

These are all indicators that the McGuinty government's economic strategy is working. Instead of the race-to-the-bottom economy that the Tory party was famous for, we're committed to building an economy that's innovative and focused on the knowledge-based economy, one that's global in its outlook and can compete with the best in the world.

Take, for example, the auto sector. In their entire term, the Tory government did nothing to attract new investment. In our time in office, through our auto investment strategy under the leadership of Minister Cordiano, we've helped bring GM's Beacon project to fruition. We've also helped Ford bring a billion-dollar investment in state-of-the-art manufacturing to Oakville.

I'm proud to be part of a government that is moving forward on our economy.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): I rise today to speak about the support that this government is getting in our fight to get a fair share for Ontario. Last week, a group of health providers called on the Prime Minister to meet with the Premier to address the issue of closing the \$23-billion gap so that Ontario can invest in "urgent priorities, including health care transformation."

Hilary Short, president and CEO of the Ontario Hospital Association, Doris Grinspun, executive director of the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, and Dr. John Rapin, president of the Ontario Medical Association, are among the eight people who signed the letter.

To be able to continue being the economic engine of the country, Ontario needs to be in a position where we can invest in the services that make our province what it is. We need to close the \$23-billion gap so that we can make needed investments to transform health care, reduce class sizes and give our kids the best possible start in life, and to invest in post-secondary education so that we can be a world leader in the knowledge economy. As

the Premier has said, and as was reiterated in this letter, "Investing in Ontario is investing in Canada."

I would like to close with a reference to the Leader of the Opposition, who mentioned to me that there seems to be some discrepancy about the Ontario municipal partnership fund. The London Free Press, a Sun paper, not really one that is kind to my government, has backed up my allegation that we know how to do grade 8 math over here on this side of the House but that the Leader of the Opposition is wrong. I might add that he mentioned, when talking about my riding of Perth–Middlesex, the great community of Southgate. I'd like to remind the Leader of the Opposition that Southgate, sir, is in your riding, not mine.

DOCTORS' SERVICES

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): I rise to welcome to Queen's Park medical students from around the province. They represent the future of medicine in our province. They're here today to shed light on the challenges of accessibility to medical training in Ontario. This is a dilemma that our government has recognized and is dealing with quickly and diligently.

Here are some of the steps we've taken in our first year and a half in office:

We're increasing overall residency spots by 22% by 2006-07.

We're addressing the family doctor shortage in Ontario by increasing residency spots for family medicine by 70%, or 141 spots, by 2006. This means 337 more family doctors ready to practise in 2008.

We're finally going to capitalize on our greatest strength: our people. We have more than doubled the number of training spots for international medical graduates, from 90 to 200.

We've established the Northern Medical School, creating 56 new medical school spots.

Also, our agreement with the OMA makes us competitive with other provinces. It includes a clerkship stipend of \$500 per month to undergraduate medical students in their final 12 months of medical school.

Premier McGuinty and Minister Smitherman are truly transforming health care in Ontario, and medical students will continue to be part of this positive change.

Let us not forget that the lack of medical spots in our schools began when the NDP cut medical school spots by 13%. The Tories compounded the problem. As a result of the actions of the NDP and the inaction of the Tories, Ontario lost 500 potential doctors.

We're cleaning up the mess. This government, with the help of the medical students, is working to meet the challenge of accessibility to medical training in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Motions? The government House leader.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): No.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I was going to move adjournment

of the House, but if you don't want to do that, we'll just work till midnight.

MOTIONS

APPOINTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSIONER

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to deal with government notice of motion number 354 without debate or amendment.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent, as requested by the House leader? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I move that an humble address be presented to the Lieutenant Governor in Council as follows:

To the Lieutenant Governor in Council:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, now assembled, request the appointment of Gord Miller as the Environmental Commissioner for the province of Ontario as provided in section 49 of the Environmental Bill of Rights, to hold office under the terms and conditions of the said act,

And that the address be engrossed and presented to the Lieutenant Governor in Council by the Speaker.

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

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Monday, April 25, 2005, for the purpose of considering government business.

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

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those against the motion, please say "nay."

I think the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1350 to 1355.

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

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne
Baird, John R.
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bradley, James J.
Broten, Laurel C.
Bryant, Michael
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David

Fonseca, Peter
Gerretsen, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hardeman, Ernie
Hoy, Pat
Hudak, Tim
Jackson, Cameron
Jeffrey, Linda
Klees, Frank
Kular, Kuldeep

Phillips, Gerry
Pupatello, Sandra
Qaadri, Shafiq
Racco, Mario G.
Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Rinaldi, Lou
Runciman, Robert W.
Smith, Monique
Sterling, Norman W.

Chambers, Mary Anne V.
Colle, Mike
Craiton, Kim
Delaney, Bob
Di Cocco, Caroline
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight
Dunlop, Garfield
Flynn, Kevin Daniel

Kwinter, Monte
Levac, Dave
Marsales, Judy
Matthews, Deborah
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Milloy, John
O'Toole, John
Peters, Steve

Takhar, Harinder S.
Tory, John
Van Bommel, Maria
Wilkinson, John
Witmer, Elizabeth
Wong, Tony C.
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Yakabuski, John
Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those against, please rise to be counted by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles
Horwath, Andrea

Kormos, Peter
Marchese, Rosario

Martiniuk, Gerry
Prue, Michael

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 59; the nays are 6.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

VISITORS

Mr. John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: In response to the statement by the member for London North Centre, I'm pleased to introduce Ontario medical school students who are with us in the gallery.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): That is not a point of order.

1400

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): Earlier today I had the pleasure to be in North Bay to reaffirm our government's commitment to Ontario's small urban and rural communities. Together with my colleagues from the federal, provincial and municipal governments, we announced an investment of more than \$249 million by the province and Ottawa for projects that will renew local infrastructure in 120 Ontario cities, towns, villages and rural areas.

This investment represents the first intake of the Canada-Ontario municipal rural infrastructure fund, or COMRIF, which, together with municipal investments, is expected to stimulate up to \$900 million in capital investments over the next five years.

Ontario was the first province in Canada to sign a joint agreement with the federal government for this program, and we have moved quickly to bring the benefits to communities across Ontario. It is a terrific initiative, based on the understanding that good, modern infrastructure is key to ensuring strong and healthy communities. It shows our government's commitment to providing Ontario's small

urban and rural communities the opportunities they need to grow and be prosperous. Their success is critical to the success of our province.

Our government has delivered a number of important initiatives as part of Ontario's overarching rural plan. The rural plan builds on rural Ontario's strengths: dedicated citizens, diverse economic opportunities, unrivalled natural resources and an unwavering sense of community.

We had these principles of the rural plan in mind when we came to the table to design COMRIF—we wanted to ensure it supported the priorities of rural Ontarians. We're proud that, through COMRIF, we'll be improving the public infrastructure of 120 small urban and rural communities.

I'm particularly proud that COMRIF is the first infrastructure program developed jointly by the province, the federal government and the municipalities through the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and that the priorities that municipal leaders told us they wanted addressed—clean, safe drinking water, better sewage systems, improved waste management processes, and safer roads and bridges—are being addressed by our investment in Ontario's communities.

I believe COMRIF sets a new benchmark for co-operation among all three orders of government, and the success of the program is abundantly clear. We want improvements to critical infrastructure to get started fast, so that Ontarians can quickly gain the benefits. We wanted to be sure decisions were finalized and announcements were made in time for municipalities to get tenders out and start work during this year's construction season.

There will be more investments to come for intake 2 and intake 3 of COMRIF. Municipalities will have further opportunities to identify their infrastructure needs and submit proposals for potential projects, the details of which will be announced in the near future.

In addition to COMRIF, our government offers other innovative programs to assist in the renewal of Ontario's infrastructure. The Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority—or OSIFA, as it's known—helps municipal governments borrow funds for infrastructure at better terms and lower interest rates.

By working together, we are building stronger communities and helping to deliver a quality of life that is indeed second to none.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Responses?

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): I'm pleased to respond, on behalf of the official opposition, to the minister's statement in the House today. Certainly those municipalities that have received some long-awaited funding for their capital projects will be happy with the news today. I know that others which did not receive funding will be looking forward to an opportunity to work with the ministry and the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal to ensure that their projects hopefully get funded in the second and third rounds.

I'm very proud, as are members of our caucus who were part of a government that made the biggest investment in infrastructure in Ontario through the SuperBuild program. Certainly my colleague from Oxford can tell

you a lot about the record investments in rural infrastructure made under the OSTAR program and the OSTAR RED program. I was pleased to help play a lead on the investment in community recreation, tourism and cultural infrastructure as well. Many of these projects are now coming to fruition, even here in the city of Toronto, like the ROM project, the AGO and others. It's a revolution in cultural tourism. So we're pleased to see the government continuing, to some extent, the programs and the massive investments in infrastructure under Premiers Mike Harris and Ernie Eves.

We do have to realize, though, that while today's announcement will be welcomed by a number of municipalities on the list, most will greet this as a salve on the wounds by the new funding formula from Dalton McGuinty that has slashed funding to Ontario's municipalities. In fact, when you compare the previous CRF program with the ongoing funding under the Dalton McGuinty program, it's some \$47 million in reductions of annual funding to municipalities. While this will be welcomed, we would like to see more action in fixing the funding formula that is impairing a great number of municipalities, which is, I will add, yet another broken promise by Dalton McGuinty, who has shattered the Guinness World Records when it comes to breaking promises. He said he had a better funding formula for municipalities, and certainly those across the province, like my friend from Chatham-Kent—you've got to pull the municipal politicians off the ceiling, they're so incensed with Dalton McGuinty's betrayal of many of our municipalities.

Let's look at a couple of examples:

Haliburton: I know my colleague from Haliburton–Victoria–Brock has fought hard for the culvert replacements in Haliburton. That municipality will receive \$330,000 through COMRIF, which is welcome, but the county is losing some \$3.5 million in funding under the new funding formula. So while the \$330,000 is welcome, they're going to be hard pressed to pay their municipal share, looking at a cut of some \$3.5 million.

Kincardine: No doubt my colleague from Grey–Owen Sound will be happy with the funding of the Stewart bridge project, some \$200,000. But Kincardine now has to wrestle with a \$1.2-million reduction, and I know the minister has looked to the press coming out of Kincardine and the Grey–Owen Sound area, and they are furious with the betrayal by Dalton McGuinty when it comes to municipal funding.

I know my colleague from Lanark will be happy that the Little Clyde River bridge is getting some funding under this program. But there's approximately \$2.4 million less for Lanark county under this program.

In the united counties of Leeds and Grenville it's some \$3.3 million, the difference in what they had received under CRF in 2004 and what they will receive on an annual go-forward basis under the new program. So the funding for the Spencerville bridge replacement is welcomed, but is a devastating cut.

In my riding of West Lincoln, I'm pleased and thank the minister that the project has come forward to help pay

for a series of road, bridge and culvert repairs, but the \$600,000 that is coming from the province does not make up for the annual reduction of over \$700,000 taken out of the community of West Lincoln.

I do want to add that, while this is the first round of projects—I know both ministers are listening closely. Certainly, while some projects in Niagara have come forward that we're happy about, Wainfleet and a really strong pending environmental concern to the water and sewer system—I want to reinforce the need for that project. I hope that in the second round we'll see the Wainfleet project get near the top of the list.

My colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has a similar concern in Arnprior, a significant environmental project dealing with the sewage system that is very important. I hope they'll get further consideration, among others.

The last thing I'll say is that I would expect that the greenbelt municipalities will have some further assistance. Their growth has been frozen in by the minister's greenbelt plan, and I do hope that when he looked at funding these projects, he made sure the greenbelt municipalities were taken into consideration.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I stand today to tell this government that you have perfected an art, and the art is of making and remaking announcements that are not likely to ever happen. You know, in the end nothing actually ever gets done. It doesn't. The classic example of this government is the announcement after announcement of all the housing and houses they are going to build in this province. You know, I once went out to Scarborough, because you said the shovel was going in the ground, to watch the shovel go into the ground, to look at the housing that was going to be built for those who really needed it. While I was watching the shovel go in, it became very clear that you were building condominiums—not housing for people who needed it but condominiums. It was quite deceptive. When the reality comes down after announcement after announcement and you see the actual figures for 2003-04, you see that this government, in the first year of its mandate, contributed to the building of 18 homes, 18 housings for people, and of that, the federal government paid for all 18. You paid for 11. That's the reality.

1410

Now we've got this COMRIF announcement, and I'd just like to quote from your own stuff, quoting the Minister of State, Mr. Godfrey: "The government of Canada's funding for this initiative was provided for in the February 2005 federal budget and complements other initiatives such as the five-year gas tax transfer of \$1.865 billion to Ontario municipalities."

The reality is that the budget has not passed and, as Canadians who watch television know, the budget is likely never to pass. This is a dying government in its dying days. You rushed out there in those dying days to be the very first provincial government to sign on board to match funds they don't have, and you know full well they're never likely to get them. You've got all those municipalities that desperately need the money, that are

looking for the money, that are trying to do something to get the money, and you're out there promising them that they're going to get it.

The reality is, we know what's happening in Ottawa, we know what is likely to happen in the next couple of weeks and we know this government is never going to be required to pony up the \$300 million that is their share. Even if by some miracle this government survives and actually gets the budget passed—and I say it's going to be a miracle, watching what we're seeing on TV these days—I'm not convinced they're going to have the money to do it, because if you watch Mr. Martin this week, they are going from city to city, from province to province, and he is not only talking about saving his government, but he is also talking about spending additional monies in all kinds of places that he's never promised before: monies that aren't included in the budget, monies he doesn't have, monies that he is never going to be able to get through Parliament.

There's no question that Ontario municipalities require the programs that are listed here. I would doubt very much that a single one of them can go without improving their water quality, without looking after waste water or bridges or roads or all the other things that are contained in this list. They need the money, and they're even willing to go out on a limb and borrow the money from you because that's part of the program too. Municipalities that once were able to debenture on their own no longer can afford to do so. Municipalities that used to have money saved up no longer have money saved up. Municipalities have been downloaded. If you want to do something to help municipalities, you should help them with the download. You should help them to be able to afford to build their own infrastructure.

Frankly, I've seen these announcements before; we've all seen these announcements before. The likelihood of your actually having to spend the money, and the likelihood of the municipalities actually getting that money in this fiscal year, looks remote at this point. I don't think you should be congratulating yourself for what you're doing. If this was such a good announcement, you should have waited to see whether the federal budget actually passed before you went out and made promises that you know you're never going to be able to keep.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): May I draw your attention, in the west gallery, to Mr. Gary Malkowski, former member for York East in the 35th Parliament. Welcome.

ORAL QUESTIONS

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): In the absence of the Premier and the Minister of Finance—we

tried them last week—my question today will be for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Last Friday, Sudbury city council passed a resolution stating that the city will petition you to provide transitional funding to cover the funding shortfalls for the years 2005-08 under your new so-called fairer program for cities and towns.

According to numbers taken from the Ministry of Finance's own Web site, Sudbury will lose over \$1.7 million annually starting this year. The Minister of Finance said these numbers were wrong when I raised them last week. Is the city of Greater Sudbury wrong, or is the Minister of Finance wrong? Can you straighten this out for us?

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): I'd like to refer the question to the Chair of Management Board.

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I just want to perhaps refresh the memory of the Leader of the Opposition. This plan was necessary because of the mistakes of the previous government in downloading responsibility on the municipalities. What the Minister of Finance has done is design a program that is fair and equitable. I say to the public today that no municipality in the province of Ontario in 2005 will get less money than they did the previous year. It is a fair and equitable formula designed to ensure that municipalities across the province are treated fairly by the province of Ontario in the delivery of services they are required to deliver to the people of Ontario.

Mr. Tory: It's so discouraging to come in—it's Monday; it's the beginning of a new week—hoping things will get better when it comes to the non-answers. In any event, we'll just keep trying.

We find out that in order to be able to say what you just did, some of the money included in this year's funding is of course for next year. I'll quote from last Wednesday's Pembroke Daily Observer. They said, "[County of Renfrew Treasurer Jim Kutschke] noted, however, that one-time funding of \$1.7 million received in 2005 is actually a cash advance for 2006, which means next year's provincial funding will be reduced by that amount."

Minister, why is this McGuinty Liberal program handing Renfrew county taxpayers a \$1.7-million property tax increase? Why are you doing that?

Hon. Mr. Phillips: I just say to the public once again that sometimes statements in the House by the member across aren't exactly backed up by the facts. I looked at some statements made last week, where the Conservative Party said that municipalities will lose \$47 million. The fact of the matter is, it was wrong; they get \$38 million more. The Conservative Party said that over 200 municipalities will receive less funding; the fact is, every single municipality will get at least as much money, and 251 will get substantially more.

Here is what a Sudbury ward 5 councillor said: "It's a reliable and predictable source of new revenue, and it's something we're very fortunate to get."

So I would just say that, once again, the facts as presented by the member opposite may not be exactly the real facts. I refer to several statements made by the Conservatives last week that frankly were incorrect. I repeat: Every single municipality is getting at least as much money this year as they did last year, and the formula is fair.

Mr. Tory: I want to thank the minister for that half-hearted apology for the fact that the statements made by them in the House don't always accord with the facts; I appreciate that. Unfortunately, the minister's story just doesn't hold up against an increasing lineup of municipal officials. He has a ward 5 councillor whom he refers to, and we have a resolution of the Sudbury city council. That ward 5 councillor must have voted against it. They're saying that the fairer deal is going to mean higher property taxes.

Last Friday, the mayor of St. Thomas sent Mr. McGuinty a letter, and I'll quote from that letter: "Our city treasurer advised council that the impact of [your new program] would result in an annual, ongoing reduction of \$1,445,700 ... we are concerned about this impending revenue loss ... [which] would translate into a 5% increase in property taxation."

Minister, why are you and your Minister of Agriculture so determined to hand St. Thomas taxpayers a 5% property tax increase, and when are you going to fess up about it?

Hon. Mr. Phillips: Again, I go back to the mess we are correcting that was created by the previous government: the downloading exercise, loading on to municipalities services that cost them an enormous amount of money.

Again, I would say to the people of Ontario—listen carefully—we now have a fair and equitable formula that treats small and medium-sized municipalities well; that recognizes the special needs of the north; that recognizes the special needs of policing in our smaller communities. Every single community in the province of Ontario will get at least as much money from the provincial government in 2005 as they did in 2004. We have a fair and equitable solution to this problem that I think the people of Ontario will be appreciative of.

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

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Mr. Tory: My question is again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I would draw to the attention of the public that what we're seeing again this afternoon is a great attempt to bamboozle them, as we did last week. But we'll try another one.

I will quote from the St. Catharines Standard from last Wednesday: "In all, after a previous one-time grant and new gas-tax revenue ... is factored, there will be around \$5 million less handed out than there was last year in Niagara."

Thorold will receive no funding from your so-called fairer deal. Thorold's director of finance says, "The loss of the \$387,000 in our budget will negatively impact on our levy and tax rates by close to 6%."

Minister, Thorold's numbers are confirmed by the Ministry of Finance's Web site. Why are you hurting taxpayers in Thorold and across Niagara region? Why are you hurting your good friend whom you can normally rely on for such co-operation, the member for Niagara Centre, and forcing a 6% tax increase on his residents? Why are you doing that?

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: Let me just say once again that the actual money the municipalities are getting this year is \$38 million more than last year. It's a 6.1% increase. In addition to that, there is an additional \$230 million to deal with the 2003-04 reconciliation and to make sure that every municipality gets at least as much money as last year.

The system we've initiated is fairer to the municipalities involved. Talk to any municipal leader out there, or a group of them, and you'll find out that the old system simply didn't work equitably and fairly. We are a government that's for fairness. This is the way we felt we should deal with it. It's fairer to the municipalities than the ill-begotten system that they initiated a number of years ago.

Mr. Tory: I'm coming to understand that the Pembroke Daily Observer, the St. Catharines Standard, the Greater Sudbury council and the mayor of St. Thomas—these people are all wrong, your Web site at the Ministry of Finance is wrong, and you're right.

But let's try another one. The Ministry of Finance Web site shows that the county of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry will lose \$5.1 million in annual funding under this latest McGuinty Liberal scheme, brought in with the enthusiastic support of the local Liberal member. According to the county treasurer, Vanessa Bennett—I'm sure we're going to hear she's wrong too—the county received just over \$1 million as an advance for 2006. She's quoted as saying, "It looks like that's a windfall but we learned from Queen's Park that it is a pre-payment of what we are entitled to in 2006."

Minister, how can it be that everybody else is wrong but you? And why are you and the member for Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh and the member for Glengarry-Prescott-Russell causing this big property tax increase for these people?

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: In actual fact, the residents of Niagara are getting 22.5% more this year than last year, and the region of Niagara is getting 10% more than last year. There are some municipalities that may not be getting in the long run, years down the road, as much as they were getting before, but, quite frankly, we wanted a system that was fair to municipalities. We wanted to make sure that their social service costs were going to be covered to a greater extent. We wanted to make sure there was true equalization. And we wanted to make sure that the smaller rural and northern municipalities got the kind of protection they needed. The new system is fairer. No municipality is getting less this year than they did before, plus there is a \$230-million transition fund that every municipality in this province will benefit from.

Mr. Tory: I think they think that the more ministers repeat this whole thing, the more often, on more days, it might become true. But let's just deal with the numbers. I've referenced these numbers from the ministry's own Web site. Your so-called fairer deal for municipalities actually is a \$47-million cut from the previous programs brought in under previous governments. Property taxes are going up as a result—5% in St. Thomas, 6% in Thorold and an astonishing 10.5% in Chatham—and we hear silence from the local members.

Your Minister of Finance has been caught including next year's money this year to try to bamboozle the public in this manner. Why don't you just own up and junk this ill-considered McGuinty Liberal scheme to raise property taxes on all those people around the province? Own up and junk it.

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: We know that the Leader of the Opposition is a great defender of the status quo. The status quo would have meant that the funding to Caledon in your own riding would be cut by \$1.2 million. The status quo would mean that Kawartha Lakes would get \$2.7 million less, that Gananoque would get \$302,000 less, that Pembroke would get \$418,000 less and Smith Falls \$568,000 less.

We are not in favour of the status quo. We want to move forward in a program you created that was totally inequitable to the municipalities involved, taking into account the realities of 2005. You're for the status quo. We are for going forward to make sure that municipalities are healthy. That's why we introduced the COMRIF program today. That's why we've approved more equitable long-term funding for municipalities with this program.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Acting Premier. Last week I asked the McGuinty government to commit itself to implement the 85 recommendations from the Casa Verde nursing home coroner's inquest, 85 recommendations that would improve long-term care for Ontario seniors. Sadly, your Minister of Health would give no such commitment. The Casa Verde nursing home coroner's inquest shows that too many seniors living in long-term-care homes aren't being looked after properly, are not being cared for properly.

My question is this: You've now had an opportunity to read and consider the recommendations of the Casa Verde nursing home coroner's jury. Will you commit today to implementing the recommendations of that coroner's inquest?

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): You can rely very, very heavily on the commitment of the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to do everything possible to protect patients, to protect people in long-term care. You can rely on that not just from what he said last week but by what he's done and what this government has done. We've invested \$191 million for

2,000 new staff, including 600 new nurses. We have brought in a higher standard of care than has been evident under any previous government in terms of long-term care.

You should know as well that there have been revisions in terms of the standards for unannounced inspections. There were 482 unannounced annual inspections and 2,528 unannounced compliance visits last year, a 61% increase.

We have the commitment of the minister in this House and we have the actions of that minister and this government to protect patients in a manner that has not happened in this province before. And it's not simply a record that we stand on but one which is an indication of further improvements to come.

Mr. Hampton: Well, the Casa Verde nursing home inquest has some very specific recommendations, and once again I'm appalled that this government can't commit to them.

Acting Premier, I'm going to send you over something that many of Ontario's frail seniors are too familiar with. It's an undergarment for incontinent seniors. When it's 80% full, it turns blue. Workers at Extencare nursing home in St. Catharines are not allowed to change the undergarments of incontinent residents until they turn blue, even if they know that an incontinent senior is sitting in their own urine or feces for hours at a time. If it's 20% or 50% or 75% full, it can't be changed—only when it's 80% full, when it turns blue.

Imagine yourself in that situation. Imagine the embarrassment, the humiliation. Imagine being dependent upon someone to help you, but they won't help you because the rules don't allow them to. You can do something about this, Minister. Will you?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: The member opposite has already heard that the answer is yes, we are doing something about this. We are making more likely than ever before a standard of care in this province that we all can be proud of.

I say to the member opposite that any of us could be in those beds or in those incontinence diapers and we would want to be treated with dignity and respect. I would say there's a judgment on every member of this House and every government that has held responsibility in this House, and this government has acquitted itself better than any before and is striving, with \$191 million in more resources, on behalf of that very person and every person who finds themselves in a vulnerable position in long-term care.

Other governments spent money on bricks and mortar. We have put the money into nurses and into the quality of care. For the member opposite to show his genuine interest, he has at least to acknowledge that there is a marked increase in the value of care and the compassion that's able to be shown in those facilities, and he can depend on this government to continue to improve that.

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Mr. Hampton: What I acknowledge is that before the election, Dalton McGuinty promised \$420 million a year

in new funding for long-term care. After the election, the promise changed to \$191 million a year, but what is delivered is \$116 million, only a quarter of what was promised.

The reality is that too many seniors across this province are lying and sitting in their own waste for hours because the improvements in long-term care aren't being made. That's the reality that saddens and discourages staff who work in nursing homes. That's the reality that saddens and discourages family members who see an elderly parent lying and sitting in their own waste for hours.

Your government promised to do something about that before the election. So far, very little is being done. You've got 85 recommendations from the Casa Verde nursing home inquest. Will you implement them? Will we see the revolution in long-term care, or is this just another broken McGuinty promise?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: You may think you are channeling, on behalf of people out there, a genuine concern. What I see instead is an opportunity to turn this into some kind of spectacle. I say to you and I say to the other members opposite that when you've got in the order of 2,500 new inspections taking place, when you have new standards that were not there before for nurses, when you have the ability for spouses to be reunified, for families to have consideration for the first time, to actually have protection take place in those homes, you see the extension of compassion from this House into actual services in every community in this province.

For the member opposite to somehow infer otherwise, that the initial investments of this government, which are substantial, have not resulted in that, is to mislead families and others. We have a genuine reason to be vigilant and to have concern, but that expectation has been fully delivered on and will continue to be delivered by a Minister of Health who has exerted his full energy—

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

Mr. Hampton: To the Acting Premier: The Acting Premier lectures on about dignity and respect. What we see is vulnerable children being forgotten by this government: the poorest of children having their money clawed back and children who are autistic being told before the election that they'll continue to receive IBI treatment, but after the election, no such thing.

Before the election, we were told that seniors living in long-term care were going to see a real progressive change, were going to see over \$400 million invested so they'd get better care. After the election, it seems like they're being forgotten. Your minister promised legislation last fall to improve long-term care. Where is it? Nobody has seen it. He quotes regulations that aren't being enforced and he hides behind service agreements that aren't being honoured. A year and a half ago, he shed tears; since then, we've seen almost nothing. Where is the revolution in long-term care for vulnerable seniors that the McGuinty government has promised?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: The average Ontarian watching the procedures of this House may be wondering, is it possible that somehow the member opposite has an abiding interest in getting something done that isn't being done, or is it possible that he is actually the member of a government that promised to get rid of food banks, to do something on behalf of hungry kids, but instead abandoned that promise faster than they could shred the Promises for People that it was built on? This was in fact not a cornering of that kind of concern and not a reflection, in today's issues, on what can be done for people beyond what the government is doing.

We have committed ourselves very fully to take responsibility. The Minister of Health has stood in this House on occasion after occasion and made announcements of improvement in the standards, and those improvements have translated, as I've already related, into \$191 million worth of more services, 2,000 more staff to provide compassionate care, 600 nurses returned from some of the neglected previous governments to have them there in the first place—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Hampton: Last week, the Casa Verde jury said, "Nursing homes are in dire need of more funding, stiffer regulations and better-trained workers." Well, we haven't seen more funding. You're delivering less funding than you promised. The minister cites regulations that we know aren't being enforced, and we've shown you examples last week of where workers are being laid off—not trained and hired, but laid off.

The minister says the revolution is underway. Well, from the perspective of seniors, from the perspective of workers who work in nursing homes, and from the perspective of families, it's not underway, Minister. When you promise \$400 million before the election and it becomes \$191 million after the election, but only \$116 million is actually delivered, that's not an improvement for people. You're not even coming close to your own promises.

Minister, where is the revolution you promised? Where's the legislation? Where's the money? Where's the training? Where are the new nurses and personal care workers that we need to look after our seniors?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Again, there is the artificial cultivation of alarm on the member's behalf across. Two thousand new workers are there and present in those homes, 600 nurses included. We have people like Greg Fougère, the chair of the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors, saying there has been a lot done in the past year with the revolution in long-term care, and we see this government moving on many fronts to improve care and services for seniors. There are objective people in the community who are seeing the improvements they waited too long for from previous governments.

We don't say that this is all the improvement that can be done or that should be done, and the Minister of Health has been first among those to put every available

resource that he can in smart places, not just with the dollars, but with the inspections, the regulation, and the training and other things that he's put forward in this sector. We have, for the first time, a champion in the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care for all the vulnerable seniors in long-term-care facilities. This government is, frankly, quite proud of the record that we have and the future that people in those homes have: a constant improvement, from a government that does finally care.

Mr. Hampton: Well, Acting Premier, I want to remind you of some of the key findings of the Casa Verde nursing home inquest jury.

First, a minimum nursing staff or personal care staff to resident ratio: That's something you promised and something you haven't done.

Another one: using permanent staff rather than contracting out. That's something you used to talk about.

Another one: mandatory reporting by long-term-care facilities on how the nursing and personal care envelope is spent. We've already had examples last week where that's not happening.

Major changes to the way in which residents with dementia are cared for: That's something you used to talk about. That's not happening.

Revisions to the funding model: Before the election, you said over \$400 million a year. Now that's not happening.

Minister, how can you continue to rant on with things that are not happening, things that are not being done to protect our seniors, when you know very well from your own promises before the election and the Casa Verde inquest after the election that these things need to be done? You promised them. Casa Verde says they need to happen. Where are they?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: They are out there, thankfully, in the real world, where seniors are, where they depend on the services this government is providing, and which the artificial rhetoric of the member opposite is not accurately representing.

For example, I quote from the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors saying as recently as a few days ago that at Dufferin Oaks, the community of management has supported significant staffing increases in the past year: May 1, we increased nursing and personal care staffing by 134 hours per week. In January 2005, despite a fall in CMI that measures the difficulty, we have another 117 hours. With these enhancements, we now have 2.45 hours per resident a day.

Real improvements for every vulnerable senior are taking place in those quiet places. We've heard those noises of people who otherwise would be unattended. This government prides itself on its civility and its purpose for being here and making sure that those people get attended to. Under our Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and our Premier and this government, they are

being listened to and those services are being delivered, despite what the member opposite tries to make of it.

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MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): A question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: Clause 6(1)(b) of your Greenbelt Act gives you the authority—and, I suggest, the responsibility—to set out “policies to support coordination of planning and development programs of the various ministries of the government of Ontario.” I would remind you that your act will be in force for a minimum of 10 years.

Minister, given your responsibilities under the Greenbelt Act, what intervention did you make or have you made with the Minister of Finance to ensure that greenbelt municipalities are not negatively affected by the new Dalton McGuinty funding formula for municipalities?

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): Let me say once again that your funding formula to municipalities under the old CRF program was totally fallacious. It didn't make any sense. Some municipalities were getting \$30,000 and other municipalities in similar circumstances were getting well over \$1 million. It didn't make any sense. We simply felt that it was time to put a new—

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): The minister used some rather unparliamentary language. I would ask you to withdraw it.

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: I'll withdraw whatever—
Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

I just ask for you to withdraw that. That's all I need.

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: I withdraw, Speaker.

All I can tell you is that the new formula is fairer to municipalities. It will assist municipalities with social program costs. It will assist and respond to policing costs, particularly in rural municipalities, which vary greatly right across this province. It will provide for much better equalization and will recognize the unique challenges facing northern and rural communities. That's what the program is about. There is \$233 million in transition funding, and the funding for this year alone is up by 6.1% over what that government spent before.

Mr. Hudak: Obviously, a disappointing response by the minister. I asked a very simple question: Did he intervene or not with the Minister of Finance to ensure that the greenbelt municipalities would not be negatively impacted by the new funding formula? The minister, sadly, reverted to his general speaking notes prepared for him on a different question entirely.

Minister, I'll give you some of the numbers here: Lincoln—in the greenbelt—cut by over \$1 million in ongoing funding from the CRF envelope; the region of Durham, \$337,000; Grimsby, over \$700,000; Niagara-on-the-Lake, \$1.3 million; Milton, \$1.2 million.

I remind you that your greenbelt plan freezes these municipalities. I find it hard to believe, and please tell me

it's not so, that you stood on the sidelines during the preparation of this funding formula. You didn't stand up for greenbelt municipalities; you didn't stand up for your legislation. Instead, you took a powder.

Minister, tell me it's not true. Tell me you'll fight for these greenbelt municipalities and make sure they don't get one dime cut from the municipal transfer.

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: First of all, the municipalities in the greenbelt can certainly work within their boundaries to develop the way they normally want to. What we have done with the greenbelt law is protect those agricultural lands surrounding those municipalities that are very valuable to this province and that we want to protect so they can provide the produce for future generations. We've also protected those natural heritage systems of streams and watercourses in those areas. Those are the areas that the greenbelt is protecting, not only for this generation but for many, many generations to come.

We have been fair with the municipalities, both in the greenbelt legislation and in the funding legislation that we have in place for this year.

SERVICES FOR THE HEARING-IMPAIRED

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): What we need is somebody in the greenbelt who will protect us from the Liberals.

I have a question to the Acting Premier. You will know that today we have with us a number of people in the east gallery who are parents of deaf children. They're upset at your government because your government has cut the funding to the Ontario society of the deaf early literacy consulting program for children. This particular program is extremely important, because it develops the curriculum needed for schools to be able to do their job when it comes to the instruction of these children, either in ASL or LSQ. Without that type of funding, there is no curriculum development, no training of the trainers, no support for the people who are going to be working one-on-one with the kids in the education system.

I have a question for you, Acting Premier, and it's a simple one: Are you prepared to restore the funding to this program to make sure that those kids get an equal opportunity when it comes to education? After all, you will know that deaf children are equal.

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): Thank you for raising the question. We appreciate the presence here of members of the Ontario Cultural Society of the Deaf. The organization was provided with a contract as part of the start-up of the infant hearing program, as I think the member is aware. Its work was very much appreciated. They were tasked with developing American sign language materials and resources for public education, and they did a tremendous job creating that as a method of communication for babies identified with permanent hearing loss.

Now that the infant hearing program is fully implemented, all the available funding is being utilized not for start-up but for actual direct service for those families.

Those resources are available through the infant hearing program or the Ontario Early Years centres. We want to be able to assure everyone that those services will be available there. If they choose ASL services, they will see the same level of service as those who choose oral language as a method of communication, as a result of the success of this program. That is as a result of the funding having served its purpose over those three years, as I believe the member knows.

Mr. Bisson: The problem is simply this: It's like locking these children in time. It's like saying, "We're going to take the curriculum development in Ontario for English and French kids and we're not going to spend any more money to develop curriculum and to support the children in our schools." Why would we do that to the deaf community? They need to have this type of work to develop the curriculum, to do the training and to give the support that's necessary for the kids. I can't understand why your government would all of a sudden think for some strange reason that the deaf community after today is not going to need more curriculum development. Get with it. You're the Minister of Education. You should know better.

I'm going to ask you the question again. It was a program that was started to assist those people who are training kids who are doing communication in either ASL or LSQ and give them the supports they need to go on with their education. Will you fund it? Yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: The member knew when he stood up in the House to address the question that the answer is yes, because the funding has already been given. The funding has gone to provide for, first of all, the development of a new program, the development of those materials. That's been done. The same amount of money—all of it, in fact, \$8.3 million—is going to the direct provision of the services that were done with the materials that this society developed very expertly and much to the benefit of infant children who need access to American sign language.

The member knew that when he raised the question. He shows the same cavalier respect for the facts as his leader when it comes to representing vulnerable people in this House. There may be other things—and I'm sure there are—that the society should be engaged in. They've expedited and conducted themselves in an exemplary fashion here, but the way you formed the question, the idea that somehow this money is not working on behalf of deaf children, is simply not accurate. I believe you knew that, and I believe this House deserves to know better, as does the public. All \$8.3 million is going into direct assistance to access educational services on the same basis as for the children with hearing of a different standard.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay–Superior North): My question is to the Minister of Education. As you know, the Lakehead District School Board continues to move toward the closure of many schools in the

Thunder Bay area. Seven are scheduled to close at the end of this year alone.

Minister, you have publicly stated that with the new closure guidelines in place, the board will have to meet the standards set by those guidelines in order to move forward with their present plan. In fact, you have made it clear that you will be appointing a facilitator to conduct an independent review into all the closures, including those scheduled for this year. Can you tell us today who that facilitator will be and provide some detail as to the scope of this review?

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I'm happy to advise the member opposite, who has advocated quite strongly to make sure that the ultimate benefit is served, that all children across the province, including those in the Lakehead, benefit from a facilities policy that will, for the first time, put a balanced view forward.

We have said that for the boards that could not, for whatever reason, honour the moratorium, we would conduct an independent review. We have now appointed Dave Cooke, who is a former Minister of Education, to conduct that review, to look at whether the process that we have now put in place, that we've asked boards to follow in future, would significantly benefit communities for which interim work was done by boards even as the moratorium was taking place. I believe Mr. Cooke will help us to make sure that a review is done to ensure that the community of Thunder Bay and the surrounding communities of Lakehead region do not lose out from all the benefits that we're bringing forward in our new facilities policy.

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Mr. Gravelle: Clearly, a great deal is relying on the review that Mr. Cooke will be conducting, certainly for the schools that are scheduled to close and also for the board itself. As you are aware, this is an issue that has caused a great deal of controversy in our region, particularly as the board has publicly stated that they believe they followed the school closure guidelines you recently put in place. Presumably this will be for the facilitator to determine, which I believe begs a few questions: How much scope does the facilitator have? Will he meet with all the concerned groups as part of his review? Also, will his recommendations be binding? And, if I may, one more question: Will his report be presented to you before the end of this school year?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: The independent facilitator will look at the actions taken by the board in arriving at a decision. We set the guidelines as a province. We've set them newly as a government now, and we'll look at whether or not the spirit of the new guidelines was met by the actions undertaken while we asked for a moratorium. Yes, those decisions will be binding and can result in changed actions on the part of the board in terms of not being in compliance with the new guidelines. I will receive those recommendations directly, and the recommendations will also go to the board for any changes in their actions. In addition, we believe this can be done in

an expedited fashion, approximately two to two and a half weeks.

We will be able to talk to members of the affected communities, not to re-conduct public hearings but to talk to representatives of each of the school communities affected to show the respect that is implied in the policy: that every community should be respected for the value the schools provide to them as well as for the students who attend those individual institutions. I believe the outcome will not just be good but better for the kids in Lakehead and the communities there as well.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): My question is to the Minister of Agriculture. On March 30, our leader, John Tory, asked you when farmers could expect the \$79 million you promised them. Your response was, "The MRI program has been in place for a number of years. ... the \$79 million that's going to flow is going to flow through the ... program, and those cheques should be in the mail within the next two to three weeks."

Well, that time has long since passed, and the farmers in my riding of Oxford haven't received anything. Farmers are calling me to say that they continue to call Agricorp, and the answer is the same: "The cheques have not been issued yet." What have you got to say to these hard-pressed farmers of Ontario? Where's the money, Minister?

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): The cheques are flowing. The cheques started to flow last week. The \$79 million will flow quickly into farmers' hands. The comments he has made that they're not flowing—I don't know where he's getting that information, but the dollars are flowing. The provincial dollars will flow much quicker than the federal government dollars. If the honourable member has a constituent who would like to know the status of his market revenue cheque, I'd urge him to pick up the phone and contact my MPP liaison or call Agricorp directly.

Mr. Hardeman: Mr. Minister, that's exactly what I did. As recently as this morning, we called Agricorp, and they said the cheques haven't been issued and it could be another couple of weeks before the farmers get any money. I remind you that the day you made your announcement, you told farmers that the additional funds would be in their hands prior to the planting season. Well, farmers, at least those who can afford to, are in the field and planting now. Banks are refusing to loan farmers money to plant their crops this year because they have no faith in your commitment to Ontario's farmers.

Minister, I ask again, when will the farmers in my riding and the farmers in Ontario receive the help you promised and said you would deliver within two weeks? They have so far got absolutely nothing, and the people who issue the cheques said they have not issued the cheques as of today.

Hon. Mr. Peters: Unlike John Tory and the band of Tories, who advocate that our grain and oilseed farmers

should be getting away from grains and oilseeds crops and moving to organics, we believe in the grains and oilseeds industry, unlike John Tory and the Tories, who are prepared to abandon our farmers in this province. As well, I see they've struck a committee with member Yakabuski and member Hardeman to look at rural issues. It should be very interesting to see the influence that the Lanark Landowners' Association has on John Tory and Tory policy in this government.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Order. I thought that the member from Oxford asked the question, and I hoped he would listen to the answer. New question.

DUFFINS-ROUGE AGRICULTURAL PRESERVE

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. On March 7, we asked to you uphold the agricultural easements on the Duffins-Rouge agricultural preserve, because the city of Pickering had just lifted them, to the delight of the Premier's and the Finance Minister's \$10,000-per-plate dinner guest Silvio DeGasperis. Despite your lack of concern at the time, we now learn that the head of the Ontario Realty Corp. and the Chair of Management Board, Gerry Phillips, see things differently. They believe the city of Pickering deceived the province and failed to honour a public trust, and are considering legal action. My question is, will you tell us today that the government will be taking the city of Pickering to court to fight their lifting of the agricultural easements on the Duffins-Rouge agricultural preserve?

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): I would like to refer this question to the Chair of Management Board.

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Indeed, I did send a letter to the city of Pickering on behalf of the government. I wanted to make it absolutely certain that the city of Pickering, and indeed the people of Ontario, understood the government of Ontario's firm commitment to ensure that the Duffins-Rouge agricultural preserve is preserved as agricultural land. That was the purpose of the letter, and it was clear to the city of Pickering that we have the full intention of making certain that is preserved. We look at all our options. Legal action is one option, but we'll make certain we take the necessary steps to protect that as an agricultural preserve, and that was the purpose of the letter I sent on behalf of the government.

Ms. Churley: Back to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: Pickering council's attempt to liberate the Duffins-Rouge agricultural preserve on behalf of Mr. DeGasperis and others is a strong statement on just how permanent developers perceive your greenbelt to be. They recognize that, contrary to your claims, one does not have to wait for a 10-year review to amend the greenbelt plan. You, Minister, have the power to initiate

amendments of the greenbelt plan at any time, and they know that. So Ontarians are legitimately concerned that the Duffins-Rouge agricultural preserve is just the tip of the iceberg and that there will be other areas within the greenbelt where developers are speculating that they can win the favour of government and get their lands removed.

My question: To stop this speculation by developers on the greenbelt, will you commit to passing NDP Bill 178, which will give Ontarians the permanent greenbelt you promised them and not the floating greenbelt you gave them?

Hon. Mr. Phillips: I want to continue to state very clearly to the member, and indeed to the public, what we've stated in our communication with the city of Pickering: We are dedicated to preserving the Duffins-Rouge agricultural preserve as agricultural land, and we are committed to preserving the integrity of our greenbelt legislation. The step I took last week on behalf of the government of Ontario was to make certain, in the particular case of this agricultural preserve, that there can be no confusion. We've made very clear to the city of Pickering our dedication and determination to make certain that we preserve that as an agricultural preserve, and we are taking the appropriate steps. I've indicated that one of the options we are looking at in making sure that is preserved is legal action. Make no mistake that we are dedicated to preserving that as an agricultural preserve and are taking, we think, the appropriate steps.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who I'm pleased to say sits in front of me, to my right. In North Bay, and in the House today, you announced the infrastructure investments that deliver on the McGuinty government's commitment to build strong and sustainable communities. My own community of Niagara Falls is the recipient of almost \$2 million, which is part of a \$6-million plan that will provide proper sewer infrastructure for my community to stop sewer backups and prevent flooding for residents in the older part of the city of Niagara Falls.

Minister, can you tell us how these infrastructure investments improve the quality of life for Ontario's rural towns, cities and villages?

1500

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): I thank the member for his question and for all he does for Niagara Falls and the Niagara area.

I'm very proud that the government of Ontario has committed \$298 million to improve rural infrastructure over the next five years. Together with our municipal and federal partners, we will be investing over \$900 million in rural investments over the next five years. These investments are helping Ontario communities provide

clean, safe drinking water, better sewage systems, improved waste management and safer rural roads and bridges.

The COMRIF program's objective is to improve the quality of life of residents through projects that enhance and renew our infrastructure to protect the health and safety of citizens and to support long-term economic growth to build strong, sustainable and healthy communities.

Mr. Craiton: My supplementary question is again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The benefits of this unique partnership between the province of Ontario and the federal government, known as COMRIF, will be felt across our great province. In the city of Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake, projects for waste management separation were selected because of health and safety value-for-money and public priorities. I know my community is eager to start construction in the upcoming season. This initiative will be creating new jobs while improving local public services.

Minister, please explain how it came about that Niagara Falls and 119 other communities across Ontario are able to start constructing and improving public services in their communities this year.

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: This is the first infrastructure partnership of its kind that joins the province, the federal government and AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, through a one-application process. That's never been done before. The governments of Canada and Ontario and AMO are working together to ensure that municipalities have the tools they need to improve essential rural infrastructure. Our government is the first government in Canada to sign this agreement, because we wanted to act quickly in the interests of all Ontarians.

As a result of today's investment announcements clear across this province, 120 communities will be provided with the support they need to renew essential infrastructure in their communities. We, the McGuinty government, are committed to rural Ontario, and COMRIF demonstrates our government's commitment.

POLICE SERVICES

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. It involves the city of Guelph. I want to add right off the bat that Guelph has joined Club Zero as of 2006 under the Ontario municipal partnership fund.

In an article in the Guelph Mercury on Saturday, a spokesman from your ministry identified the latest in your arsenal of stalling tactics on your campaign promise to put 1,000 new police officers on our streets. I'll quote from the ministry spokesman, who says, "It's not just hiring the officers, but we also have to determine what areas need officers." That's exactly what the spokesperson from your ministry said.

May I remind you that your ministry doesn't hire the officers? Local police services do. These local police services also know better than anyone else in the

province what areas of policing require the officers most. When are you going to stop stalling on keeping this promise, let municipalities know how many officers they are actually getting and let local police services decide how they want the officers allocated?

Hon. Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I thank the member for the question. He obviously doesn't understand how the system works. Under the community policing program that his government initiated, it was a shared-cost program, with the government paying 50%, to a maximum of \$30,000 per officer. The ministry does not decide how many officers a particular municipality is going to have. The municipality has to decide how many officers they can afford, pegging their share of the cost.

What happens is that we are negotiating with police services across the province to determine what number of officers they would like to access. When they do that, and when we have them all in order so we know how many of the 1,000 are going to what particular police service, we will do it. We are absolutely committed, and I can give you my guarantee, that before this mandate is over, we will be putting 1,000 new officers in the streets and communities in Ontario.

Mr. Dunlop: Minister, in that same newspaper article, Guelph police chief Rob Davis, right in your parliamentary assistant's own riding, says he couldn't wait for the McGuinty government to make good on its promise to hire 1,000 new police officers. In fact, he hasn't even had a response from your office in over two months. Because of retirements, maternity leaves and injuries, he's had to hire new police officers, but he's not getting a single penny from the McGuinty government to pay for them.

Minister, if and when you finally get around to keeping your promise, will you reimburse the city of Guelph and other municipalities for the police officers they hire on their own in the meantime? Will you do that, since your Premier made the fancy announcement last year on October 24 when he announced that you'd be hiring 1,000 new police officers?

Hon. Mr. Kwinter: Every police service in Ontario has retirements, attrition, things that are happening, and they have a complement that their local municipalities have decided they're prepared to fund. What we are talking about is an additional 1,000 officers. What is happening in a lot of communities is that they're saying, "This could be imminent, so why should we hire 100% dollars on police services when we can wait and get 50% dollars?" That is what is happening. But in the meantime, they have an obligation to maintain their police service at the complement they have. We are providing 1,000 extra officers on top of that.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question is to the Acting Premier. In the last election, your government campaigned on a platform of restoring

public services. To date, however, your record in office has been more about cutting those same services and handing out layoff notices to the workers.

Today we hear about another attempt to off-load valuable public services: the proposed privatization of air ambulances. Minister, air ambulances are a crucial public service, particularly in northern and rural Ontario, and it is the sole responsibility of the government. My question to you is simple: Will you rescind your government's decision to privatize this essential service?

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I want to assure the member opposite that this government has in fact done the opposite of what he has said, which is to make \$3 billion worth of investments in health care, making them more accessible to people in every part of this province. The member opposite would well have taken note, I think, of the family health teams put forward last week to increase access in their own communities to services, some of which would have required air ambulance before.

The commitment we have is very, very clear: to invest at some cost, not just in dollars but in terms of political risk, because we think this is the right thing to do for the province to improve health care services. So I say to the member opposite, we guarantee that health care services are getting better, that wait lines are getting shorter, that services all around the province, far from being impaired, as the member implied, are actually going to be improved under this government's watch.

Mr. Prue: I listened to that whole response, and I'm going to check Hansard too. He never once mentioned the term "air ambulance." My question is about air ambulances.

The reality is that it is the government that has a responsibility to ensure that emergency air ambulance service is there for the people of Ontario in crisis situations, when they most desperately need it. Air ambulance services make 17,000 calls a year and are responsible for all of the people in Ontario. Off-loading that responsibility will prove to be a disaster. I ask you again, will you rescind your government's decision to privatize this vital service?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: It's clear that the member opposite is, like some of his colleagues, stuck somewhere in the middle of a process and not actually with delivering an outcome for a patient, for someone who needs a service.

Air ambulance service will not only continue but, like every other part of our valuable, publicly funded health services, we will endeavour to improve it. That has been our track record; that has been what we've done. There isn't an area you can point to, frankly, where the services haven't been improved.

1510

Your leader flailed away earlier, trying to talk about long-term care. Instead, that's improved. We say again, we will look at every area where we can find improvements, because we have that obligation. We don't have the luxury of being stuck in process like the third party or

stuck 25 years ago, like the third party. We have confidence in public services, and the only way those services engender confidence is when they work, when people can actually see that they get value for the dollars that are in.

So we are looking at all the different operations of government, but they are essentially public in nature, they are publicly controlled, and they will have, ultimately, the confidence of the public, which is something the third party forgot about how to do a long, long time ago.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot): My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, it's clear to me, as one who sat through the Bill 100 hearings, that the McGuinty government takes its commitment to the environment seriously. Announcing the appointment of Mr. Peter Love as Ontario's first chief electricity conservation officer during Earth Week was not just a coup, but a fitting reminder of that commitment.

Minister, I know that Mr. Love is a committed environmentalist who will be working as hard as he can to ensure that Ontario becomes a world leader in electricity conservation. That said, Minister, can you tell us a little bit more about Mr. Love's mandate and specifically what he'll be doing?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I note that the NDP leader shakes his head in opposition to this appointment, but let me say a few words about the chief energy conservation officer, the individual who will lead what will be responsible for helping the government meet its target to reduce peak electricity demand growth in Ontario by 5% by 2007.

The bureau will develop province-wide conservation programs to help consumers save energy and save money. It will promote energy conservation and the efficient use of electricity, it will assess the technical, economic and market potential for conservation in the province, and it will report on Ontario's progress in achieving its conservation targets and assess what further action is required. That is, we'll set targets and we'll mark progress so that there's openness and transparency and the people of Ontario can see whether or not this government or any future government is meeting its commitments with respect to that. This government still believes that a megawatt saved is every bit as good as a megawatt built.

Mr. McMeekin: Minister, you're just full of good news these days. Earlier last week you announced a new request for proposals for 1,000 megawatts of clean, renewable energy generation. You seem to be moving forward on all fronts, to be firing on all cylinders. What impact do you expect your announcement will have on our goal of increasing the amount of electricity generation that comes from clean, renewable power sources in Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The member is accurate. We're doing what John Tory and the Conservatives won't do: moving forward on renewable electricity. We're doing—

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): They liked coal.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Yes, John Tory and the Tories want more coal-fired generation in Ontario. We say no to that. We're doing what the NDP couldn't and wouldn't do when they were the government: We're adding wind power, solar power, biomass, geothermal, in a way that is prudent and responsible, that's delivered in a timely fashion and will lessen our dependence as the Tories don't want to do.

The Tories want more coal. They want more pollution. They don't seem to want to deal with childhood asthma. They don't want to deal with smog days in Algonquin Park. They don't want to deal with smog days in Toronto in February. The McGuinty government is taking a lead in North America in terms of shutting down our coal plants, replacing it with clean, renewable, affordable electricity that will serve our children and their children for many, many years to come.

PETITIONS

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): This is a petition calling for "In-Depth Investigation of Judicial System.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Hon. Michael Bryant is minister responsible for democratic renewal; and

"Whereas the Hon. Michael Bryant, Attorney General of Ontario, is elected to safeguard our justice system on behalf of the people of Ontario; and

"Whereas the ministry of our Attorney General may not be aware of the serious and important issues facing individuals involved in areas of the justice system even though the Attorney General's ministry is continually monitoring;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, ask the Hon. Michael Bryant, Attorney General, for his in-depth investigation of the Ontario judicial system and [to] make the public aware of his findings immediately."

I'm pleased to submit this on behalf of many, but my constituent Albert Werry has signed and dated this, and I'm pleased to endorse it myself.

ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I'm pleased to present a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly from the Mississauga Board of Chinese Professionals and Businesses. CPB does a great job in our community, and I'm grateful for the help of André Mak, Rosie Yu, Winnie Tung and Cindy Chan. 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....

“The government of Ontario support the swift passage of Bill 3, An Act to protect anaphylactic students, that requires that every school principal in Ontario establish a school anaphylactic plan.”

I join with my colleague the member for Brampton in supporting this position. I affix my signature to it and I'll ask Taylor to carry it down for me.

HALTON RECYCLING PLANT

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas noxious odours from the Halton recycling plant in Newmarket are adversely affecting the health and quality of life of residents and working people in Newmarket; and

“Whereas local families have lost the enjoyment of their properties for themselves and their children, face threats to their health and well-being and risk a decline in the value of their homes; and

“Whereas, for the 300 members of the nearby main RCMP detachment as well as other workers in the area, the odours are making their working conditions intolerable;

“Therefore, we, the undersigned, demand that the Minister of the Environment take immediate action to halt all noxious emissions and odours from the Halton recycling plant, and take all steps necessary to force Halton Recycling to comply with environmental rules, including closing the plant if the odour problems continue.”

As I am in agreement, I will sign my name to this petition.

CREDIT VALLEY HOSPITAL

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It's my pleasure to present a petition from a group of ratepayers in Oakville, Milton, Burlington and Richmond Hill because they're all in the catchment area of my local hospital, Credit Valley Hospital. It reads as follows:

“Whereas some 20,000 people each year choose to make their home in Mississauga, and a Halton-Peel District Health Council capacity study stated that the Credit Valley Hospital should be operating 435 beds by now, and 514 beds by 2016; and

“Whereas the Credit Valley Hospital bed count has remained constant at 365 beds since its opening in November 1985, even though some 4,800 babies are delivered each year at the Credit Valley Hospital in a facility designed to handle 2,700 births annually; and

“Whereas donors in Mississauga and the regional municipalities served by the Credit Valley Hospital have contributed more than \$41 million of a \$50-million fundraising objective, the most ambitious of any community hospital in the country, to support the construction of an expanded facility able to meet the needs of our community;

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

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care undertake specific measures to ensure the allocation of capital funds for the construction of A and H block at Credit Valley Hospital to ensure the ongoing acute care needs of the patients and families served by the hospital are met in a timely and professional manner, to reduce wait times for patients in the hospital emergency department, and to better serve patients in the community in Halton and Peel regions by reducing severe overcrowding in the labour and delivery suite.”

I support this wholeheartedly. I'll affix my signature to it and ask page Jonathan to carry it for me.

1520

FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD

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

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

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

“Whereas the town of New Tecumseth, under the leadership of Mayor Mike MacEachern and former Mayor Larry Keogh, has been unsuccessful in reaching an agreement with the Ontario Historical Society to use part of the land to educate the public about the historical significance of the work of Sir Frederick Banting;

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

“That the Minister of Culture and the Liberal government step in to ensure that the Banting homestead is kept in good repair and preserved for generations to come.”

I want to thank Larry Whitmore of Loretto for helping circulate that petition, and I want to thank the CBC, which did an extensive program on this very issue on the weekend.

VISITORS

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to recognize students here from John Diefenbaker school in Scarborough East, who are playing host to a group of about 30 students and their teachers from Elnora, Alberta. I want to—

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): It's not a point of order.

ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): On behalf of everyone in Mississauga, we join with them in welcoming all of our colleagues from Scarborough here to the Legislature.

I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly from Lee Perrin on Lisgar Drive, in my home neighbourhood of Lisgar, in Mississauga. 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 the government of Ontario support the swift passage of Bill 3, An Act to protect anaphylactic students, that requires that every school principal in Ontario establish a school anaphylactic plan.”

I thank Lee for sending in the petition. I affix my signature to it, and I'll ask Elizabeth to carry it down for me.

ABORTION

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): I have a petition from a number of people in my riding.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario health system is overburdened and unnecessary spending must be cut; and

“Whereas pregnancy is not a disease, injury, or illness, and abortions are not therapeutic procedures; and

“Whereas the vast majority of abortions are done for reasons of convenience or finance; and

“Whereas the province has the exclusive authority to determine what services will be insured; and

“Whereas the Canada Health Act does not require funding for elective procedures; and

“Whereas there is mounting evidence that abortion is in fact hazardous to women's health; and

“Whereas Ontario taxpayers funded over 46,000 abortions in 1995 at an estimated cost of \$25 million;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to cease from providing any taxpayers' dollars for the performance of abortions.”

I assign my name to this, Mr. Speaker, and send it to you.

CREDIT VALLEY HOSPITAL

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I'm pleased to present a petition sent to me by Roxanne Tang, who is actually from Markham, like a number of others who are

workers at the Credit Valley Hospital in Mississauga. It reads as follows:

“Whereas some 20,000 people each year choose to make their home in Mississauga, and a Halton-Peel District Health Council capacity study stated that the Credit Valley Hospital should be operating 435 beds by now, and 514 beds by 2016; and

“Whereas the Credit Valley Hospital bed count has remained constant at 365 beds since its opening in November 1985, even though some 4,800 babies are delivered each year at the Credit Valley Hospital in a facility designed to handle 2,700 births annually; and

“Whereas donors in Mississauga and the regional municipalities served by the Credit Valley Hospital have contributed more than \$41 million”—and counting—“of a \$50-million fundraising objective, the most ambitious of any community hospital in the country, to support the construction of an expanded facility able to meet the needs of our community;

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

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care undertake specific measures to ensure the allocation of capital funds for the construction of A and H block at Credit Valley Hospital to ensure the ongoing acute care needs of the patients and families served by the hospital are met in a timely and professional manner, to reduce wait times for patients in the hospital emergency department and to better serve patients in the community in Halton and Peel regions by reducing severe overcrowding in the labour and delivery suite.”

I support this petition wholeheartedly. This is my community hospital. I'll ask Jonathan to carry it for me.

REGIONAL CENTRES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): It's one of the petitions from the Huronia Regional Centre.

“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;

“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 this.

ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It's my pleasure to read a petition sent to me by Joseph Clegg and some of his friends and neighbours from Barcella Crescent in Mississauga. It's to protect anaphylactic students 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 the government of Ontario support the swift passage of Bill 3, An Act to protect anaphylactic students, that requires that every school principal in Ontario establish a school anaphylactic plan."

I'm pleased to affix my signature to support the petition, and to ask Inderraj to carry it for me.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I have a petition signed by a number of individuals and veterans from the Preston, Hespeler and Galt Canadian Legions.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current government has proposed province-wide legislation that would ban smoking in public places; and

"Whereas the proposed legislation will also prohibit smoking in private, non-profit clubs such as Legion halls, navy clubs and related facilities as well; and

"Whereas these organizations have elected representatives that determine the rules and regulations that affect the membership of the individual club and facility; and

"Whereas by imposing smoke-free legislation on these clubs disregards the rights of these citizens and the original intentions of these clubs, especially with respect to our veterans;

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

"That the Parliament of Ontario exempt Legion halls, navy clubs and other non-profit, private or veterans' clubs from government smoke-free legislation."

SENIOR CITIZENS

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

"To immediately commit to action and funding to ensure the rights and protection of our citizens living in nursing homes and retirement homes in Ontario."

It goes on to say:

"This is in support of the petition of Joan Faria which is currently before the Legislature."

I have signed this petition.

REGIONAL CENTRES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Again, a petition from the Huronia Regional Centre.

"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 disabilities, no matter where they live."

I'm pleased to sign this, and give it to Sean to deliver to you.

1530

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TRANSPORTATION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LE TRANSPORT

Mr. Takhar moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 169, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and to amend and repeal various other statutes in respect

of transportation-related matters / *Projet de loi 169, Loi modifiant le Code de la route et modifiant et abrogeant diverses autres lois à l'égard de questions relatives au transport.*

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I will be sharing my time with Dr. Kular, the MPP from Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale, and my parliamentary assistant Mr. Lalonde, the MPP from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

In leading off debate on this bill, I would like to underscore that at its very heart is the fundamental issue of public safety: safety for children at school crossings, safety for senior citizens at crosswalks, safety for highway construction workers, safety for taxi passengers, safety for student drivers and for people commuting to work, safety for truckers and for northern residents driving in harsh winter weather conditions; in short, safety for all Ontarians.

The facts are very clear: Fatalities are down. We have the lowest fatality rate ever recorded on Ontario roads. In fact, they're the lowest in North America. I'm very proud of this great record, but over 800 people still died on our roads in 2003.

The sad reality is that speed kills, and it keeps on killing. Too many people are dying while simply crossing the road. Fifteen thousand pedestrians have been struck or killed in the past five years. People driving 50 kilometres per hour over the limit are almost 10 times more likely to hurt or kill someone. In 2003, speeding or loss of control was a factor in about 44% of all deadly crashes. Those collisions took the lives of more than 300 people—to be exact, the number was 363.

We want and need to address the issue of speeders. If the bill passes, we plan to give them longer licence suspensions. The bill proposes to increase fines for those who drive 30 kilometres over the limit. It would also allow the courts to impose licence suspensions of up to one year on those who are convicted of repeatedly driving 50 kilometres over the posted limit.

If this legislation passes, it would be an offence to ignore “stop” or “slow” signs on road work zones. That is important, because over five years there have been more than 11,000 collisions on our roads. Fifty people have died. That is why we are getting tougher with speeders. We want fines doubled for speeding in highway construction zones and doubled for those drivers who ignore the rules at school and pedestrian crossings. We are doing what we can to improve safety. Right now, 45% of pedestrians killed are struck at marked crossings.

We would also improve truck safety with more rigorous daily inspections. There would be tough new rules targeting those who operate illegal taxis, limousines and passenger vans. There would be tougher standards for driving schools offering ministry-approved courses.

The police would be able to clear highway collisions more quickly. We need to do that in order to keep our highways moving. That would ease driver frustration and help the economy. A major crash on the 401 can not only

tie up traffic but lead to all sorts of secondary collisions as well.

To save lives, the bill proposes to allow a new generation of studded tires to be used in the icy winter conditions of northern Ontario.

When I introduced this legislation, the opposition parties knew it was the right thing to do, but they choose to say that the legislation won't work. But road construction workers support it, and truckers are keen to do their part. Municipalities are pleased with what we are doing. We are adding provincial rules to crack down on speeders on local roads.

Police support this law. Let's listen to what police and others say about this bill. Staff Sergeant Tom Carrique of York Regional Police said, “Anything we can do to deal with speeding will make our roads safer.” The Metroland papers said, “Peel Regional Police are lauding the bill.” The Woodstock Sentinel-Review said, “A step toward pedestrian safety,” and the Ottawa Citizen said, “This is the right move.”

When the opposition criticizes the proposal of studded tires, they should think again about parents in the north who will have greater mobility to get their sick children to the hospital. Ontario has the safest roads in North America, and every time we toughen road safety laws, we get results: People now wear seat belts; getting tough on drunk drivers has clearly saved lives; introducing mandatory bike helmets for children has saved untold grief.

Ontario will continue to lead the way in road safety, thanks to responsible citizens, educational campaigns, fine police officers, good roads and sound laws like the bill we are debating here this afternoon. Bill 169 demonstrates that we can, must and will do more to make our roads even safer. That is why I urge honourable members on all sides of the House to give this legislation their enthusiastic support.

1540

Mr. Kuldip Kular (Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale): It's a pleasure and an honour to participate in the debate on Bill 169, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and to amend and repeal various other statutes in respect of transportation-related matters.

Bill 169 contains a package of integrated measures: short-term measures and long-term measures; measures to improve road safety; measures to ease the congestion on the roads in our province; measures to help increase transit ridership. This proposed bill also meets our government's commitment by allowing studded tire use in the northern part of this province.

This bill would also support the McGuinty government's growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe. This wide-ranging package of legislative measures proposed by the honourable Minister of Transportation is pragmatic, sensible and very much in the interests of all Ontarians. As the minister has pointed out over and over, the bill is about safety on our highways and local streets. Pedestrians, especially seniors and schoolchildren, are the most vulnerable road users. If passed, this bill would enhance the existing rules to improve safety at school

crossings, pedestrian crossovers, and crosswalks at traffic signals. Drivers who disobey these rules and put pedestrians at risk would be subject to increased penalties.

This bill would target illegal, unlicensed taxis and limousine scoopers who gouge unsuspecting travellers. For example, last year I was travelling across Ontario during the public meetings and consultations, listening to Ontarians with disabilities, their family members and other stakeholders. Once I had to fly back from northern Ontario. When I landed at Pearson airport, I was picked up by a scooper. Normally, it costs about \$45 from the airport to my home in Bramalea. When I got out of his car, he asked me for a \$100 bill. I was taken aback. This bill will handle these kinds of scoopers.

It will also single out fraudulent driving schools which offer false certification to student drivers.

These are all things that Ontarians want addressed.

More than 15,000 pedestrians have been hurt or killed while crossing the street during the past five years in this province of ours. Almost half of the fatal collisions on our roads are tied to speeding or loss of control. Over a five-year period, there were nearly 12,000 incidents in road construction zones, and those crashes resulted in almost 3,500 injuries, and the loss of about 50 lives. That's why this bill is important.

Through a combination of good laws, excellent policing, proper roads, public education and the basic thoughtfulness of Ontario drivers, our province has the safest roads in North America, with the lowest rate of fatalities per 10,000 licensed drivers.

But being the best isn't enough when the number of pedestrians being run down is still unacceptably high. It's not enough when the current law only allows for a 30-day licence suspension no matter how often someone is convicted of driving more than 50 kilometres an hour over the speed limit. It's not enough when illegal taxis and limousines are scooping unsuspecting customers at Pearson International Airport. It's not good enough when fenders and grilles are flying off poorly maintained vehicles on our busy highways.

There would be increased penalties if this bill passes. The fine would be \$210 and four demerit points on convictions for going 30 kilometres per hour over the posted speed limit. There would be lengthier, court-ordered, suspension periods for drivers convicted of repeat offences of speeding 50 kilometres an hour or more above the posted limit, occurring within five years of a preceding offence. The vast majority of road users view this category of speeders as both intimidating and reckless.

The fines for speeding would be doubled for offences in work zones when workers are present.

It would be an offence under the Highway Traffic Act to pick up a passenger for compensation without a proper licence or permit. It would help deter identity theft by significantly increasing the penalty for having or using a fictitious, fraudulent or imitation driver's licence.

This bill is not just about going after the bad guys or after the bad drivers, as important as that is; it's also

about working cooperatively and effectively with the good drivers. This bill allows our police officers more authority to order the clearing of collisions or spills or debris on a highway. At the present time, the Ontario Provincial Police have to wait for approval of trucking or insurance companies to get things cleared away. We think that the police should have the power to use their professional judgment to deal with serious highway problems and to get our highways moving again. This is vitally important for export economies such as ours, where 60% of all delays on highways are the result of collisions, spills or debris.

This bill is about working with 553,000 commercially licensed bus and truck drivers in Ontario. Over the past 15 years, the number of large trucks on our highways has increased by about 45%, but the number of fatalities involving trucks has decreased by close to 27%. Our truckers are doing a great job, and soon they will be able to do even more to make our roads even safer. They would examine more than 70 vehicle parts on every commercial vehicle every day. That is three times more than they do now. Trucks move over \$1.2 trillion of goods on Ontario's roads annually, and I think we all owe a debt of gratitude to our truckers for taking on responsibility in doing even more to improve highway safety.

This legislation would also give the professionals who monitor and oversee our highways the authority to set varied speed limits.

For people in northern Ontario, this bill proposes to allow the use of a new, more environmentally friendly generation of studded tires. Research shows that studded tires can reduce collisions on icy roads. This is something that our Liberal MPPs from the north have been advocating for many years.

This government, the McGuinty government, has moved to promote transit by providing \$1 billion to municipalities from gas tax revenues.

The honourable Minister of Transportation is working to promote measures that would improve public transit, our environment, our quality of life, and commuter congestion. Bill 169 would protect school kids and senior citizens. It would protect sensible and responsible drivers. It would protect more than eight million Ontario drivers who follow the rules of the road. This bill is about education, enforcement and the consequences, and most importantly it's about saving lives. I ask all the members of the Legislature to act to pass this legislation as quickly as possible. We have the safest highways and streets in North America, based on the rate of fatalities. Let's work together to make them even safer.

1550

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry–Prescott–Russell): I am delighted to stand in the House today and speak about a healthier and safer Ontario. Since the Minister of Transportation introduced a transit and road safety bill, we have received overwhelming support and endorsement from stakeholders, from the police, from municipalities and from the public at large. The minister

has already dealt with the provision of the bill covering pedestrian safety, speeding and other enforcement issues.

Permettez-moi de passer en revue les dispositions du projet de loi 169, axées sur les transports en commun, et de réaffirmer l'engagement de notre gouvernement aux transports en commun de l'Ontario.

Au cœur de notre vision de collectivités vigoureuses figure la stratégie de notre gouvernement, visant à planifier et à bâtir un réseau de transports en commun intégré, sécuritaire et fiable pour tous les Ontariens et Ontariennes.

Ontario's 83 transit systems together move some 680 million passengers every year. GO Transit carries 44 million riders annually. The TTC, Canada's largest transit system, carries 1.15 million passengers daily. Meanwhile, the average car in Toronto carries only 1.16 people—yes, only 1.16 person per car. A single GO bus can replace 50 cars, and a GO train would replace 1,400 cars.

Notre gouvernement est conscient du fait que nous devons investir, oui, investir aussi bien dans les réseaux routiers que dans les transports en commun pour réduire les embouteillages. Nous devons bâtir un réseau de transports en commun pratique et coordonné qui offre au voyageur une vraie solution de rechange à l'utilisation de leur propre voiture. S'il est adopté, oui, avec l'appui des trois partis de cette Assemblée, le projet de loi sur les transports en commun et la sécurité routière améliorera nos réseaux de transports en commun.

Le projet de loi permettrait de désigner et de faire respecter des voies réservées aux véhicules transportant plusieurs passagers en plus d'encourager le covoiturage. Il permettrait que des terrains soient réservés à de nouveaux parcs de covoiturage et à des stations de transports en commun pendant les étapes de planification. Il réduirait la durée des trajets à faire la navette, tout en permettant aux véhicules de transports en commun d'avoir la priorité aux feux de circulation, et de prolonger le feu vert ou de faire passer un feu rouge au vert plus rapidement. Oui, j'ai bien mentionné que les transports en commun auront priorité aux feux de circulation.

Those proposed measures would help to improve transit in real terms. If this bill is passed, we will have HOV lanes on Highway 403 in Mississauga and Highway 404 just north of Toronto. "HOV" stands for "high-occupancy vehicle."

Each car taken off the road through carpooling or public transit will save approximately three tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions annually, and that means cleaner air for everyone to breathe.

À l'heure l'actuelle, on estime qu'à l'heure de pointe du matin, 7 000 personnes empruntent l'autoroute 403 à l'intersection de Mavis Road en direction de Toronto. La plupart de ces personnes voyagent seules dans leur véhicule, ce qui correspond à environ 20 000 sièges vides.

It is estimated that one year after HOV lanes open on the 403 this fall, 650 vehicles an hour will use them. Car-poolers and buses using HOV lanes will be able to save

as much as 11 minutes from their trips—yes, a shorter time on the road.

La disposition de ce projet de loi vise à améliorer les transports en commun et à réduire le temps de déplacement.

By investing in transit, we will reduce the congestion that slows economic activities and robs Ontarians of their quality family time. Also, investing in transit will improve air quality, conserve energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The McGuinty government will give municipalities \$1 billion in gas tax funding over the next five years for public transit, and a total of 83 transit systems serving 110 municipalities across the province are now receiving stable and long-term funding from the gas tax to improve their transit services.

Il va de soi que l'amélioration du service encouragera un plus grand nombre de personnes à utiliser les transports en commun. C'est cela notre but principal : accroître le nombre de personnes qui utilisent les transports en commun.

Grâce au financement provenant de la taxe provinciale sur l'essence et l'appui financier des trois paliers du gouvernement pour les transports en commun, le gouvernement de l'Ontario appuie les municipalités en leur donnant les fonds nécessaires pour faire l'acquisition de 1 800 nouveaux autobus. La province a signé une entente avec le gouvernement fédéral et la ville de Toronto en vue d'injecter conjointement 1 \$ milliard destiné au financement de la nouvelle infrastructure de la CTT.

As for Ottawa, up to \$600 million will be spent by the province, the federal government and the city of Ottawa to develop a light rail transit system. On top of all that, the province and the government of Canada have agreed to invest another \$1 billion to upgrade and expand GO Transit.

Il me fait plaisir d'annoncer que nous faisons de réels progrès, et ce n'est que le début. Des collectivités vigoureuses dépendent de réseaux de transports en commun fiables, et les transports en commun ont besoin de l'appui du gouvernement.

Transportation affects all of us, and this bill is a key piece to creating a world-class transportation system.

The McGuinty government has a healthier and safer vision for Ontario. I am counting on your enthusiastic support for the passing of this bill.

Je compte sur votre soutien enthousiaste.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Questions and comments?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'll be speaking to this bill a little later on, but with your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a comment today.

First of all, I'd like to welcome the pages to Queen's Park. I know you're here for four or five weeks. In particular, I'd like to welcome a young man named Sean McConkey, who is here today. Why I say that is Sean's aunt and uncle, Laura and Terry Gregson, are close friends of my wife's and mine. They've both recently retired—Laura as an executive with the Co-operators and

Terry as a referee in the National Hockey League. Sean comes from a very interesting family. Sean also has an uncle, Doug Riseborough. For the folks here in the House, Doug Riseborough is the general manager of the Minnesota Wild of the National Hockey League.

1600

Not every time we get an opportunity to stand and speak in this House is it about someone we know. Terry and Laura are really good friends of my wife Jane's and mine. We've had a lot of good times. They have a new condo up at Intrawest in Jim Wilson's riding. I can tell you that they're great people.

I just want to say, on behalf of the folks in our caucus, welcome to all the pages. I know you're going to have a great time here over the next four or five weeks. In particular, I want to welcome Sean. I just got this e-mail, so I understand I'm going to be having lunch with Sean's aunt and uncle some time next week here at Queen's Park, when they come to see Sean in action. Sean, it's great to have you here, and you do have a good member over here. The member from Brant is a good MPP. We've had our clashes in the past. You'll enjoy your time here, as all of you will.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): So little to say about so much. What is happening here? We had three honourable members from the government side—the minister, the parliamentary assistant and the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale—who I would have thought would have had more to say on this legislation.

This is a little bit of an omnibus bill when it comes to transportation. There are some good-news items inside the bill that I'm prepared to support. I would think that this government would have stood up with glowing hearts, talking about the wonderful things contained inside this bill, but three people for the lead speech and they can't even go an hour. Try being in opposition, where my good friend the critic for the Tory party or myself, I can guarantee you, will be taking their full hour.

There's much to say. We can talk about the need to have more police on roads. We can fine all we want, but at the end of the day we need to have somebody to enforce these things if we want to have a real impact. We're going to talk about taxi drivers when it comes to our side, because—you'll know, Mr. Speaker; you met with some of the same individuals I have who are in the profession of driving taxis in the city of Toronto and who are really worried about one part of the provisions in this bill.

There are a number of things to speak to, and I can't believe that only a mere 30 minutes could be made in the lead by three honourable members from the other side, who I know have lots to say.

For example, mon ami M. Lalonde, un membre distingué de cette Assemblée, quelqu'un avec expérience, qui a travaillé dans le secteur municipal pendant des années, justement comme maire de Vanier—combien d'années mon ami a-t-il été le maire de Vanier—a beaucoup à dire sur la question des transports. Je ne crois pas

que l'adjoint parlementaire, mon ami M. Lalonde, et son ministre et son collègue de Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale peuvent prendre seulement une trentaine de minutes.

What is this world coming to? I don't know, but we'll soon find out.

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): I wish to commend the minister for bringing this legislation forward. There are very many items related to safety, but there are also items related to conservation and to transportation demand management, which is extremely important.

The Planning Act is amended so that approval of subdivision plans may be subject to the condition that land be dedicated for commuter parking lots, transit stations and related infrastructure. This was mentioned by the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. It's extremely important that these infrastructures, which cost a lot of money, are going to be part of the planning process and the dollars are going to be in the subdivision agreements as they move forward.

One of the other areas is the high-occupancy vehicle lanes, which are extremely important. We have a bridge that's been in the making between Ontario and Quebec in my community. One of the issues I've argued about for many years is that it's going to put a lot of strain on my community of Ottawa–Orléans. I feel we should go back to the good old days. I remember working at the National Research Council back in 1954 and a Ford Fairlane my brother had. There used to be six of us who drove in that every day to work because we realized that we couldn't all afford to take our cars to work. But as the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell says, today the occupancy of vehicles is 1.16 on our highways. We're just not thinking of conservation; we're not thinking of preserving the environment.

These are excellent things. When I see that bridge from Quebec being built, I hope that we restrict traffic during peak hours on that bridge to high-occupancy vehicle lanes; I think that's what we should demand. We're going to give people a new opportunity to get to work more quickly, but let's make them carpool and do the right thing for the environment, for themselves and for their pocketbooks.

I really like this bill. It's moving in the right direction. I commend the minister for bringing it forward.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I'm pleased to join the debate in regard to Bill 169. In particular, it's very topical because health and education have always topped the concerns in my riding. But during the last five years, it has been quite noticeable that gridlock has joined those two as a great concern for Cambridge. In particular, Cambridge now exceeds 100,000 souls, and we still have a rather substantial railway crossing, which unfortunately goes through the middle of town and during rush hour, on many occasions, blocks traffic and creates an even greater gridlock situation. It's hard to complain about that, because of course that is a result of a spur line which goes to Toyota. The reason for the

traffic being blocked are all these wonderful Corollas and Lexus RX 330s that are being shipped throughout North America. It's a nice, warm feeling to see all that product going out and to think about the 3,000 individuals who are employed. However, gridlock is a problem, and this bill unfortunately provides nothing in the way of funding which might alleviate Cambridge's problem and the problem across this great province.

The Acting Speaker: The minister or one of the other debaters has two minutes in which to respond.

Hon. Mr. Takhar: I really want to thank all the members who participated in this discussion. I especially want to thank Dr. Kular and my parliamentary assistant, Mr. Lalonde. They made very strong, convincing and insightful arguments. I'm not sure what Mr. Dunlop was talking about, and Mr. Bisson had no focus.

After carefully listening to the debate, I am convinced that moving forward with this bill is the right thing to do. Over 800 people died on our roads last year and thousands were injured. Ontarians are frustrated by daily gridlock. We need to make our roads safer. We must ease congestion and improve public transit. Public safety is at the heart of this bill. This bill is really all about public safety: safety for our children at school crossings; safety for seniors at crosswalks; safety for road workers; safety for taxi passengers; safety for northern residents driving in harsh winter weather—in short, safety for all Ontarians.

Ontario's transportation system has to be not only safe, but it has to be efficient as well. Some of the members have made arguments to that effect. If passed, the bill would make public transit a real alternative to the car. This bill would encourage carpooling through HOV lanes—my parliamentary assistant talked about that—and allow land to be dedicated for new carpool lots and transit stations during planning. This bill, if passed, would allow police to clear highways faster after a collision on the highway. This would improve safety, ease congestion and keep Ontario's economy moving. I would urge all members on all sides of the House to really support this bill.

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The Acting Speaker: Further debate? The member from Simcoe-Grey.

Applause.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I'm a little leery when the Liberals start clapping for me, Mr. Speaker.

Before I get into Bill 169, which my party, the Conservatives, generally agrees with, I want to congratulate Garfield Dunlop, the member from Simcoe North, and his wife, Jane. For the third consecutive year, they won the log-sawing contest this past weekend at the Elmvale Maple Syrup Festival, beating out many large guys like me and municipal people. I didn't do it this year. Jane is a heck of a sawyer.

Given that we had three government members speak—I don't want to offend them, because this bill is not worth losing my soul over, but you wouldn't know what this bill was. So I'm going to read—if people are at

home, don't go to your fridge; this omnibus safety bill will be riveting. I've got to read, for the people at home, what this bill does. This may take a few minutes.

In general summary, the bill will increase penalties for cars that ignore pedestrian crossings—the minister did mention that; double speeding fines in construction zones to better protect highway construction workers; enforce high-occupancy vehicle lanes to encourage carpooling and transit use; give police more power to clear accidents and spills faster. Police will be given powers to remove vehicles and debris from the roadway. These new powers will be clarified under the bill, and there will also be provisions to protect the police, the province and municipalities from liability in these circumstances.

The bill will create new offences for flying vehicle parts that can cause serious injury or death to other highway users and improve daily commercial vehicle inspection standards by requiring truck drivers to check for more than 70 itemized defects daily, up from the 23 itemized defects they have to check for now. It will allow for the use of studded tires on vehicles in northern Ontario, allow land to be dedicated for new carpool lots and transit stations during municipal and provincial planning stages, and improve transit commute times by allowing transit vehicles to pre-empt traffic signals, to lengthen a green light or change a red light to green sooner.

It creates an offence to punish scoopers, that is, illegal taxis that pick up passengers from Pearson International Airport. Unfortunately, unscrupulous operators have been known to charge unsuspecting passengers, many of them tourists, as much as \$180 for a trip to downtown Toronto. The minister has pointed that out in some of his speeches in the past. Under the new law, the driver, the person who arranges the ride and the taxi owner could be fined anywhere from \$300 to \$20,000. Failure to pay could result in licence suspension and plate denial at renewal time.

The final purpose of the bill is to make Ontario roads more transit-friendly by increasing the viability of carpooling etc.

I think the best summary I have seen on Bill 169 comes from the Ontario Trucking Association. It's a bit lengthy. At the beginning, though, I want to thank Rebecka Torn and Doug Switzer. Doug is a long-time friend of mine. He was an assistant to Elizabeth Witmer for many years. He and I were assistants here many years ago in the 1980s, before I was elected in 1990. He's a good guy, a very bright guy. He and Rebecka have done a great summary, and I'm going to read that into the record. It's dated February 22, 2005.

“Transportation Minister Introduces Omnibus Safety Bill

“On Monday, February 21, Ontario's Minister of Transportation, Harinder Takhar, commenced his first major legislative initiative when he introduced an omnibus safety bill (Bill 169, the Transit and Road Safety Act) for first reading in the Legislature.

“The bill contains over 25 measures aimed at improving road safety. While many of the measures have no

direct impact on the trucking industry, there are a number that do. While OTA was generally aware of what some of the proposed measures were prior to introduction of the draft legislation, it has spent the last couple of days reviewing the bill in order to better understand the potential implications for trucking. There are a host of issues which have arisen that will require direction from the OTA board before the association can comment in detail, but the following is a summary of the major elements that will be of interest to the trucking industry and to OTA's preliminary commentary:

"Speeding: A major focus of Bill 169 is addressing the problem of speeding. The following measures are proposed:

"—Permitting municipalities to limit speed to 30 km/hr in traffic calming zones.

"—Allowing the MTO to use variable speed limits on highways where the speed limit can be changed using electronic speed limit signs to reflect changes in highway conditions.

"—Increases the fines for those traveling over 30 km/hr.

"—Increases suspensions for those convicted for second and third offences for traveling greater than 50 km/hr over the posted limit.

"—Allow reduced speeds in construction zones and increases fines for speeding in construction zones."

The OTA goes on to say, "While these measures are positive steps as far as they go and represent at least a symbolic effort to reduce speeding in Ontario, it is important to note that there are no new commitments to expanding enforcement of speed limits."

That's something I mentioned at first reading of this bill in February: Where are the 1,000 police officers the McGuinty government promised before the last election and have yet to deliver on, to make sure that any new traffic laws they bring in are actually enforced?

Anyway, the OTA goes on to say, "Increased fines and penalties are only as effective as the speeder's perceived risk of being caught, and without additional enforcement it is unlikely that these measures alone will have significant impact on driver behaviour." These guys ought to know; they represent thousands of truckers across the province who are on our roads every day.

Under the heading "Flying Vehicle Parts," the OTA says:

"Section 84 of the Highway Traffic Act is being amended to make it an offence for any part of any vehicle (including commercial vehicles, automobiles, mobile cranes and any road building machine) to become detached. At the present time, the only similar offence is restricted to wheels that become detached from commercial vehicles. This will be an offence for the driver of the vehicle, and for first time it will make the person doing repairs as well as the repair shop liable if it caused the part to become detached. The fines for an offence involving a commercial vehicle, mobile crane and road building machinery will range from \$400 to \$20,000. In large part, this measure is in response to last year's fatal"

accident "where a car driver was killed after a piece of a sand shoe from a truck crashed through his car's windshield. Two of OTA's chief concerns with this approach are addressed in the bill: (1) the law should allow due diligence defences (in other words, the offences should be matters of strict liability as opposed to absolute liability, as is the case with wheel-offs); and (2) the law should apply to all vehicles including cars, not just trucks. The Minister of Transportation's bill includes both of these measures. This may be good news as far as wheel-offs go because the police will have a lot more alternatives to charge whoever is actually responsible. It could result in a reduction in activity relating to the absolute liability sections for carriers."

This bill will also help the situation where a major piece of drive shaft fell off and went through a lady's window just a few weeks ago in Ontario. It was in the media. At that time the OPP couldn't find anybody to charge. Perhaps this bill will help. She was almost killed.

Under the heading "Wheel-offs," it says,

"The bill includes an amendment that provides a more comprehensive description of the wheel components that are captured within the existing absolute liability provisions. It now includes any 'major component of a wheel, such as a wheel rim or a wheel assembly, and a large piece of a wheel or of a major component of a wheel, but does not include a tire or large piece of a tire.' This closes the loophole for some of the other parts that could detach but aren't actually wheels. It also signals clearly that the government, no doubt buoyed by recent court decisions, remains committed to the absolute liability offence for wheel-offs."

Under the heading "Removal of Vehicles, Debris Blocking Highways":

"In an attempt to speed up the cleanup following a highway accident, the HTA is being amended to give sweeping powers to police officers at the scene, including the power to order the removal and storage of a vehicle, its cargo and debris without the consent of the owner of the vehicle and its cargo, or the insurer of the vehicle and cargo, and no action can be brought against the officer for his"—it should say "his or her"—"actions provided he acted in good faith. The costs of the removal and storage will be the responsibility of the owner, operator and driver of the vehicle, which may eliminate much of the argument at the scene of the accident about liability and responsibility to pay the service providers, usually towing companies and their sub-contractors. A long-standing complaint from the towing industry or at least those involved in recovery operations, is that not infrequently they have to wait a significant time to receive payment for their services—all other parties assisting at the scene receive payment directly from government sources. One of the OTA's long-standing complaints about the time it takes to clean up after an accident is that it is not clear which agency is in charge. The bill attempts to address that—at least in part. However, there are significant cost and liability issues that need to be considered. OTA is currently discussing this issue and

the implications of the proposed change with the insurance industry, since it has been suggested that a change in the insurance regulations may be required. OTA is concerned that where more than one vehicle is involved in an accident, the party who is perceived to have the deepest pockets—usually the trucking company—will be stuck with the bill. Presumably the carrier will be able to take civil action to recover its costs, but whether this is fair needs further examination.

1620

“Trip Inspection: Section 103 of the HTA has been completely rewritten to facilitate adoption of the revised NSC trip inspection standard. The changes are consistent with the requirements that were successfully piloted by several OTA member carriers in 2000. The changes allow for revised daily inspection requirements as well as under vehicle inspections. There is also an allowance for continued operation of a vehicle with certain minor defects. These changes will not come into effect until the supporting regulatory changes are drafted, which could take another year. However, OTA is pleased to see this issue (which was first discussed back in the target ‘97 process) finally moving forward.

“HOV lanes: The bill would allow the minister to designate any lane on a highway as a high-occupancy vehicle ... lane, the use of which will be limited to vehicles carrying a specified number of occupants. This will be determined later in the regulations. In most other jurisdictions the limit is a minimum of two people in the vehicle. The HOV lanes can be either existing lanes on highways or newly constructed lanes specifically created to be HOV lanes.” I’ll just note that the government is adding HOV lanes in part to the 404, the extension of the Don Valley Parkway, right now. “In the past, MTO has indicated that its intent is to generally create new lanes to serve as HOV lanes rather than take away existing lanes. While this measure is designed to reduce traffic congestion on the highways by encouraging more car-pooling, the loss of existing lanes could in fact lead to more congestion on the regular lanes, impeding the movement of trucks. OTA will be actively urging the ministry to apply this new power only to new lanes.

“Driver education: The Ontario government has been struggling to bring order to the class G driver education industry for some time. The bill would give MTO sweeping powers to license and regulate driving schools, including course content, and instructors. While initially aimed at the car driver training industry, the powers contained in the bill can, by regulation, be applied to any type of driver training, including commercial driver training. Given ongoing concerns over the state of commercial driver training, the ministry could use these powers to establish a licensing regime for the commercial driver training schools and instructors. The exact form and nature of this regulatory regime would have to be debated and discussed. OTA will follow this process closely to ensure that carriers’ interests are protected in whatever regulatory regime may be developed.”

Finally, the last section that the OTA deals with is under the heading of “Pilot Projects”:

“The bill proposes to add a section to the HTA to allow MTO to conduct research and testing in pilot projects involving vehicles or operations inconsistent with existing HTA requirements. This could be beneficial to OTA as it gives the ministry more flexibility to deal with innovative suggestions without having to go back through the legislative process.”

I want to again thank Doug Switzer and Rebecka Torn for those comments—an excellent overview.

There are some other things I should mention. Anybody watching, you should know this now because, when this bill does become law, you have to make sure that the crosswalk or school crossing is totally cleared before you go through it. A lot of people—I watch crosswalks and crossings every day on Bay Street and Avenue Road—start through when the pedestrian has cleared the front of their car. The new law will require making sure that the pedestrians are fully on the sidewalks or on the sides of the road. Anyway, clear the crossing before you proceed through. I think that’s a good thing. I had a friend killed, a good priest friend from St. Michael’s College at the University of Toronto, in the mid 1980s on Avenue Road for exactly that reason. Someone didn’t wait until he cleared the intersection before they proceeded forward and they ran him over and killed him.

The Driving School Association of Ontario has some critical commentary on Bill 169. First of all, they want the minister to know that he has not consulted with the Driving School Association of Ontario. John Svensson is the president of the Driving School Association of Ontario, and he makes the following critical commentary about Bill 169: It “fundamentally kills 20 years of hard work, innovation and investment in self-regulation of the driving school industry initiated under the Peterson government.” Another point he makes is that the bill “will not bring the standards up but rather bring the industry down to the lowest common denominator.” He says that it “gives the government the right to enter driving school property without a warrant.”

We have to be careful because there are hundreds of bills. I remember one time I served in committee when I was last in opposition somewhere between 1990 and 1995 and I was astounded to see how many bills—hundreds—in which government or their agents can enter your property without a warrant. This bill is another case. You can go into a driving school. Why you would need to go into a driving school without a warrant is beyond me. Is somebody bleeding or is there a crisis on the premises? I doubt it. You probably could go get a warrant and have probable cause, but I’ve given up this argument over the years when lawyers get hold of these bills; they always put this in every bill.

John goes on to say that the “government gains the right to remove any equipment, documents or vehicles” from driving schools. He goes on to say that there is a “right to waive new requirements in Bill 169 for special interests, such as school boards who operate driving schools.” Finally, he says, “If a driving school owner sells his or her business, the business licence becomes non-transferable, devaluing their businesses.”

I would urge Minister Takhar to meet with John Svensson. We certainly meet with him regularly in my office. He has put an awful lot of his life, and time and effort, into trying to improve driving schools across the province. He spends his own time, his own money, and he is really a great advocate. I know it's been a controversial area for each government in Ontario, but John is worth listening to, and the minister should do that. In fact, I'm surprised he hasn't. Usually one of the first people every Minister of Transportation meets when they get the portfolio is John Svensson.

I don't have a lot of great problems with the bill, so I'm going to move on and just talk about some other issues. First of all, the minister mentioned in his remarks, as did a couple of other government members, the gas tax. I just want to quickly read from a letter of March 31, 2004, about the gas tax. It is over a year old; it's from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and nothing has changed. Under the heading of "Gas tax," they say, "According to the 2001 annual report of the Provincial Auditor of Ontario, the ministry collected over \$2 billion in gasoline tax and \$643 million in diesel fuel tax in 2000-01. The revenue from these taxes was to be used for the maintenance and expansion of our national highways. Instead, this source of revenue has been put into general revenue accounts. Government should establish some very clear and objective guidelines to the allocation of revenues from existing fuel taxes."

It's a lot of money, and that's the only reason I used that letter. With SARS and that, we have seen the amount of gas tax collected by governments go up and down but it's about \$2 billion and, as I said, another \$643 million in diesel. The fact of the matter is, the McGuinty Liberals brag about fulfilling a commitment that they made to transfer—first of all, in the last election, in the seven all-candidates meetings we had in my riding, the promise from Mark Redmond, the Liberal candidate, was very clear on behalf of the Liberal Party of Ontario—and I think it was repeated at every all-candidates meeting across the province—that all municipalities were going to get a share of the gas tax. Then, after they get elected, we find out that only those municipalities with a transit system will actually get gas tax. So of all the municipalities in my riding, only one sees anything, and it's a little trickle of money. That's the town of Collingwood, I believe—Collingwood for sure. You have to go to Owen Sound, which isn't in my riding; it's in Mr. Murdoch's riding. So just Collingwood, in my riding, receives anything from the gas tax.

1630

Municipal politicians were really after me when I was in government, and they were really after me in these all-candidates meetings and during the last election to get our government—because I was fourth in charge of this from 1995 to the time we left government—to change its mind and say we would give the gas tax to municipalities. Ernie Eves and Mike Harris used to say, "Well, its two billion bucks. You'll have to find that money otherwise, because right now 47% of every revenue

dollar collected by the government goes into health care." I think that under the Liberals it's going to be higher. You can't help it; there are constant lineups in our health care system.

The Liberals decided that they were going to give it to all municipalities. After the election, that promise got broken, and it's now just those municipalities with transit systems. It's been of almost no help to rural and small-town Ontario. Even if you give money to places like Collingwood, we then find out that in Toronto they have any gas tax money clawed back from one-time grants—which were every year—they would get from Queen's Park to run the TTC. So they're really no further ahead.

Finally, when the minister spoke on this bill a few minutes ago, he indicated that the money had already flowed to municipalities. I'm not aware of municipalities getting the cheques yet. I'm not aware of the federal government giving their gas tax to municipalities. I don't think anyone's actually seen one red penny of that. Martin's using it as his lever to try to get the opposition parties not to force a federal election. He's saying, "You won't get your gas tax. You won't get a bunch of other things. You won't get your new immigration rules. You won't get all kinds of things. You won't get your corporate tax cuts." One of them I heard this morning on the radio very clearly: "You won't get your gas tax."

The money hasn't even flowed, so I wouldn't get up here and brag about it until somebody actually sees that money. If it's like most other promises, we may not see anything.

I have the most amusing three letters I've ever received in my 15 years, and they're to do with Highway 26 realignment, my favourite topic in this House, if it's not the lights in front of the Nottawasaga Inn in Alliston before somebody gets killed—and the minister did come up a couple of months ago to see the problem. He saw the 2,000 cars; in fact, his own driver had to wait five minutes according to the New VR, and six minutes according to the CBC that covered it, in order to get on to the highway just to turn right. You should try turning left. You should try turning westbound from the Nottawasaga Inn and the Green Briar development. He experienced it first-hand and wrote a letter back to me after his visit. He wrote one also to Mrs. Donna Jeb, which is dated April 12. My letter is not dated, but I think I got it at about the same time.

For those at home, he's decided that he's not going to put a spotlight at the 10th Side Road and Highway 89. He's not going to put one in front of the Nottawasaga Inn intersection. Instead—I know we're not allowed to use props, but he even sent me a beautiful little coloured map of what he's prepared to do—he's prepared to pave the shoulder on the north side of 89 so that the almost 1,000 senior citizens who live in Green Briar in this area can actually go out on the highway, and they are to sit in the middle of the road. He's going to put nice yellow stripes—it's the snowbelt of Ontario—in the middle of the road. That works like coming out of McDonald's at Avenue Road just south of the 401. It's not going to work when you've got 2,000 cars going in each direction.

You're supposed to pull out of the Inn. If you want to turn left, you'll have to sit in the middle of the road on these beautiful yellow stripes we're going to get and—he even says in the letter—take your chances to get into the traffic. But he's hoping, as he said, that this will at least give drivers the confidence to get their noses out into the traffic.

It's humorous. It's beyond humorous, actually. Someone's going to get killed. Last year, two people did get killed. If you drive by there now, on the bridge area about half a kilometre from the Nottawasaga Inn-89 intersection there are flowers there. They're renewed every few weeks to commemorate the two people, employees of the Nottawasaga Inn, who got wiped out there last year.

Two years ago, in response to that, Frank Klees came up as Minister of Transportation in June 2003 and announced the lights. The government gets in and they say, "We didn't announce the lights. We didn't pay for them." Lo and behold, before they silenced the bureaucrats at the Owen Sound Ministry of Transportation office, one of them told the Alliston Herald—it was in there, and I've quoted it in this House many times—"Yes, we have the money. We have the \$85,000 for the lights." A week later, the McGuinty government shut down the bureaucrats. I phone now and it's, "Sorry, Mr. Wilson, everything goes through the minister's office"—a senior member: 15 years. How do you buggers don't have near that in here? You shut me down, and I can't even talk to my local bureaucrats.

I'm never going to forget it. I think of it every day that I'm on the phone. I phone ministers' offices all the time. You've got the most useless MPP liaisons I've ever seen in my life who have no idea what they're doing. It's horrible.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): Go get them, Jim. Don't let up.

Mr. Wilson: I don't intend to.

The Acting Speaker: I think I understand your point of order, but please go ahead.

Hon. Mr. Peters: Mr. Speaker, we have individuals who work both in the bureaucracy and on the political side who are dedicated individuals, and for this honourable member to stand up and demean their hard work I don't think is appropriate. I think he owes those employees an apology.

The Acting Speaker: I don't believe that is a point of order. The member is entitled to say what he wishes, so I ask him to continue.

Mr. Wilson: Yes; I'll remind you that this place is a substitute for war. In other countries they shoot each other first, then have this debate. We tend to get yelling at each other in here and we leave as friends. So I just say to the minister—

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I do take exception to the honourable

member making a comparison between this House and war.

The Acting Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Wilson: Do you know what the mace is? It's the king's club for war. All the decorations here are war decorations and shields. That's what they're for. That's why you're exempt from the laws of the land during the time you're in here. That's why, when you're a minister, you often say, "Go say it on the steps." The distance between this front row and the government front row is exactly the distance of two men with outstretched swords. Do you not know your parliamentary history? Do you not know what this place represents?

Anyway, I'm not apologizing to anyone. What I would suggest to you is that you allow your senior bureaucrats, who work very hard, to talk to us and not have to filter everything through the minister's office. It's an insult to democracy; it's horrible. I've said it with a straight face, I've raised it in here a dozen times and I'll continue to raise it until I can get through to a director. In fact, the last time I talked to a director was last week, and he said the exact same thing: "Go through the minister's office." So don't tempt me to take a break and go out and use the phone, because I bet that I'm right. I've heard it myself. We all complain about it and it's true.

I just want to ask Mr. Takhar, the Minister of Transportation, to take another look at the Highway 89 Nottawasaga Inn entrance. It's not just the Nottawasaga Inn, which is a fantastic resort in this province where the government has a lot of conferences; it's all of the people who live in Green Briar and Briar Hill and the people in Alliston, because you've got to start to create, east of Alliston, breaks in the traffic so people like my parents, who live behind the bowling alley just off Highway 89, can get out into traffic. My mother told me that one day she waited 20 minutes to turn. A lot of people will turn right and go up and try and do a U-turn and come back. I was trying to come out of Tim Hortons at Cookstown the other day to go eastbound to the 400 and ended up going westbound for a whole concession. The whole detour took at least three and a half to four minutes, a complete inconvenience. I had to turn around and come back just to get over to the 400. It's ridiculous.

In Mr. Takhar's letter, he says that it's only a temporary problem for part of the day. Well, what part of the day doesn't he like? The problem is from 5:30 in the morning till 7:30 at night. I can't believe his road counts are right. In fact, they show 22,000 cars. You'd think that's enough for a light, but apparently not.

I want to go back to Highway 26. This is the most astounding thing I've ever seen. Highway 26: Last summer you guys got in, and they're building this \$33-million highway. It's about 6.7 kilometres, a realignment of Highway 26 between Stayner and Collingwood. I've never seen anything like it in my life. I was notified by the local media one day when they noticed that even the outhouses were being removed; all the construction people had left. This was in the middle of last summer's construction season. You cancelled the project under the

guise of a 10-year review. This isn't a political piece of road. If I wanted to put a political piece of road in, I'd have redone the whole of Highway 26 for hundreds of kilometres.

1640

The fact of the matter is that this is a safety-zone issue. We've had a lot of people killed between Wasaga Beach and Collingwood. Next to Niagara—and some years it beats Niagara; before they had the casino, we were certainly busier than Niagara. It's a four-season tourist area of the province, and we're busy all year around. The Blue Mountain hills are at the other end of this realignment.

This is only phase one; we need phase two and three. Oh, you've cancelled phase one; you've even gone to the expense of putting up a fence with a padlock on the part that had been started under our government. We've got about half of the area cleared and about half of a highway bed put in, but there is about three kilometres where you haven't cleared the bush and you haven't done any of the intersections anywhere. It's astounding, and every time we write about it, every time I bring it up this in this House—at a chamber of commerce event I was at, the Wasaga Beach business awards on Saturday night, the mayor, Cal Patterson, told me that he met with Minister Takhar, the Minister of Transportation, during the ROMA-Good Roads conference. Mr. Takhar said he would talk about certain issues but he wouldn't talk about Bill 26.

Mr. Marchese: How come?

Mr. Wilson: I don't know. He wouldn't talk about it.

We've got major commercial properties along where this realignment is. All the developers tell the mayor now that they're not going to do anything. Everything is on hold. We've got small businesses, big business, and we are hoping for a big anchor store there. This is the Town of the Blue Mountains area, the gateway to the Blue Mountains, and the fact is that it's on hold.

This wonderful lady—if you think my language is unparliamentary, wait until you hear this one. Marilyn Iva Thomas lives at 96 Constance Boulevard, Wasaga Beach, Ontario. She writes on March 23, 2005, and on March 26 and on March 24. I'll try and read them in chronological order. She's writing Harinder Takhar. I don't know this lady; I've no idea what she looks like. But she's pretty angry.

"Highway 26 realignment between Stayner and Collingwood" is the title of the letter.

"Dearest Taki," she calls the minister; she's got other names for him later.

"Another sunny day has made its appearance. Spring is chomping at the bit to get at my flower gardens. Alas, it's another day of red tape and bewilderment in your camp since I have neither heard from you nor have you deigned to respond to the public's need for action. Are you bound to a certain nondisclosure code? Or the code of non-participation as represented by the red tape?"

"The noticeable thing about this man is that neither the hands nor the mouth are bound!" She draws a little

picture of Mr. Takhar. "And that's all you need—a mouth to approve the continuance of realigning the present Suicide Alley and the hands to sign the papers"—in other words, say something about the Highway 26 realignment and sign the papers.

She goes on to say, "I am positive Jim Wilson is a tad chagrined by my freedom of speech. However, rather than appealing to you using fake honeyed words, begging and pleading, bowing and scraping, which are so belittling, especially under the present circumstances, I appeal to your sense of fair play. If you don't have one, I'll gladly loan you mine." I can't tell you what she says after that. I'd better skip that paragraph.

She ends this particular letter of March 23 saying, "Stand up and be counted! Break the bonds that tie! Refuse to be bound by political narrow-mindedness since lives are at stake! Every moment you dawdle could be detrimental to someone's life." That's from Marilyn Iva Thomas. I couldn't have said it better. There is a little picture of Mr. Takhar all bound up in red tape.

On March 24, again the title of the letter is "Highway 26 realignment between Stayner and Collingwood.

"Hari," she says this time, "sleeping on the job does not necessarily mean you're overworked." She's got a picture of a fellow sleeping on a table. "It could mean that you don't sleep well at home because of a guilty conscience and go to work where a guilty conscience is unheard of. To be a politician and claim to have a conscience is the grossest oxymoron...."

She goes on to say, "I invite you to attend this location and see for yourself the death-dealing situation we contend with summer, winter, spring and fall. Bring your armour to slay dragons, and shed the slings and arrows of the outraged populace living here.

"I remain, forever trying to get the job done,

"M.I. Thomas."

She writes to Mr. Takhar again, and copies me, on March 26. Again the title of the letter is "Highway 26 realignment between Stayner and Collingwood."

She says:

"Hari, how much of a line are you feeding Brian Peltier? He seems to think that three phases were planned for the realignment. What happened to the smooth flow of planned phases?"

"Jerky, irrational planning does nothing for our confidence that there are, in fact, phases. If phases were properly planned, there would be no unrealistic delays."

I would just say to people at home, she is mentioning the phases because that's one of the excuses we get back from this government. They keep saying, "We're about to enter the next phase." Well, no one seems to know what the next phase is. She goes on to say:

"The traffic is atrocious on local Mosport speedway." That's what she's calling the existing Highway 26 that we're trying to replace.

"It's so strange to have a highly built-up area cut in half by a curvy two-lane highway with the speed limit at 80 kilometres per hour. Tourists (now mainly skiers galore!) and others who cannot read the signs or respect

other drivers ... test our forbearance. We were so excited when the first work was underway and absolutely mystified and left scratching our heads in wonder when the work was halted without warning. Without advising the public of the strategy up front. The constant terminological inexactitudes are very wearying.

"We have too many pre-existing private accesses and public roads presenting hourly hazards to allow the matter to sit gathering mould. Step up to the plate.

"As never before and one day older,
"Marilyn Iva Thomas."

Thank you, Miss Thomas, for your letter. There is a local constituent, unprompted by her MPP, in very strong words expressing disbelief and disappointment, to say the least, in what has happened. I never heard anything of it.

Mrs. Patsy Boyce stopped my constituency assistant, Joy Parks, in Collingwood the other day. "Patsy lives just off Highway 26 and was explaining how difficult it is getting on to 26 to go to work each morning. Many days"—get this, folks—"she waits 10 to 15 minutes to get safely on to the road. She wants to see the work proceed as soon as possible"—that's on the realignment—"but realizes she may have to wait until 2007 when the Conservatives get back into government.

"Lorne Winkler also resides on Highway 26 and also finds it extremely difficult to get safely on to the road. He drops into our office asking about any updates. He is very concerned about the safety of the road, especially with the number of tourists travelling to our region.

"Dale and Julie Parks" I gather they are Joy's in-laws, so there might be a little bit of a conflict of interest, but they are entitled, in a free and democratic society—unlike what some people just expressed here a few minutes ago. You're not allowed to say anything in here any more. "Dale and Julie Parks ... live just off Highway 26 also. Both struggle each morning to gain access to this highway."

It's a safety issue. It's a ridiculous issue. It's one that the Liberal Party will never live down if they don't smarten up soon. Someone will get killed, and I can tell you it will be a sad day for those families, obviously, but also a sad day in Ontario.

This bill, Bill 169, is the first major initiative of this government to deal with transportation. There is nothing in it to solve problems like Highway 26, or Highway 89 east of Alliston. There's nothing in it for gridlock other than—I agree that a lot of this was drafted under our government in terms of getting the wrecks off the road when there is an accident and protecting police officers and emergency personnel from liability and things like that.

Look at the CAA's Mobility Express: "Gridlock." The only reason it's blown up is because my eyes have gone and the original print is too small, so I had to blow it up. But this is their Gridlock report from 2004. It says: "Gridlock, and How CAA Proposes to Reduce it in Toronto." I'll just read from the summary page. It's a 15-year, \$18-billion plan. They recommend that there be some partnerships with the private sector and that we

spend, as a government, about \$1.2 billion a year over the 15 years, for, as I said, a total of \$18 billion. I'll just read from this document, which is available on the CAA's Web site.

"CAA proposes a three-phase implementation plan. Each phase will take about five years to complete, so the entire plan can be implemented within 15 years—a decade before experts predict Toronto's transportation system and road-users will be frozen by total gridlock"—by total gridlock, because it's gridlocked now for all of us trying to get in, out and around Toronto.

1650

I'm surprised there isn't a revolt. I'm surprised there isn't a revolt from drivers every day. It's two hours in the morning to get from one side of the city to the other. It's horrendous. I have to try to come down Avenue Road; it can be an hour itself just coming down Avenue Road. Getting out of here after question period, if I want to get to a dinner or an awards event or something in my riding at 6 o'clock, I have to leave during question period. I have to get out of here at 3 o'clock to get home to Wasaga Beach to be sure I'm there at 6. I don't know how many meetings I have to miss, because sometimes you can be an hour and 15 minutes getting up Avenue Road; sometimes, you can be 40 minutes. With no traffic, it's literally a 20-minute drive.

Then you get on the 401, and that's a parking lot going east or west. Of course, I have to go west. Then I get on the 400, and that's a parking lot usually up to just about Wonderland. It's just ridiculous.

So, Toronto "frozen by total gridlock. Estimated costs are based on costs associated with similar projects such as the Front Street extension, the Howard Franklin Bridge and the Red Hill Creek Expressway."

For the first phase, they recommend a \$5.3-billion—or about \$1.1 billion per year over 15 years—expenditure: "Expand SCOOT installations to all signalized intersections: \$58 million at \$36,000 per intersection.

"Extend the Bloor subway to Square One Plaza in Mississauga via Sherway Gardens....

"Extend the Sheppard subway to Consumers Road....

"Build the Scarborough Highlands expressway to Highway 401 and adjacent transit line from Old Weston Road to the Toronto Zoo....

"Upgrade Black Creek Drive to an expressway....

"Link arterial roads in the downtown core...."

Beside each of these items they give a dollar figure.

The second phase, which would be \$10.2 billion, or about \$2 billion per year:

"Construct the Yonge-Spadina subway loop via York University....

"Finish the Queen Street subway line....

"Build the Richview expressway and adjacent route for the Eglinton subway....

"Extend Allen Road underground to Bathurst Street....

"Link arterial roads in suburban areas....

"Build the Humber Bayway bridge....

"Construct the Gardiner Offshore Extension."

The final stage would be \$2.4 billion, or \$473 million per year for the last few years of this 15-year plan. It says: "Complete the Sheppard subway to Scarborough Town Centre from Consumers Road...."

"Tunnel the Eglinton subway route to Allen Road from Jane Street...."

"Create a city-wide network of cycling paths on their own routes."

The total plan costs the city \$18 billion, or about \$1.2 billion a year.

Given that the gas tax is \$2 billion a year, plus another \$637 million—I believe I said—in diesel tax, the government who said that they would commit this to transportation should meet and deal with the CAA's recommendations. They put a lot of work into it. They've had a task force running for quite a long time, and it's quite a good plan. Anything would help with respect to gridlock.

I want to talk, too, where this bill doesn't, in a sense—Bill 169 touches on the 427 north-south corridor, the 427 extension. As you know now, the 427 ends at York Regional Road 7, which is the old Highway 7. It was to go up through Peel, Brantford, Vaughan, up through my riding, north up to Highway 89. Then, there was a lot of opposition during the last election.

For those listening at home, you may have heard that the ministry has announced that—let's find the announcement here. The 427 corridor north of Highway 89—actually, north of the GTA, so anything north of Highway 9—project has been cancelled. It's not contained in what the government calls its draft growth plan. I'll just read here from April 14, 2005, a letter to me from Linda McAusland, manager, provincial and environmental planning office for the people back home.

"Dear Mr. Wilson:

"Re: 427 Transportation Corridor Environmental Assessment Terms of Reference

"The Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO) is working to provide for the efficient movement of people and goods within the context of the province's draft growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe.

"In February 2005, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and Renewal released a draft growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe. The draft growth plan outlines a strategy for managing growth and development in the greater Golden Horseshoe over the next 30 years. As part of the policies in the draft growth plan, improving access to intermodal facilities is identified as a priority for improved goods movement, and the link between the current terminus of Hwy 427 and the CP intermodal yard in Vaughan is specifically identified."

The important line for my constituents is: "The GTA north transportation corridor across and north of the Oak Ridges moraine is not identified as an initiative in the draft growth plan and is no longer an active project."

In other words, what they are going to do in this EA—and I agree with them—is deal with the intermodal facilities; that is, the truck-train transfer yard just off Highway 50. It would have been parallel to where the

427 would have extended north of old Highway 7, or Regional Road 7 as it's now called. Because they have not asked for an EA on anything north of the GTA for at least the next 10 or 15 years, the government is saying it will not look at wiping out the village of Ivy, the village of Utopia in my riding and some of the best farmland in Ontario.

Now, it wasn't the Liberals' fault at all, and it really wasn't our fault; in fact, the first I heard of this plan—the 427 north to Barrie, and then a bypass around Barrie—was when the Ministry of Transportation under our government started holding open houses. I think the second open house went by when I started to get calls from my constituents saying they were going to drive a new four-lane highway right up through the east part of my riding. As a cabinet minister, I asked my colleague the Minister of Transportation to cancel any further open houses, which we did in 2003, to try to quash this thing.

I'm glad the Liberals now have said they're not interested, because here's the thing: The minister's own House note on Highway 400 from Toronto to Barrie indicates that we should have 20 lanes of highway. I've indicated that I've been waiting all my life, or at least 30 years, for some government to come along—the existing six lanes from, say, Wonderland north, actually King Side Road north, can be expanded to as much as 20 lanes. You've got a bottleneck at the Dunlop Street and Bayfield Street bridges in Barrie, so you'll probably have to do a Barrie bypass.

But finally the government, and I give them good credit for this—finally the planners have said, "Don't listen to politicians," because I've said, "Over my dead body are you extending the 427 through my riding; you may want to extend it up to 9, because it looks like Vaughan is quite interested in it." But the fact of the matter is, those at home know this 427 extension would be only a few kilometres west of the current 400. So the 400 should be 20 lanes. It should be at least 12. I think that's reasonable.

Mr. Marchese: Jim, 20 lanes?

Mr. Wilson: Well, you've got an EA already done. According to the House note, you have the widening from Highway 9, at the beginning of my riding, to Highway 89, in the middle of my riding, right where I was talking about Nottawasaga, from six to eight lanes and ultimately 10 lanes, awaiting the Minister of the Environment's decision. This is the government's own House note. You can do that right away, Rosie. Why upset everybody with a new piece of Highway 427 through prime agricultural land when you've already got environment approval? Part of this note says you have it and part of it says you're waiting for environmental approval. The EAs have been done—I guess that's the point—and the minister has to sign off on final approval. But the environmental assessments have been done. We've been waiting years for the highway to be expanded. It already is 12 lanes at the south end. The part my colleagues from Toronto are wondering about already is 12 lanes up to about Highway 407, plus the off-ramps and everything. You need to continue that right up to Barrie.

1700

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): The transit tax credit.

Mr. Wilson: I'll get to that. I'm covering everything I know on transportation here at the moment, I say to Mr. O'Toole.

I'll just read this note for people back home, because this is a major highway. Forty thousand cars come out of my riding and Joe Tascona's riding every day. They come down this highway, only to be stopped at Highway 9, where the traffic backs up as you get into Toronto. It's killing family life. As I said earlier, there are about two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon; that's four hours of your day just sitting in gridlock. Yet we have governments and planners in the Ministry of Transportation who want to spend all kinds of new money building a Highway 427 in my riding which isn't necessary.

If I ever ask this question of what the minister's going to do about the increasing commuter and weekend traffic on Highway 400, the minister's suggested response, according to the briefing note, is:

"This important commuter and economic route currently handles about 176,000 vehicles a day at its busiest section.

"The ministry is planning to improve Highway 400 between Toronto and Barrie to expand capacity and enhance safety." By the way, this is relevant to Bill 169 because some of the authority for the planning that has to be done for this highway is contained in the bill.

"MTO has recently completed three environmental study reports for improvements to Highway 400 from Major Mackenzie Drive to Barrie, including:

"Widening from Major Mackenzie Drive to Highway 9 from the current six lanes to an interim eight lanes and ultimately 10 lanes." You could go further, but they've asked for environmental approval and received it for up to 10 lanes.

"Widening from Highway 9 to Highway 89 from six to eight lanes and ultimately 10 lanes," as I said before, is awaiting the Minister of the Environment's decision.

The environmental studies also got approval for "widening from Highway 89 to Highway 11 ... MTO is finalizing additional information for consideration" by the Ministry of the Environment on that particular point.

"The ministry will be initiating a Highway 400 high-occupancy vehicle ... planning study to determine the opportunity and feasibility of providing HOV lanes on Highway 400 from Toronto to Barrie." Remember what the truckers' association said? Any HOV lanes should be new lanes. Don't take away one of the six lanes we have now to make it a high-occupancy vehicle lane, which would mean only two people per vehicle. A vehicle with two or more people could use that lane; the rest of us would be stuck with the lanes that were left over. It goes on to say what HOV lanes are.

"Facts:

"Highway 400 from Major Mackenzie Drive to Highway 11 is a six-lane rural freeway." Its traffic count is 75,000; I guess that's a daily count.

"Highway 400 from Steeles Avenue to Major Mackenzie Drive is an eight-lane rural freeway." Its daily traffic count is 118,000.

"Highway 400 from Highway 401 to Steeles Avenue is a 10-lane rural freeway." Its daily traffic count is 176,000. That comes back to the earlier comment at the beginning of this note saying that peak parts of Highway 400 have 176,000 vehicles a day.

"The highway serves as both a vital economic and commuter route and also as a recreational corridor." We all know that.

"The highway experiences heavy travel during week-day commuting periods and significant congestion on summer weekends."

If the government is so inclined, you may have to borrow some money from the private sector, but you really should get moving on the 400. I'm glad that the 427 isn't on the radar right now, although you should do what you're planning on doing, according to this new environmental assessment: Deal with the CP Rail yard and deal with the intersection of Highway 7, which is now York regional road 7, and Highway 50. Apparently, it's over capacity, by the government's own notes. The assessment will look at that. You can't put any more turning lanes in or anything; you're going to have to do something there. You may want to parallel Highway 50 with the 427 extension to the edge of the GTA, up to Highway 9.

If you've got that done, you'll be doing more than any other government has done in that area in decades. Other than that—a couple of lanes here, one lane here and one lane there, on each side—that whole area, for commuters, especially those who are trying to come down from the airport in my riding, is badly congested and needs help. But don't bother spending the \$1 billion building the 427 right up to Barrie. I don't think you'd end up getting environmental approval anyway.

They talk about the gas tax going to some municipalities. The minister said that in his comments—so it's a fair comment for debate—today about Bill 169.

I did a question last week in the House about this new municipal partnership fund, which is turning out not to be much of a partnership at all. It's replacing the former community reinvestment fund that was established by our government to deal with local roads, police, land ambulances, social services etc. As I mentioned last week, Owen Sound is going to lose \$2 million. It gets a little bit of money—I forget the exact amount, to be fair, but it's just a little bit of money; it might be \$100,000 or less—for transit, but they're going to take back \$2 million. Property taxes, the treasurer tells us, will eventually go up by 12.5% because of the McGuinty government's new funding.

The Town of the Blue Mountains will see a decrease of \$1.3 million; property taxes will go up 17% because of the government's new funding formula. The municipality of Grey Highlands loses \$1 million; property taxes could go up—the treasurer says "will go up"—a whopping 25%. That's from the treasurers you met last week in

Grey county. They report on three of those municipalities. Twenty-five per cent is unbelievable; 17% is unbelievable; 12.5% is unbelievable. The municipalities and property taxpayers were angry when we caused property taxes to go up 4% or 5% in the worst cases. Under their new formula, which they're bragging about in question period—and John Tory, the leader of my party, has been asking about it every day; I asked about it last week for these Grey county municipalities.

Anyway, I just want to read: "New Provincial Grant Hurts Grey Highlands." I represent Grey Highlands.

"A recent change in provincial grants for municipalities will cost taxpayers in Grey Highlands almost a million dollars annually, and that will translate into large tax increases starting in 2006." This press release was written and distributed on April 7, 2005.

"Last Friday, the municipalities across the province received details of a new grant called the Ontario municipal partnership fund.... The 2004 provincial grant, called the community reinvestment fund ... was \$1.97 million for the municipality of Grey Highlands.

"This year's OMPF grant"—the municipal partnership fund grant—"is the same amount but it includes a one-time payment of \$202,032 for this year only and \$663,821 that will be phased out beginning in 2006. Next year, \$50,880 will be lost; in 2007, a further \$76,320 will be lost; and in 2008, a further \$127,200 will be lost. With no information beyond that, Grey Highlands officials are hoping that the balance of \$409,421 is not lost all at once, in 2009."

I'm just going by the government's charts, which are available on the Ministry of Finance Web site. In fact, they're here somewhere; I had them printed out again this afternoon.

It continues: "The former CRF"—community reinvestment fund grant—"was initiated in 1998 to help municipalities pay for costs downloaded from the province, such as police. The new grant has six components, some of which do not apply to Grey Highlands."

This is the real kicker, I think. Under the title of "rural community" in this press release from Grey Highlands, it says: "Grey Highlands is recognized for being a rural community and receives \$150 per household. With its 5,088 households, Grey Highlands will receive a grant of \$763,200. Other similar-sized municipalities received similar grants in this category"—West Grey and Meaford, it goes on to say.

The final kicker, though, is under "Rural stabilization.

"Because the new grant for Grey Highlands would be smaller than the previous grant, it receives \$278,098 in this category," and then assessment equalization, farm and forest equalization, police services and rural social programs. The final kicker, the point that I was trying to make here, I guess, is that it's going to cause a huge property tax increase. For the purposes of most of the categories in this new municipal partnership grant, Grey Highlands, which is probably one of the most rural municipalities of any riding in Ontario, is no longer considered a rural municipality for most parts of this grant.

I don't have it with me, but the local newspaper had a headline saying, "Grey Highlands No Longer Considered Agricultural; Loses Agricultural Designation." That was a shock to everyone back home.

In conclusion, I generally agree with Bill 169. I can't believe that the minister would spend exactly nine and a half minutes on his largest initiative to date. There have been almost no government announcements, that I'm aware of; almost no tenders put out at all on transportation. I don't know what major projects they're doing this summer as we enter the construction season, because they're doing very few. There's no bold transportation plan for the province. I haven't even talked about the Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association, which has sent me all kinds of stuff about there being no transportation plan for the greenbelt area. I'd like you to look at these local issues before someone gets killed. Whether I'm in opposition or in government, it's ridiculous for you to come in and cancel projects in my riding that are safety issues, and I'd ask the government to consider that. We are generally supportive of Bill 169, except for my last hour of comments.

1710

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Marchese: I just want to say that I agree with some of the things the member from Simcoe-Grey talked about. The fact that this is a place of war is true; it is war in this place. The government is over there—with a rump here that needs another place—and the opposition is here. It's war. This is not a friendly place where we're all working together. Every government comes in and says, "We should work together." You couldn't have found a bunch of Liberals, who are now in cabinet, who were more violent, vitriolic and ready for war each and every day against the Conservative government. You had the Conservative government on the other side saying, "Come on, let's be friends. Let's work things out." Everyone who gets over there wants to be friends with the people over here. But everyone who is in opposition, including Papatello, who I like in many ways—

Hon. Sandra Papatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): Hey, I'm non-violent.

Mr. Marchese: She's non-violent now, but, boy, you should've seen her when she was in opposition. It was a state of siege each and every day. So I'm with the member: This is a place of war.

I've got to disagree with him on the whole issue of creating 20 lanes on the 400. I've got to tell you, 20 lanes: Can you just picture that? I can see for miles and miles. That's a lot of lanes. I would prefer to go a different way: the James Bond movie, *You Only Live Twice*; the good doctor mentioned that to me. I was thinking of those little jets you can put on your back and press some little button and just take off. I prefer that than to have 20 lanes on the 400. I've got to tell you, Jim, I'm not in agreement with that. But maybe you might agree with me on those little gizmos, where you can just take off. We'd create so much space.

I wonder what you think about the fact that the Liberals were going to hire 1,000 cops and we don't have them yet. You might have an opinion on that as well, and I'd be interested to hear that.

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I listened with great interest to the speech from the member from Simcoe–Grey, and I noted his general support for Bill 169. I think I was disappointed, as most members were in the House, that although he supported Bill 169, he ended up devoting three quarters of his speech to other subjects. I think once in a while the opposition has to come clean. When the government comes through with a piece of legislation that is going to increase safety, that is going to increase the environment, that is going to bring an end to gridlock, which is causing so many economic problems, I think it is time for the opposition not to stand up to say, “Yes, it's a good bill,” and then go off on tirades.

In terms of those tirades, I must say that I was particularly disturbed by a series of letters by one Mrs. Thomas, written to the member. The reason why is, first of all, I want to go on the record that our Minister of Transportation is a fine, upstanding minister. He's a man of integrity; he's an individual who has a vision for the transportation system in this province. To stand up and read letters which begin by making fun of the minister's name, I find particularly questionable. I think, instead, it would have behooved the member to stand up and go into the bill in greater detail, to use his hour to talk about a piece of legislation which is forward-looking and, as I say, will have an effect on some of the major issues that are facing our province in terms of transportation and gridlock.

I just look at some of the quotes that have come out about this bill. One from officer Cam Woolley, an OPP sergeant, who told the Toronto Sun, “The police have been waiting for such legislation for a long time. It's in the public interest to do this. It's going to save lives and improve the quality of life and the economy.”

Dave Woodford, another OPP constable: “[The bill] gives us more authority. Our main job is getting the highway open again.”

This is a good piece of legislation, and it's about time that the opposition stood up and supported it.

Mr. O'Toole: I'm disappointed only in the fact that I have very little time to compliment the member from Simcoe–Grey for outstanding comments on Bill 169. As our critic on transportation, he's very well informed. I'm somewhat disappointed, however, that he didn't take more time to speak on a bill that I'm very familiar with, which is Bill 137, the tax credit for commuters. That's before the estimates committee, and I can assure you what it's aimed at doing in particular is that the commuters who are frustrated with the gridlock now have a choice of taking public transit. When they do, their expenditures for the use of public transit would become a tax deduction, a credit. I urge members of all parties to support Bill 137, which will be going to the estimates committee, and I urge viewers today to write to me or send me an e-mail, for that matter, and I can assure you that your comments will be heard.

This bill, as the member from Simcoe–Grey has said, is pretty much in agreement with many of the things we were doing as government. Everyone is frustrated with gridlock, and I would only say what I see here, and I want the Liberals in presence here today to recognize that one of the things they're doing is doubling the fine. They're increasing taxes again. Everywhere I look, they're increasing taxes, and they're barriers on the people of Ontario. In fact, Doug Switzer, of the Ontario Trucking Association, said that they don't have a problem with the legislation, that it doesn't place an unfair burden on the guy with the deep pockets on the other side of the road. So they are just as cynical and suspicious of the minister. But these are much-needed issues, and in my riding of Durham we want the 401 interchanges completed, the 407 extension completed and improvements in GO Transit service in support for Bill 137.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): It is really, really humorous to hear a Liberal member in this Legislature come forward and say, “Pass this bill on a wink and a nod.” You know, this bill doesn't really deal with gridlock too much; HOV lanes, yes. But talk about parliamentary gridlock. Go back to the last Parliament, and the Liberals of the day did nothing but slow this Parliament down as much as they possibly could. We would debate bills which they would vote unanimously in favour of. We would debate three, four, five days of legislative time when they had nothing to say about the piece of legislation. Fortunately with our new leadership, with John Tory, Mr. Tory wants to make this place work properly. So you will find a responsible opposition in this Legislature, and that's what you have at this present time. On some occasions we have given the government bills in one or two days.

Interjection.

Mr. Sterling: The member from Windsor Centre cannot be in this Legislature without interrupting.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Windsor West.

Mr. Sterling: Windsor West. Whether she's in the opposition or on the government side, it doesn't really matter that much with regard to her interjections anyway. They don't make any sense. We are going to try to pass this bill in a timely manner but we require time to debate it. We won't stall like the formal Liberals did when they were in opposition.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Simcoe–Grey has two minutes in which to respond.

Mr. Wilson: I appreciate the comments, good and bad, from colleagues around the House. On a positive note, although I don't know it should be positive—some Liberal member here objected at the beginning of my remarks to me calling this place a substitute for war. The first time I was ever called a liar in my public life was by the Minister of Social Services, the member from Windsor West. Before I even got to the radio station in Windsor, when I announced the new cancer centre down there as Minister of Health back in about 1996, she'd already called me a liar three times on a live radio show. You walk into the studio and it is like, “You're a liar”—

the little girl who was the DJ. "You're a liar." And I'm like, "What do you mean I'm a liar?" You called me a liar, you and George Smitherman—

The Acting Speaker: Excuse me. Hold on. I don't think I've ever run into this before, where someone refers to himself using that word, but you've used it over and over and now you're purporting to use it for other people. So I would ask you to cease and desist.

1720

Mr. Wilson: I'm not bitter about the whole thing, but it was horrible. That was the beginning, in my time, of seeing this place go downhill. You're the rat pack over there, folks. You seem to think you're sinless. This place went from, "We used to have a beer or a hot coffee together after work," to "No one talks to anyone any more." How did that start during the time I was here? A rat pack. They used to call us names. They were rude; they were incredible. Don't tell me this isn't a substitute for war. You guys were doing war long before I even knew it.

Anyway, I'm going to say something nice about the government. Hold on; you'll hear a pin drop. I want to thank the government. Although only two municipalities in my riding got anything under the Canada-Ontario infrastructure, I want to thank them for a little bit of money for the rural hall's water supply in Clearview township, and Springwater township is getting rehabilitation of the Finlay Mill Road bridge. I want to thank you for that.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Bisson: That was a very interesting ruling and a very interesting two minutes. I want to say my friend is not bitter. I do know that for sure.

I've got a whole bunch of things that I want to put on the record in this particular debate.

Mr. Marchese: Take your time. Don't go fast.

Mr. Bisson: I'm not going to go fast. I'll take my time, as my good friend the member from Trinity-Spadina has pointed out. I've got a whole hour, so I'm going to have a chance to put some of this stuff on the record.

Let me say from the outset that there is much in this bill that we support—no question. I would see this as a bit of an omnibus bill in transportation. There are a number of things in here that we support, and we're going to go through some of those a little bit later. But there are a few things that I have some difficulty with.

I'm sure the government is going to be interested in referring this bill to committee in the summer recess, and we're going to have an opportunity to deal with a couple of amendments that I don't think the government would be totally opposed to.

I want to raise one directly, right off the top of the debate, and that is a concern that's been brought to me by a number of people who do recovery at accident scenes: tow truck drivers and specifically the guys who come in. For example, a large logging truck or transport truck or fuel truck or something has been involved in a motor vehicle accident and it goes off into the ditch and has to

be recovered. It has to be taken off the highway, because the highway has been blocked and closed. They call in these specialty operators, such as D. and L. Towing and other people in my riding and across this province. They are there, ordered by the police, who say, "There is something in the middle of the road. We need you to take that transport truck, clear it off the middle of the road, so we can reopen Highway 11 or 17"—or whatever it might be—"so people can get access."

One of the difficulties we have with this particular bill is under subsections 134.1(1) and (4). There's a section in here that, rightfully, tries to create an amendment that basically says that police officers, acting in good faith, who are doing their jobs, who are trying to deal with the scene of an accident and at the same time do an investigation and get the highway open, will not be held liable for damages as a result of carrying out their duties in reopening the highway.

There are all kinds of examples where that could happen. For example, a large logging truck has been involved in a motor vehicle accident. Let's say the logging truck has turned over in the ditch and there are logs across the highway. The police officer says, "Clear that area out because we need to get the traffic through after we've done our investigation," and for some reason there is more damage done to the vehicle in doing the quick removal of the logs and stuff off of the highway. Or there is some other damage to another vehicle or property or something near the accident scene.

This particular amendment under section 134—we understand it and we support the general direction the government is going—says that we're not going to hold the police officer at the scene who ordered the cleanup liable by way of a lawsuit because other damages or other liabilities may have been created by right of the actions he or she has taken as a police officer. We generally support that amendment. However, we've got a problem, because the police officer who is now protected by way of this legislation says, "OK, Jonathan"—let's say that my friend Jonathan, the page from Cambridge, is the person arriving on the scene and is the one who is supposed to remove that particular transport truck or trailer. He could be held responsible by the courts for any damage that is done to the vehicle that's being withdrawn or any other damages that might occur as a result of being ordered by a police officer. One of the amendments we would like to put forward in committee would extend the right of protection from liability to those people who have been ordered by the police to do the actual clearing of the highway or the municipal road or whatever it might be.

I want to put on the record a letter I have, dated March 3, from Riopelle Griener, the lawyers representing this particular organization, D. and L. Towing. It is written by Joshua Bond. I think he makes a fairly good point. I just want to put on the record this particular part of that issue. He lists in the letter—I don't want to read it verbatim. Speaker, according to the rules of the House, I can't read this letter verbatim because you might rule that I'm using

a prop, as other Speakers have in the past, so I assure you that I'm not going to read it verbatim. Under 134.1(4), he is saying, "We are requesting, on behalf of our client, that the protection from liability being proposed under s. 134.1(4) be extended to those persons who have been ordered by the police or otherwise to attend at the scene to assist in the removal of objects that have interrupted the flow of traffic."

They are asking for specific amendments in 134.1(1) and 134.1(4) that would give us an opportunity to extend the protection from liability afforded to police officers and others listed in that subsection to those people who actually have to go out and do the work. That is a pretty reasonable amendment, Mr. Speaker, wouldn't you agree? Government, hopefully, is going to support that type of amendment, and I want to put that forward as one of them.

There is another issue. This is something that currently exists that maybe we can fix with this particular bill. It is related to removing emergency vehicles off the highway. What ends up happening is this. Let's say you have a transport truck that is out of the province of British Columbia and it is involved in an accident somewhere on a highway in Ontario. The truck in question, the British Columbia truck, ends up blocking the highway, so traffic can't flow as a result of the accident. A police officer shows up and says to the tow truck operator or the person responsible for cleaning up the mess on the highway, "Move this truck off the highway. Move it off into your yard somewhere. Get it out of here." The tow truck operator has been ordered by the police to tow the truck away from the scene of the accident, after the investigation, into a compound somewhere.

Now the problem is that obviously the person who operates the tow truck needs to be repaid for having done that tow call. One of the problems we have now is that because it is out of province, many times the insurance won't pay, because there is no mechanism within current legislation to allow the tow truck operator to have a proper lien in some cases. More importantly, there is no mechanism to force the insurance company from the other jurisdiction to pay, when they're settling the account on the damaged vehicle, the costs that were incurred by the tow truck operator to move that truck from the scene of the accident to wherever the truck was held, in a compound owned by the city, by the OPP, by someone else or by themselves, for that matter.

A number of tow truck operators have come to me and raised this issue. They have said they would like to have some sort of amendment in the legislation. We can take a look with legislative counsel, once we get to committee, to deal with the whole issue: Can an amendment be made to this legislation that would ensure that if a tow truck operator is ordered by the police to remove a vehicle from a highway and that particular vehicle is owned outside the province, or within the province, for that matter, there is some sort of mechanism to ensure that when the insurance company settles the bill—in other words, when the insurance company pays to fix the truck

or replace the truck if it's a write-off—the bill for the tow truck operator is also covered and paid by the insurance company? As it is right now, the tow truck operator ends up being further down the list. What you end up with is that the insurance company says, "OK, that truck from BC is a write-off. We're going to pay the owner of the truck or the fleet for the damages done to the particular truck," but there is no mechanism to make sure that the tow truck operator gets paid.

The tow truck operator can't say no to the police officer, that they're not going to tow the truck. They are forced to make the call. The tow truck operator shows up at the scene of the accident, knows it is a bill that he or she may not be able to collect on, but they have to tow it away because they're ordered to do it by the police, but there is no mechanism for them to collect at the end. We need some sort of mechanism that will block that particular loophole to give the tow truck operators an opportunity to collect on that.

1730

I want to thank my friend Luc Migneault from D. and L. Towing for having brought this issue up with me. Since he raised this, I've raised it with a couple of other operators across northern Ontario, and they had similar concerns.

On behalf of the operators not only in the north but across this province, I would ask that we move on those two amendments: (1) to extend liability coverage for the operators who do the removal of the wreck from a highway so they're not sued if additional damages are done, and (2) to have some sort of mechanism to make sure there is some ability for them to collect on a bill for having towed a vehicle they've been ordered by the police to take away.

There is another issue in this bill that I would like to raise. This is one I have a fair amount of sympathy for, for a couple of reasons, and that is the whole issue of the anti-scooping thing that's being put in the legislation. In this section of the bill, basically, as I see it, the minister is trying to be friends to the people, the constituents, he represents. I understand that; we're all parochial in our approach to this place sometimes. Unfortunately, I think what he's doing by bringing in these amendments is really a disservice to those licensed taxi drivers in the cities of Toronto, Mississauga and others who have to do business at Toronto Pearson airport.

Let me explain what the issue is. This isn't too complicated, but I'm going to try to do it as simply as I can, because it is somewhat involved. If you're a taxi driver, you are issued a licence for which you have to pay the city of Toronto to be able to do business within the jurisdiction of the city of Toronto. That licence allows you to pick up fares and drop off fares anywhere within the city of Toronto, and you pay a licensing fee for that.

If you're a limousine driver at the airport—"limousine" is a term used for those vehicles that run passengers from Toronto Pearson airport back into the city or to Mississauga or wherever they might be. Those people, because they do business at Pearson International, have

not so much a licence but a permit, a sort of licensing fee they pay the Toronto airport authority to be able to pick up passengers at the airport and deliver them to their destination, let's say in the city of Toronto, for the most part.

So you have two different people who end up at the airport: a cabbie who has a licence from the city of Toronto and primarily does business in the city but from time to time delivers people to the airport, and then you have those people who have a licence to operate out of the airport to deliver airport passengers from the airport into the city.

If I am a limousine driver out of Pearson airport and I have a licence from the GTA airport that says I can pick up people at the airport and drop them off in the city, there's an amendment in the Municipal Act that says those same drivers are able to pick up fares in the city of Toronto and bring them back to the airport. They've got a fee that they don't pay to any government but to a private entity at the Toronto airport because, as we know, Pearson airport is owned privately. They pay a fee to the Toronto airport authority to be able to do business at the airport, and they've got an amendment in the Municipal Act that says, "You can go into the city of Mississauga or Vaughan or Toronto or wherever, pick up a fare on the street and bring them back into the airport at Pearson."

But here's the inequity: If you're a cab driver for the city of Mississauga, Vaughan, Toronto or wherever, you pay a very large licence fee and you're able to pick up fares in the city and bring them to the airport, but you don't have a reciprocal agreement of any type to give cabbies the ability to pick up a fare at the airport and bring them back into the city of Toronto. There's a huge inequity there.

One of the things we're going to have to talk about once we go into the committee hearings is the whole issue of the inequity that exists between a cabbie working outside of the airport and a limousine driver working in the airport. There's an inequity. What you've got is legalized scooping by the limousine drivers when they come into the city of Toronto or other places, but the Toronto taxi drivers don't have a similar provision within any legislation to allow them to pick up a fare at the airport. The only thing they can do is that they have to prove they've had a pre-arranged fare, if they are a cabbie from the city of Toronto, and they have to pay about a \$10 fee, I think, for doing the actual pickup, when they pick up the fare in Toronto and bring the person back into Toronto.

So here are the taxi drivers from the city of Toronto paying a licensing fee to the city of Toronto. Whenever they need to pick somebody up at the airport, because there's a pre-arranged fare they're in a situation of having to pay an additional \$10 to the Pearson airport. But there is no similar requirement for a limousine driver when scooping a fare out of the city of Toronto to do the same thing to the city of Toronto. So there is an inequity.

You have a number of limousine drivers, quite frankly, who are doing business in the city of Toronto without

having to pay a licensing fee to the city of Toronto or to other municipalities, and are able to scoop to their heart's desire. In some cases, some of the limousine drivers say that if it's not too busy and a person opens the door and says, "I really don't want to go to Pearson but I'd like to go to Mississauga for something," the limousine driver says, "Sure, I'll bring you to Mississauga." Well, they don't have a licence to do that, and there is nothing in this bill to deal with that particular issue and to stop that illegal scooping that goes on on the part of the limousine drivers when they come into the city of Toronto.

I want to say I've got a bit of a personal thing in here for two reasons. One is, I am a frequent customer of the airport, coming out of the airport, flying down from Timmins every week, and obviously, with a number of other members in this Legislature, take the airline limousine into Toronto every week for some 40-odd dollars. What's the other company? Aerofleet, I think, is the other one. Normally, when I'm going back, I flag a cab somewhere if I'm down at my apartment or whatever and go back with a taxi—but not always, depending on where I am. So I have a certain affinity for the issue of scooping for two reasons. One is because I understand the issue as a customer from the airport back into the city, but also, I drove cabs some years ago when I came out of the armed forces. I drove a taxi for a number of years in the city of Timmins and understand just how hard a business it really can be to make a living. If you're having to compete against people who are non-licensed operators—scoopers, in other words—that can be very frustrating, because you pay a large fee in order to operate your cab every week, every year, within your municipality, both by way of operating costs, insurance, fees and licences to the municipality. It's pretty frustrating if here you are trying to do your business and the government turns a blind eye to people who are non-licensed operators going in and scooping business out from under your very nose. Pretty darn frustrating. You're a hard-working person. You normally work 12 hours, sometimes longer, per day, you pay your taxes, you work hard, and all you want is fair treatment on the part of the government. What we have now by way of what Minister Takhar is doing is legalized scooping on behalf of the airport drivers, to the chagrin and dismay of those taxi drivers, hard-working men and women in the city of Toronto and others.

I want to say, by way of this debate, that we're going to have to have some time at committee in order to deal with this particular amendment and to find some sort of fair and equitable arrangement when it comes to legislation, so that we make sure that we get rid of illegal scoopers—because what the minister is trying to do here is deal with the issue of those people who are scooping fares at the airport—and try to find some sort of equitable arrangements for cab drivers.

I want to say, the scoopers aren't the taxi drivers. It should be said, and that's what I forgot to say in my particular portion of debate. When I come out of the airport on Monday mornings or Sunday nights to get the cab, there are always a couple of people standing there. I

can recognize them. There are about five or six I know by face as soon as I see them. They are standing there, saying, "Do you need a taxi in town? Do you need a limo to get into town?" If I go out there, because I've gone out to take a look before, and it's not a taxi out of the city of Toronto but some guy with a private car who doesn't pay a licence fee to the airport authority of Toronto, looking to scoop fares out of Pearson, and that's what the minister is trying to shut down, fair enough.

I don't believe those people should be allowed to operate, for a number of reasons. For example, if I, the unsuspecting passenger, get into that car and there is an accident, where am I when it comes to liability insurance if something should happen and I somehow become injured and there might be a lawsuit involved? So you want to make sure that you're with a licensed operator who is properly trained and has the insurance to go with the service they are providing.

I want to say for the debate that the scoopers the minister is trying to put an end to are not taxi drivers; those are not the scoopers. They are actually other individuals who have their own private cars. I have seen some of these guys before. They used to be limousine drivers, in some cases, and lost their jobs. They go back and do it on their own. That's who we're getting at.

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What I'm looking for is an amendment that basically says we're going to treat airport limousine drivers the same way we treat taxi drivers. If pickups by limousine drivers are allowed in the city of Toronto, we should allow pickups at the Toronto airport by taxi drivers. If we don't allow taxi drivers to do pickups at the airport, we shouldn't allow limousine drivers to do pickups in the city of Toronto or in other municipalities. There's an inequity there that we need to deal with. We'll deal with that in committee, but I wanted to raise it.

There is one thing in the legislation that I kind of support but have some problems with, and that is the whole issue of fines. I have to say this is a bit of a money grab. If you look at this particular bill, there are a number of increases in fines for all kinds of things that you're not going to argue against because they're motherhood issues. If somebody is in a construction zone and is found to be speeding, there is going to be an increase in the fine. If somebody is found to have crossed a pedestrian crossing illegally, we're going to have an increase in fine. Again, it's kind of a motherhood issue, and I think most people would say, "Yeah, we'll increase the fines and that will be a way to deter those illegal activities and make our highways safer."

I want to say—and I've spoken to this on a number of issues—you can make the fines as high as you want, but if you don't have a fear of getting caught, you're still going to do it. It seems to me that we're kind of missing the boat a little bit here and not dealing with how you actually deter people from doing it. I argue that you have to figure out how they're going to get caught.

There are a couple of options. One is that the government can do what it promised to do in the last election

and hasn't done yet, and that is increase the number of police officers in Ontario. If we increase the number of police officers, supposedly we'll have more police officers to patrol for these particular infractions, and supposedly, if somebody fears they may get caught, and there's a higher risk because there are more police officers, maybe the increased fines will have some effect. Or you can utilize modern technology. There are cameras that can be utilized at intersections, crosswalks etc. What do they call them? It's not photo radar but the intersection ones to catch people who blow stop signs.

Mr. Wilson: Red light cameras.

Mr. Bisson: Red light cameras. That's what I was looking for—a similar type of technology or other technology installed in areas where we typically have these kinds of infractions. For example, if there's a pedestrian crossing we want to watch or keep an eye on, put a great big sign out saying that it's being watched by a camera, and if you are found not to stop when somebody presses the red button, you will be charged. I'll tell you, if I there's a big sign there and the light is flashing and there's a child crossing the road, and somebody is going to take my picture and that of my license plate and I'm going to get charged, I'm probably not going to break the law.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): Or photo radar.

Mr. Bisson: Photo radar. That's another argument. If I know I'm going to get caught for speeding and get a ticket, I'm not going to speed. Why is it that people speed on our highways? Because they figure they're not going to get caught. That's why they do it. You can raise the fine from \$60 to \$120 for a 10-kilometre infraction over the speed limit, but at the end of the day, the person says to themselves, "Am I going to get caught?" And the driver says, "No, I don't think I will; therefore I'll speed." Well, I say, photo radar. Put the signs up in areas that are critical. I would go as far as to say that if you don't want to have speed traps where the driver doesn't know where they are, fair enough. But another way of doing it is that in areas we know are a problem we say: "Over the next number of kilometres, this stretch of highway is being controlled by photo radar. Zero tolerance for breaking the speed limit." I tell you, that will slow the traffic down real quick.

I'll give you a good example. Do you remember the Bob Rae NDP government, I say to the clerks? I remember; I was there with you. We introduced photo radar. Do you remember that? There was much chagrin by the Conservatives and the Liberals back then. But I always remember jumping into a cab at the airport after they put photo radar on and coming on to the 427. As soon as we got on the 427, the driver had to put the brakes on. Why? Because people were following the speed limit. Here's the interesting thing: You got into the city faster. You actually got there faster. Why? Because it wasn't the bumper to bumper, with somebody slamming on the brakes because something had just happened.

It happened today. I was driving into the city with a cab driver and all of a sudden, because everybody was

going in excess of the speed limit, somebody ahead of us put his brake lights on, and all of a sudden my cabbie just slammed on his brakes out of nowhere. Well, that created a whole bunch of congestion behind us. I just say that photo radar actually worked, because people said, "The speed limit is 90 or 100 kilometres an hour," and people did 90 or 100 kilometres an hour. It was as simple as that, because they knew that if they were speeding, they would get caught. Why? Because it was posted that there was photo radar.

So I say to the government that if we're serious about reducing accidents because of speed, if we're serious about reducing accidents because people blow red lights, stop signs, pedestrian crossings, speeding in a construction zone, as spoken to in this bill, we need to take a look at how we can really make it a deterrent. I argue that just raising the fines is not really, at the end of the day, going to do it the way we would like. You have to say, "We're going to put the people resources on our roads, hire police officers, or traffic officers if we feel there is another way of doing it, to make sure that we properly police those key areas where we know we have problems." At the Ministry of Transportation, and also within municipalities across Ontario, we have the stats to know where all the accidents are happening, so we're able to patrol those areas that are at highest risk. Or, the other argument would be to use new technologies. Say, "Here is a school crossing where we know we've had problems before." You post it. You say, "There's going to be a camera here, taking your picture, your smiling face and your licence plate number if you're found to be going through a pedestrian crossing when that thing is activated." We have the technology to do that.

I want to digress a little bit and talk about regulation. I have been waiting to give this speech for a little while. You can make as many rules as you want for the highway, but at the end of the day there has got to be some individual responsibility when it comes to what we do as drivers or as pedestrians. In North America and Europe generally, to my friends the pages—I know you're listening intently to this. You're going to get your drivers' licences not too long from now. I see all the guys and girls going, "Yah, we're going to get our driver's licence." Man, I couldn't wait to get mine. I'll tell you, my father regretted it, but that's another story. One day you're going to get a driver's licence and you'll be out there, driving. Don't you think that you, as new drivers, have a responsibility for driving safely? Of course. Our problem here in North America and in Europe is that we tend to figure that the way to make you safe is to fine you. Sometimes it's a little bit simpler than that, as far as, why don't we make each other aware of what our responsibilities are as drivers and as pedestrians?

I'll give you a good example. I was in Vietnam in January this year. I was there on behalf of l'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, as the president of our section here in Ontario, at a meeting called le bureau. That's where basically all the nations come together that are part of l'APF in order to decide the business for the

year. So here I am; I go off to Vietnam. I've been in many places around the world. I've been in Europe a lot, where driving rules are very different from Ontario and North America. I think that generally traffic there probably runs a little bit better, considering that they have more traffic than us. But here they are: Vietnam. There is one traffic law—get a load of this—the biggest vehicle will be charged. That's the traffic law. There are hardly any stop signs; there are hardly any red lights. On a two-lane road like the one in front of your school, where one car can go this way and one can go that way, they drive four parallel cars along that road, sometimes five. Interesting: no traffic laws; no stop signs; nothing. What do they do to turn? They take a flowerpot and put it in the intersection, and everybody wanting to turn left has to go around the flowerpot. That's the rule. That's how it works over there.

Here's the interesting thing. They have about a million vehicles—a million motorcycles, I should say—on the street in Vietnam plus a whole bunch of vehicles—trucks and cars—and a whole bunch of pedestrians trying to cross, and people on bicycles. Per capita, they have fewer accidents than we do in North America, and they have no traffic laws. You have to ask yourself why. I think the answer is kind of simple: People watch out. Pedestrians don't walk across the road and say, "That green light is going to protect my life; therefore I can walk and not look to both sides." Right? The person says, "Hang on. I'm taking my life in my hands. All right, I can go," and then they walk with the traffic. It's really interesting.

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I was in Hanoi. I got in the cab and ended up in Hanoi. The next morning I got up right in the middle of the city, and there were mopeds going every which way, up and down the road. There were cars, trucks, people on bicycles, a granny running down with her—what do they call that again: the vegetables on both sides of her shoulder? And I'm trying to figure out how I'm going to cross the road, and I'm doing one of these. I watched everybody else and they just went, so I just went when I thought it was somewhat safe, and they all flowed around me. It was kind of interesting. People would go behind me, people would go in front of me, trucks would go this way, a car would go that way. I'd be on this side of the road and cars would be going both ways. I'd be on that side of the road, and there would be cars going both ways. But everybody watched out. When I crossed to the other side of the road, I was aware of my environment, so I took the responsibility of going like this, and those people driving the mopeds, granny running with her whatever you call it and the women driving the trucks and cars and the rest of it kind of watched out for each other.

The whole time we were in Vietnam—there were about four or five days of meetings and I built a holiday around it. I was there for a total of about three weeks—I must add, on my dime for the other two weeks. In fact, I used my Aeroplan to fly, as the Clerk well knows. Maybe I shouldn't have done that, but that's another story. Anyway, the point is that I saw not one accident.

My brother and I had some fun—my brother came with me. We were in the old capital, Hue, at the Saigon Morin hotel, a wonderful place in the middle of Hue, a beautiful old imperial city in Vietnam. Our hotel overlooked the busiest street corner in the city of Hue and one of the main bridges crossing the *rivière des Parfums*. I forget what the name of the road was in front of the hotel—a major, major intersection. After the meetings, my brother and I would have a great time sitting down for an hour and a half or two hours for the four or five days we were in Hue smoking nice big stogies and drinking a nice glass of gin and water out on our balcony overlooking this intersection. We watched and watched. We said, “Sure as heck we’re going to see an accident here.” We were like the two guys in the Muppet Show. Do you know the two old guys in the Muppet Show sitting there and heckling at the crowd? That was my brother and I. Here we are, at the Saigon Morin hotel overlooking the intersection, and we were disappointed: four or five days and not an accident. After a couple of days, we decided we’d go and talk to some of the locals or to the police officers who were here and there sort of watching what was going on. We asked them, “Are there a lot of accidents?” They said no.

I had a bit of an opportunity to speak to some of the members of the Vietnamese National Assembly about it. I asked them for some stats, which, by the way, I haven’t received yet. Maybe I should call the Vietnamese government and tell them this is an incident of diplomatic relations between Canada and Vietnam, but that’s another story. The interesting thing was, they were basically saying there are not a lot of accidents. When you do have an accident, it’s an accident. If somebody goes walking out on the street and doesn’t watch and there’s a 10-ton truck coming, I can tell you it’s probably going to be a pretty serious accident. The point is, there seem to be fewer accidents. All I’m saying is that sometimes regulation is good, but my friends the pages—drivers’ licences next year or the year after, right? I’m just elevating you by another year. I used to love it when I was your age and somebody thought I was older. I just loved that. Anyway, that’s another story. Now that I’m older, I like it when people think I’m younger.

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: You’re never happy. When you’re young, you want to be old; when you’re old, you want to be young. I just know that Mark Twain got it right: Youth is something that’s wasted on the young. That’s very true.

My point is that we have to have some internal responsibility when it comes to how we drive and how we flow traffic on our roads. People need to look around a little bit. I just say to my good friends who are here today, maybe part of what we need to do is a little bit more about making people aware of the environment they drive in and walk in so we don’t take for granted that crossing on the green is necessarily going to make it a safe place for you to cross. You should look both ways before you go.

My good friend Mr. Wilson raised an issue, at least with me privately—I don’t know if he raised it when he

did his leadoff—and that is the issue of the autobahn, which is another example. The autobahn is one of the first freeways built in Europe, I would imagine; if not, for sure in Germany. The autobahn is one of the few highways in the world that has no speed limit. Imagine: You’re 16 years old, you’ve just got your driver’s licence and dad has a Lamborghini. Which one of you is going to drive the Lamborghini? Ah, Mr. Ryan back there wants to drive the Lamborghini. He knows what a Lamborghini is. It’s one hot car. If you ever get a chance to drive a Lamborghini, guys, jump in. It’s the one where the door opens on the side and it does 200 miles an hour in neutral. It’s just one heck of a car. You can literally get in your Lamborghini and go up the autobahn at any speed you want and they won’t pull you over.

The interesting thing is, when it comes to accidents, there are fewer accidents on the autobahn compared to similar freeways in North America. Again, when you have an accident, there will probably be a fatality associated with it, because you’re talking about pretty high speeds. But my point is that we need to be aware of where we’re driving and the environment that we’re in.

I’ve had the opportunity—I forget the highway number. Who has been to Italy here? A whole bunch of us? What’s the name of the big freeway that goes down the western coast of Italy? I can’t remember. I think it’s A11. I’ve driven it a couple of times. That highway as well: If you take a look at the speeds that are posted on it, it’s 100 kilometres an hour in the right lane and 160 kilometres in the left lane. And the little Renault diesel I’ve rented, *mon Dieu*, you can push it to the metal all you want, but you’ll never get it to 160. The point is that there are fewer accidents on that freeway as well, according to some of the people I’ve talked to.

So it’s not necessarily on the freeways. It’s in the city, and that’s my point. If you go to Rome, if you go to a number of cities, there’ll be more accidents in the cities—

Mr. Wilson: Paris.

Mr. Bisson: Paris and others—because of the congestion in there. I think part of the reason is that people rely on the rules, and there’s always somebody driving in the traffic who doesn’t know the rules or is lost, who goes somewhere they’re not supposed to be and gets themselves into an accident. But even A11, which runs down the west coast of Italy, coming up from Monaco, with high speeds, has fewer accidents and fatalities per kilometre than we do on some of our major freeways in North America.

Increasing fines, as you want to do in this bill, is not a bad thing. I’m not saying that increasing the fines doesn’t have some effect. I’m just saying there are other things that we should be looking at in North America. For example, as I said, let’s make sure that we have people out there, enough cops or enough technology, to catch people when they’re committing these particular infractions. The fear of getting caught is probably going to stop someone from doing it. Sometimes we need to make sure that there is a certain amount of, how would you

say—I don't want to use the words "common sense." It worries me when I say that. I feel myself drifting to the right.

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): What, drifting to the right?

Mr. Bisson: I know; it's pretty hard to believe coming from me. The point is that I think drivers and pedestrians need to have a little bit of, how would you say, internal responsibility.

I just say to members here, in the last couple of minutes I've got: Always remember that the parliamentary associations that are part of this assembly—either the commonwealth association, l'Assemblée parlementaire or others—are really good associations to take part in. People should check with their caucuses or with the table as to when they meet. You make all kinds of really interesting connections with different people; from time to time you get to travel and see interesting things. For

example, we had a great opportunity two weeks ago to meet with the Republican senator and congressman from Michigan, I think it was. It was fascinating: their particular view, how they approach issues in their jurisdiction. We're able to exchange ideas.

I encourage members, in the last minute I have—I know we're almost out of time for today—to participate in these associations, because they're quite beneficial to us as members. It gives us a bit of an opportunity to measure off what's going on in other jurisdictions, and I think they help you grow as a member. I encourage people to participate in those. I would just say that it's almost 6 of the clock. I will continue this debate the next time we meet.

The Acting Speaker: It being nearly 6 of the clock, this House stands recessed until 6:45 this evening.

The House adjourned at 1757.

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