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(Hansard)**

Tuesday 1 November 2005

Mardi 1^{er} novembre 2005

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 1 November 2005

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 1^{er} novembre 2005

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): It's interesting that today Bill 197, the budget bill, is before the House. Also today, the Gomery report is questioning Liberal spending, such as Adscam. Recently, Sorbara, Duncan, Dingwall and all Liberals have been in the media. My sister, Catherine Brooks Stevenson, sent me an interesting article, which I would like to put on the record:

"Billions of Reasons for Concern

"Only those with nothing better to do should waste time on math, but everyone should give this some" special "thought.

"The next time a Liberal politician uses the word 'billion' casually, think about whether taxpayers want that politician spending their tax money.

"A billion is a difficult number to comprehend. But one advertising agency did a good job of putting that figure into perspective in one of its releases."

It says, and it's important to listen here:

"A billion seconds ago was 1959.

"A billion minutes ago, Jesus was alive.

"A billion hours ago, it was the Stone Age.

"A billion days ago, no one walked on two feet on earth.

"A billion dollars ago was only eight hours and 20 minutes, at the rate our Liberal government" is spending.

Isn't that something worth thinking about?

I put to you, Mr. Speaker: With all the controversies and the casualness with which this government spends money, this is a worthy article, and I would ask people to contact me to get a copy of it.

CELEBRITY WALK AND BREAKFAST

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): On Wednesday, October 20, it was my pleasure to join with many of my constituents for the Celebrity Walk and Breakfast, held at the Cornwall Civic Complex in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh. Sponsored by the Cornwall Standard Freeholder and chaired by its publisher and general manager, Milton

Ellis, this annual event raises money for the Children's Treatment Centre.

This is an important centre that provides aid to children who suffer abuse. The guest speaker at the breakfast, Reverend Dale Lang from Taber, Alberta, spoke movingly about the importance of providing support and compassion to those who have suffered abuse. You may recognize Reverend Lang as the man whose son was gunned down by another youth in the hall of a local high school in an act of violence precipitated by the abuse the young man faced himself.

This message of support did not fall on deaf ears. Indeed, it was well received by the local "celebrities" who donated or raised at least \$100 each to attend, and many went far beyond this. The honorary chair of the event, Sean Adams, raised \$25,600. Other substantial contributions were made by Connie Vardy, Bishop Paul-André Durocher, Mike Despatie, Raymond Shannon and the Survivors of Sexual Abuse group. When the final tally was realized, the treatment centre had raised over \$144,000. That's \$24,000 more than last year.

This is an important local initiative that provides much-needed help to the youth of our riding. I commend everyone who participated and invite my colleagues and the community to join in at next year's Celebrity Walk and Breakfast.

COLLEGES

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): This week we mark College Week to celebrate the critically important role that colleges play in our post-secondary education system and our ongoing economic strength and development. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome to Queen's Park the presidents of our 24 colleges, and representatives of the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario.

The challenges our colleges face are truly "seismic," in their words. Rapidly changing technology, the outsourcing of jobs and the looming skills shortage threaten our long-term prosperity and productivity. This is why Ontario's colleges have launched Pathway to Prosperity, a province-wide consultation to examine these challenges and develop new ideas for a comprehensive skills strategy to inform all Premiers before their meeting with Prime Minister Paul Martin later this fall to discuss the competitive skills agenda.

However, when it comes to funding post-secondary education, the McGuinty Liberals are long on multi-year funding announcements but short on detailing the

accountability frameworks on which the funding depends, as well as actual timelines for its release to the colleges. Will those accounting frameworks be like those contained in Bill 8 that led to bed closures and nursing layoffs in our hospitals?

Until the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities can deliver on the question, "Under what conditions, and when?" with respect to college funding, he is only adding to the burden of anxiety and frustration that Ontario's 24 colleges are facing.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): Very recently, Australian child care expert Lynne Wannan spoke at the Common Table for Childhood Development and Care in Ontario. Her message: Act now to stop big box child care before it's too late. She said Australia's child care system used to be mostly public, but all that changed in 1991 when they started a child care program just like Ontario's. Today, 70% are commercially owned, and the sector is dominated by large chains. Why? Because Australia failed to ban big box daycares. Australia's largest chain, ABC Learning Centres, made \$80 million in profits last year. Now it wants to expand into Canada.

Lynne Wannan says Australia's road-to-privatization pathway was totally unexpected: "I've come to Canada to say we [in Australia] got it wrong."

During the estimates committee, I asked the Ontario Minister of Children and Youth Services about this very issue. I asked her what she was prepared to do to prevent this from happening in Ontario. Would she make a clear, iron-clad commitment and back it up to the fullest to make sure big box daycare is not coming to Ontario? Her answer: She agreed it was a concern, she made all the right noises about stopping big box daycare in Ontario, but when pressed, she would not agree to legislation. In fact, all she would say is that the province signs the cheques, and therefore will not fund them. How naive.

This is the problem, the mistake that Australia made, and we have a chance to learn from their experience. The Australian experience shows good intentions are not good enough. The McGuinty government must act today and ban public funds from being used to expand for-profit daycare in Ontario.

NOUVELLES ÉCOLES À GLENGARRY-PRESCOTT-RUSSELL

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): J'ai une très bonne nouvelle à partager avec vous tous aujourd'hui. En effet, le mois dernier, j'ai participé à l'ouverture officielle de trois nouvelles écoles dans la belle circonscription de Glengarry-Prescott-Russell. Quel beau témoignage de confiance du gouvernement McGuinty. Quel important investissement pour l'avenir de notre jeunesse.

Le 4 octobre dernier, c'était l'ouverture de l'École élémentaire catholique de l'Ange-Gardien de North Lancaster; le 18 octobre, l'ouverture de l'École secondaire catholique Le Relais d'Alexandria; et le 28 octobre, j'ai participé à l'ouverture de l'École élémentaire et secondaire publique L'Académie de La Seigneurie à Casselman.

Je tiens à remercier le ministre de l'Éducation, l'honorable Gerard Kennedy. J'aimerais également souligner ma fierté et ma reconnaissance envers tous ceux et celles qui ont travaillé sans relâche afin de garantir et d'offrir à la communauté franco-ontarienne une éducation et une formation accessibles, appropriées et de qualité.

Finalement, je désire souligner ma fierté pour le cheminement que les élèves de ces trois écoles ont déjà accompli, et je les encourage à continuer leur recherche du savoir pour développer davantage le plaisir d'apprendre. Encore une fois, permettez-moi d'exprimer ma fierté et ma reconnaissance pour ces trois nouvelles écoles francophones chez nous.

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OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): Today marks the anniversary of one of more than 50 Liberal broken promises. One year ago the McGuinty government, in a very short-sighted move, delisted primary eye care services for adults between the ages of 19 and 64, thus breaking their promise to provide universal, accessible health care to all Ontarians. People must now pay out of their pocket for eye care services.

For a government that has focused so much attention on health promotion and prevention, to the point they are even paying for a minister, it is ironic they have cut funding for primary eye care services that do just that: prevent sight-threatening diseases such as macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetes. We know this government is failing to appropriately invest in primary eye health and vision care services that optometrists today provide to patients. Early detection of eye disease is absolutely critical to the successful treatment of many conditions.

It is time this government recognized the importance of providing the resources in order that eye problems can be detected early and appropriate treatment be provided so that people avoid permanent vision loss.

VETERANS

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): In Ontario, we take time during the first part of November to honour those veterans who fought for our country, our freedom and for peace during the many conflicts of the last century, and particularly those who lost their lives in war and peacekeeping missions. For many, the most visible way in which we remember our veterans is to wear a poppy. Brantford resident Stan Wawzonek started a tradition

wherein we ask servicemen and women to wear two poppies to make it easier for us to say thank you to these veterans.

In my riding I have been honoured over the last eight years to be associated with the Thank-A-Vet luncheon to express our appreciation to the veterans of Brantford, Brant and Six Nations/New Credit. This is the largest event of its kind in Canada and sees the attendance of over 650 veterans and widows who come for a complimentary lunch and a chance to meet friends and share their memories. The event continues to be a huge success due to the efforts of the Thank-A-Vet committee and the many volunteers, patrons, students, sponsors and city officials who donate their time, energy and money to make this event happen.

I encourage all members of this House and of this province to thank a veteran, and veterans everywhere, but particularly in their own riding. What is most important: We will remember.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): Just over a week ago, I had to take my son Kennedy to Scarborough Hospital following a knee injury in hockey practice earlier that night. I have two bits of good news to share with members here. The first is that Kennedy suffered just a strained knee ligament and he's already back on the ice. The second is the fact that I was able to experience at first hand the significant improvements to health care brought forward by the McGuinty government, right in my own backyard.

Following an X-ray taken at Scarborough Hospital, I was invited by Dr. C. Tyu to a room with a large computer screen. Dr. Tyu said to me that he was not giving me special treatment, but that due to an investment made by the McGuinty government he was about to show me an example of how health care in Ontario was improving.

Some time ago the McGuinty government invested in a new project at Scarborough Hospital called PACS, which stands for picture archiving communications system. This is an electronic network that allows the digital transmission, storage, display and retrieval of medical images such as X-rays, MRIs and mammograms.

Upon taking the picture of my son's knee, it was placed into a secure Internet site where it was immediately made available to the physician treating my son in emergency. It could have been immediately made available and easily accessed by my family doctor or a specialist at any time. We were able to do in minutes what used to take hours. This not only saves time, it saves money as well through quicker results, without the need to develop film, and the doctor does not physically have to be with the patient to interpret the test results.

The installation of the PAC system at Scarborough Hospital is one example of many demonstrating how the McGuinty government is making a difference in the lives of Ontarians.

COLLEGES

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Today is Colleges Day at the Legislature and a wonderful opportunity to recognize the important role that our colleges play as leaders in learning.

Colleges are celebrating their 40th anniversary this year. In those 40 years, more than one million people have graduated from Ontario colleges—people who have helped to drive economic growth and make this province a better place to live.

Our 24 colleges are an accessible option to quality post-secondary education in Ontario. The options for education and training are many and varied at the 100 campuses located all across this province.

Our colleges deliver modern, technically advanced programs leading to certificates, diplomas or applied degrees, as well as in-class apprenticeship training. This in turn leads to quality, high-paying jobs such as animation artist and biotechnologist. That's why our college system plays such a key role in Reaching Higher: The McGuinty Government Plan for Postsecondary Education. Reaching Higher is the largest multi-year investment for Ontario's higher education system since the founding of this system.

The \$6.2 billion in funding is an unprecedented new investment in Ontario's colleges, universities and training system. The college in my home of Peterborough, Sir Sanford Fleming College, received \$4.2 million in new capital money this spring. These funds are part of a \$250-million capital injection made to the province's post-secondary education. Sir Sanford used the money to upgrade its heating, ventilation and cooling system to make it more environmentally and economically efficient. It also totally renovated its chemistry labs, which will support increased enrolment in health programs.

We know that the key to success in a competitive growth economy is our community college system.

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a copy of an order in council appointing the Honourable James Bradley, MPP, as a commissioner to the Board of Internal Economy, appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council from among the members of the executive council in the place of the Honourable Dwight Duncan, MPP.

ANNUAL REPORT, ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSIONER OF ONTARIO

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table the 2004-05 annual report of the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TRUSTEE STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES FIDUCIAIRES

Mr. Klees moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 17, An Act to amend the Trustee Act and the Limitations Act, 2002 with respect to a limitation period for actions for wrongful death and other estate matters / Projet de loi 17, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les fiduciaires et la Loi de 2002 sur la prescription des actions en ce qui concerne le délai de prescription pour les actions engagées à la suite d'un décès dû à un acte délictuel et d'autres questions relatives au patrimoine.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may have a brief statement.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Jennifer Dawson was infected with HIV through tainted blood and died of transfusion-associated AIDS at the age of 40. She is survived by three children—Tamara Lynne, Julie Anne and Mathew Patrick.

Their father, Patrick Dawson, brought to my attention a defect in Ontario's limitations law that precludes wrongful death claims unless the tort is discovered within two years of death. This bill before us rectifies that defect by amending section 38 of the Trustee Act to provide for the limitation period for an action to expire on the second anniversary of the day on which a claim was actually discovered, rather than the second anniversary of the day of death.

The adoption of this amendment will allow the Dawson family to apply for compensation that was made available to other persons and estates that were affected by HIV blood through blood transfusions under a plan by the Red Cross that was established under a federal bankruptcy law. This amendment will bring Ontario's law into line with every other province in Canada, and I do hope all members of the Legislature will support this important legislation.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, 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 Tuesday, November 1, 2005, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1351 to 1356.

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

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Hoy, Pat	Parsons, Ernie
Baird, John R.	Hudak, Tim	Patten, Richard
Barrett, Toby	Jackson, Cameron	Peterson, Tim
Bartolucci, Rick	Jeffrey, Linda	Phillips, Gerry
Bentley, Christopher	Kennedy, Gerard	Pupatello, Sandra
Bountrogianni, Marie	Klees, Frank	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bradley, James J.	Kular, Kuldeep	Racco, Mario G.
Brownell, Jim	Kwinter, Monte	Ramal, Khalil
Bryant, Michael	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ramsay, David
Cansfield, Donna H.	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
Caplan, David	Levac, Dave	Runciman, Robert W.
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Marsales, Judy	Sandals, Liz
Colle, Mike	Martiniuk, Gerry	Sergio, Mario
Cordiano, Joseph	Mauro, Bill	Smitherman, George
Craitor, Kim	McGuinty, Dalton	Sterling, Norman W.
Crozier, Bruce	McMeekin, Ted	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Tascona, Joseph N.
Dombrowsky, Leona	Meilleur, Madeleine	Tory, John
Duguid, Brad	Miller, Norm	Van Bommel, Maria
Duncan, Dwight	Milloy, John	Watson, Jim
Flaherty, Jim	Mitchell, Carol	Witmer, Elizabeth
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wong, Tony C.
Gerretsen, John	Munro, Julia	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Gravelle, Michael	O'Toole, John	Yakabuski, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
Churley, Marilyn	Martel, Shelley	
Horwath, Andrea	Murdoch, Bill	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 75; the nays are 7.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I want to bring to the members' attention, in the Speaker's gallery, the mayor of Manitowadge, Darrell Chisholm, and the mayor of Winnie the Pooh's hometown, White River, Roger Drolet.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

PERSPECTIVES ÉCONOMIQUES

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I rise to present the 2005 Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review.

It has been said that leadership requires equal parts optimism and realism, that we need to be optimistic enough to seize the opportunities before us and realistic enough to face the challenges. At the midway point of our first mandate, we are confident about Ontario's future.

À mi-chemin de notre premier mandat, nous envisageons l'avenir de l'Ontario avec optimisme.

Ontario's economy is performing solidly. A number of sectors are doing well, employment is up, and growth is better than expected. Since we have taken office, Ontario businesses have created more than 193,000 new jobs. The current consensus of private sector forecasts for Ontario's real growth in 2005 has increased from 2.3% at the time of the budget to 2.5% today. We anticipate continued solid growth in 2006 and 2007.

We are confident as well that our plan is the right plan to secure Ontario's future prosperity.

Nous sommes aussi confiants d'avoir le bon plan pour assurer la prospérité future de l'Ontario.

We are working with the people of this province to enhance Ontario's economic advantage by strengthening the education and skills of our people, improving their health, fostering innovation, leveraging diversity, and insuring we get the fundamentals, including energy and infrastructure, right. We are making these investments in our future prosperity at the same time as we are reducing the province's deficit.

This government is providing strong and prudent financial management.

Nous avons instauré une gestion financière rigoureuse et prudente.

Winston Churchill once said, "However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results." Premier McGuinty and his government are all about results, and the results are good for Ontario. Let me tell you about it, Mr. Speaker.

Our economic foundations are firm and the outlook is positive, though challenges lie ahead. This year, there has been strong job growth in information and culture, wholesale and retail trade, education, finance, insurance, real estate and construction. Unemployment is expected to average 6.7%, the lowest since 2001. Retail spending is up, the housing market remains robust, and overall real consumer spending is also on the rise.

Ontario's auto sector continues to be a top producer in North America, with \$4.5 billion in new investments, including a new Toyota plant, which have secured over 19,000 jobs and are creating 1,800 new jobs.

Ontario is also North America's second-largest employer of information and communications technology workers. It is the business and head office capital of Canada. The province's financial and business services sectors are performing well.

With some of the world's best theatre and cultural attractions, this is the national hub for the arts. Employment in film and the media is on the rise as a result of this government's policies.

Turning to our resources, the mining sector has a promising future, with strong global demand generating higher mineral prices. On the other hand, forestry faces enormous challenges. In response, our government has committed an unprecedented \$680 million in support to help this sector compete globally, and we're confident they will compete globally.

The agri-food industry has seen improved market prices, though farmers have needed support through marketing, innovation and income safety nets.

Dans son ensemble, l'économie ontarienne se porte bien.

Overall, our economy is doing well.

In light of the growth in the economy this year, we have increased our own projection for real GDP growth from 2% to 2.2%. The government is working hard to ensure that Ontario is prepared to weather any challenges that may lie ahead by bolstering the foundations of economic growth.

We are investing in the education and skills of our people, from the early years to our historic \$6.2-billion investment in universities, colleges and training programs. To win the innovation race, we are making strategic investments in research and development through our newly created Ontario research fund.

Ontario should be the first to discover new ideas, the first to turn them into new products and services, and the first to market those products and services to the world, and because of this government's policies, we will.

We are also working to leverage our greatest strength—our diversity—by attracting the best and brightest from around the world and fully integrating them into our society and economy.

We are working to get the fundamentals right.

New electricity generation capacity is on the way. Currently, there are more than 9,000 megawatts at various stages of development—enough power for 4.1 million homes. We are on target to meet our goal of 5% renewable generation by 2007, we're taking action to ensure that prices are competitive, and new smart meters will eventually help everyone conserve energy.

In the 2005 budget, we announced \$30 billion in an infrastructure investment plan. Since then, we have announced new road upgrades to highways across Ontario, and we have announced or broken ground at affordable housing projects in Waterloo, Guelph, Hamilton, Brantford, Vaughan, Peterborough and Kingston.

To help speed up the movement of people and goods, we have announced improvements to border crossings at Windsor, Sarnia and Niagara.

To date, the Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority has committed to provide up to \$2.1 billion in low-cost financing to 170 municipalities for more than 1,100 local municipal infrastructure works projects.

We have begun hospital expansions or renovations in Sudbury, London, Oakville, Barrie, Almonte, Ottawa, Belleville, Mississauga and Toronto, as well as announcing a new hospital for the St. Catharines-Niagara region.

At the same time, we are improving the health of our people by reducing wait times for key medical procedures and expanding access to doctors, nurses and other health care professionals.

Turning now to our fiscal plan, I would like to update you on our progress.

Notre objectif d'éliminer le déficit dont nous avons hérité est en voie d'être atteint. We are on track to eliminate the deficit we inherited.

Higher-than-anticipated revenues allow us to project the 2005-06 deficit to be \$2.4 billion. That's a \$427-million improvement from our 2005 budget projection. If the reserve is not required, the deficit is projected to be \$1.4 billion. Although we are slightly ahead of plan this year, in light of what we know about the risks that our economy faces, we are not revising our deficit-elimination target. As was stated in the 2005 budget, the deficit will be eliminated no later than 2008-09, or a year earlier, in 2007-08, if the reserve is not required.

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Our balanced, responsible approach to eliminating the deficit, while continuing to make essential investments in education, health and the economy, is working for Ontarians. We must continue, however, to manage the province's finances prudently. Overall, our expenditures are on target and our plan is disciplined. Our prudent approach to expenditures will be even more important now to help us ensure that we are equally prepared for the challenges that lie ahead.

While we are optimistic about economic growth, it is important to remember that there are clouds on the horizon. These are risks that are beyond our control. The Canadian dollar hit a 13-year high in September; oil prices have increased dramatically; and the US economic outlook faces challenges. As a result, private sector forecasters have decreased their estimates for Ontario's GDP growth in 2006 from an average of 2.9% to 2.6%. We have also reduced our projection from 2.8% to 2.6%. The forecast is still positive for Ontario. We still anticipate solid economic growth; indeed, growth that is better than this year.

The US economy has continued to grow at a strong pace, remaining close to our projections in the 2005 budget. The devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma has disrupted the US economy, although rebuilding effort will likely stimulate activity in the final months of 2005 and early 2006. While the US economy also faces risks, forecasters are, on balance, optimistic that growth will continue at a healthy pace.

The most significant change this year has been the price of oil. At the time of our 2005 budget, forecasters projected that crude prices would average US\$49.10 a barrel in 2005. Since then, prices and projections have risen sharply.

Another challenge going forward is the value of our dollar. The average forecast for the Canadian dollar is over US84 cents in 2006, two cents higher than projected earlier this year. For Ontarians visiting the United States, this is positive. For Ontario companies making capital

machinery investments to improve productivity, this is good news. It does, however, make it harder for Ontario exporters to compete. We've seen that exporters are responding to the challenge by increasing productivity, lowering costs and shifting toward higher-value-added products. As a result, in the short term, export volumes are expected to increase marginally.

There is a considerable difference of opinion about the future path of the dollar, but it is unlikely that the dollar will decline significantly in value in the short term. Overall, the economy must, and will, adjust to this new reality.

Another challenge to the economy is the \$23-billion gap between what Ontarians contribute to the federal government and what they receive in return. We will continue to seek a full and effective partnership with the federal government to address the issue of this gap.

This year, in accordance with the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, we have added some new features to the fall report. These include an estimate of tax expenditures as well as information on how Ontarians can contribute their ideas as we prepare our next budget. We are committed to accountability and transparency because they contribute to a stronger, more informed democracy.

We are proud of the progress Ontario is making.

Nous sommes fiers des progrès que l'Ontario accomplit.

We are realistic about the challenges we will face.

We are optimistic that, with our plan, Ontarians can and will succeed.

Working together we can, and we will, seize the almost limitless opportunities of the 21st century.

We can, and we will, build a quality of life that is second to none.

Nous allons donner à l'Ontario une qualité de vie incomparable.

We can, and we will, fulfill the aspirations that Ontarians share, for our province, our country, and most of all, for our children and our children's children.

This government is making progress. We're on track. We're sticking to the plan. We're delivering real results, just as we said we would.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Response?

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): What's plain today is that under new Liberal Finance Minister Dwight Duncan, the deficit is going up. What an inauspicious debut for the new finance minister. Greg Sorbara left a deficit of \$1.6 billion in 2004-05. Today, the minister reports a deficit of \$2.4 billion. Dwight Duncan increased the deficit by 50% in two weeks' time.

The McGuinty Liberal government has raked and clawed in from Ontario taxpayers some additional \$13 billion in new revenues. Despite that massive revenue grab, there's no break for hard-pressed Ontario taxpayers, no stimulation for businesses struggling to create jobs in Ontario. This debut by the finance minister is going to go over like a flat \$9 Diet Coke.

Today in Ottawa, Justice Gomery reported on an irresponsible Liberal spending spree, and today in Ontario, Dwight Duncan is reporting on irresponsible Liberal spending in our province. Clearly, the reason the McGuinty Liberals are hiding behind the skirts of the Gomery report today is because there is no good news for hard-pressed taxpayers to make ends meet in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario; no good news for hard-pressed businesses worried about the economy, businesses hesitating to invest in new jobs or expansion in our province. Despite massive new revenue through higher taxes and fees, the McGuinty Liberals still cannot get through their voracious appetite to continue to spend taxpayer dollars.

Let me tell you about this. We all grew up in a province that was the leader, the lead province, the engine of growth in this country, proud to be part of the powerhouse economy that pulled the rest of Canada forward. Every Canadian—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock. Member for Erie-Lincoln.

Mr. Hudak: Our province was the envy of every Canadian, but not so in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, not so today, not so in 2005. Economic indicators continue to show our economy, which used to be the leader in Canada, continuing to fall behind competitive states and other provinces.

Statistics Canada recently reported that housing starts have decreased by 16.7%. However, nine of the 12 areas in the entire country that showed that decline are in Ontario: Windsor, Hamilton, Toronto, Sudbury, London, Ottawa, St. Catharines, Niagara, Kingston and Thunder Bay.

Retail sales are falling way behind the national average. The hospitality industry reports their sales are behind the national average. In March, the CFIB released a survey indicating that business confidence in Ontario remains flat. Sadder still, for the first time since World War II, for five consecutive months Ontario's unemployment rate has been above the national average. That has not happened in 60 years. Under this government's watch, 42,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in this year alone.

The minister says there are clouds on the horizon. There's a perfect storm gathering for Ontario consumers: Hydro rates are going through the roof; Dalton McGuinty has increased taxes substantially on working families; home heating costs are going up; gasoline costs are far higher than they've been in a long time; drivers' licence fees; eye exams. The average working family in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario is paying \$2,000 more a year than before Dalton McGuinty, let alone seniors and young people trying to get ahead. It's simply unaffordable. Dalton McGuinty and the new finance minister continue to take more and more money out of their pockets.

1420

We would have thought on this side of the House, with a \$13-billion windfall, that there would be some break for working families, for taxpayers in our province,

that there would have been some initiative to stimulate job growth and investment in an economy that looks like it's in jeopardy. But instead, we see job losses, higher unemployment, higher hydro, higher taxes, and out-of-control spending, resulting in a 50% deficit increase on the new minister and \$2,000 less in each working family's pockets in our province. That is the real economic outlook that the McGuinty government has delivered to Ontarians today, one sadly very unpromising for Ontario's working families.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I want to begin to respond to the government's statement by saying that people across Ontario should wonder why the McGuinty government is presenting their economic statement on the day when the Gomery Commission is reporting all the nefarious activities of the Liberal Party at the federal level. I think there's only one reason: This is a government that is trying to bury the story about their economic statement. Why are they trying to bury it? Consider it from the perspective of the ordinary Ontarian. Consider it from the perspective of somebody out there who's working harder, working longer, and yet, at the end of the month, they find they're having a harder time paying the bills.

Think about the average Ontarian who heard Dalton McGuinty say he was going to freeze electricity prices. What they've seen are double-digit increases in electricity rates from the McGuinty government. Think about the average Ontarian who heard the Minister of Tourism, Mr. Bradley, say he had a plan to control gasoline prices. The Minister of Northern Development, Mr. Bartolucci, too had a plan to control gasoline prices. Mr. Colle, the Minister of Immigration, too had a plan to control gasoline prices. The Premier said he had a plan to control gasoline prices. Now that they're the government, gas prices, heating prices—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock. I can wait. Order. I need to be able to hear the leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: I think too of people who heard Dalton McGuinty say there would be no cuts to health care under a McGuinty government, and now, if they have to see an optometrist, they pay out of their pocket. If they need to see a physiotherapist, they pay out of their pocket. If they need chiropractic care, they pay out of their pocket. Why? Because the Premier who promised no cuts to health care has cut those health care services.

Think about the people who heard the McGuinty government say that they recognize that Ontario's property tax assessment system was all messed up and they were going to fix it. Now they're getting property tax assessments that are increasing not by 10%, not by 15%, but by 30%, 40% and 50%, and the McGuinty government says, "Oh, there's nothing we can do." Then, think about the people who heard Premier McGuinty, looking into the television camera, say, "I won't raise your taxes." Now they're paying an unfair and regressive health tax that hits lowest- and modest-income families the hardest.

A modest-income family with an income of \$35,000 a year is paying through the nose. Somebody who has an income of \$1 million under the McGuinty health tax gets off lightly. That's the perspective of the average working Ontarian, and they will know why the McGuinty government is trying to bury their economic statement on the day that the Gomery commission reports.

All we need to do is look at some of Ontario's leading companies and hear what they have to say. Dofasco, one of our main manufacturers, is very clear. They said—get this—they've lowered their use of electricity by 23% through conservation, but their electricity costs have gone up by more than 50%. They say to the government that this is creating real problems for them as a major Ontario manufacturer and for all Ontario manufacturers. They point out, "We are asking the government to do everything possible and sustainable to make Ontario's electricity costs competitive—to keep Ontario a competitive place to do business."

They say, "It has become a significant issue for us.... We look at other jurisdictions where we do business, and in some cases Ontario's electricity costs are double, with a lot more volatility...."

This, to me, doesn't suggest good news; this suggests that the 42,000 manufacturing jobs that have already been lost under the McGuinty government are about to be eclipsed by the loss of more manufacturing jobs.

Let me refer to the forest sector, which says the same things. We're looking here at the loss, potentially, of 75,000 manufacturing jobs. They are very clear. They want the McGuinty government to develop a fair and rational electricity policy, not one which forces paper mills and pulp mills to pay four times the cost of electricity—

The Speaker: Thank you.

DEFERRED VOTES

ADOPTION INFORMATION DISCLOSURE ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 SUR LA DIVULGATION DE RENSEIGNEMENTS SUR LES ADOPTIONS

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 183, An Act respecting the disclosure of information and records to adopted persons and birth parents / Projet de loi 183, Loi traitant de la divulgation de renseignements et de dossiers aux personnes adoptées et à leurs pères ou mères de sang.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Call in the members. This will be a 5-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1428 to 1433.

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

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Hampton, Howard	Parsons, Ernie
Bartolucci, Rick	Horwath, Andrea	Patten, Richard
Bentley, Christopher	Hoy, Pat	Peterson, Tim
Bisson, Gilles	Jeffrey, Linda	Phillips, Gerry
Bountrogianni, Marie	Kennedy, Gerard	Prue, Michael
Bradley, James J.	Kormos, Peter	Pupatello, Sandra
Brownell, Jim	Kular, Kuldip	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Racco, Mario G.
Cansfield, Donna H.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ramal, Khalil
Caplan, David	Leal, Jeff	Ramsay, David
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Levac, Dave	Rinaldi, Lou
Churley, Marilyn	Marchese, Rosario	Sandals, Liz
Colle, Mike	Marsales, Judy	Sergio, Mario
Cordiano, Joseph	Martel, Shelley	Smith, Monique
Craitor, Kim	Matthews, Deborah	Smitherman, George
Crozier, Bruce	McGuinty, Dalton	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Dhillon, Vic	McMeekin, Ted	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dombrowsky, Leona	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Duguid, Brad	Meilleur, Madeleine	Watson, Jim
Duncan, Dwight	Milloy, John	Wong, Tony C.
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Mitchell, Carol	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Gerretsen, John	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Zimmer, David
Gravelle, Michael	Oraziotti, David	

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Martiniuk, Gerry	Sterling, Norman W.
Barrett, Toby	Munro, Julia	Tascona, Joseph N.
Flaherty, Jim	Murdoch, Bill	Tory, John
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakabuski, John
Jackson, Cameron	Runciman, Robert W.	
Klees, Frank	Scott, Laurie	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 68; the nays are 19.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

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

VISITOR

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order and with your indulgence: I rise today to recognize a truly special Ontarian. Rita Buffalo, who is in the members' gallery to your left, is the first Ontarian ever to receive the Council of the Federation Literacy Award.

Just briefly, growing up, Ms. Buffalo received very little formal education, but as an adult she enrolled in a basic skills and literacy class, improving so much that she qualified for college in only four years. In 2002, she graduated with honours. Today, she is a literacy coordinator for the same program that helped her. She now helps others reach their full potential. She's an inspiration to all of us, and on behalf of all Ontarians, I congratulate her.

USE OF MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Yesterday, the member for Guelph-Wellington contravened established precedents

in this House when, as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, she presented what amounted to a government announcement in this House.

During members' statements, she announced the wholly inadequate financial commitment of the government to the townships of Centre Wellington and Mapleton, which doesn't go far enough to assist these communities with their costs related to the devastating tornadoes that struck our area on August 19.

As parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community Safety, which, of course, is the ministry responsible for emergency services and response, it is inappropriate that the government used the member for Guelph-Wellington to publicly announce for the first time its insufficient commitment to my communities. Of course, by making the announcement during members' statements, the opposition parties did not have an opportunity to respond in this House. This is why there is an established precedent upheld repeatedly by a number of Speakers which says a parliamentary assistant should not be permitted to make a member's statement which falls under the responsibility of the ministry he or she is affiliated with.

This is the first available opportunity I have had to present this in the House, and I would ask that you clarify this matter for all members so as to ensure that the government doesn't continue to use the time reserved for members' statements for government announcements, contrary to the established precedents of this place.

1440

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to point out that the announcement in question was not from the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. The announcement was on behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, as was the cheque, and the letters had been sent to the mayors of the municipalities in question on a previous occasion.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I appreciate the point of order. I will take it under advisement and get back to the member.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. Under the cover of the Gomery report into the Liberal sponsorship scandal, your government has today delivered—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): We're off to a bad start. I need to be able to hear the Leader of the Opposition and other members. We need to show respect for the people who have the floor.

Mr. Tory: Your government has today delivered an economic update that the Acting Premier yesterday called

“very good news for the people of Ontario.” The minister today referred to “very good results.” I guess it's very good results if you're the government, because the only thing that's really up is taxes, up by hundreds of millions of dollars. If you compare today's statement to your own budget, I say to the Premier, GDP growth is projected to be down, housing starts are in decline, retail sales are going down next year, personal income is going down next year, job creation is going down next year, wages and salaries are going down next year, and corporate profits are going down next year.

My question is this: I don't know where it fits within the “very good news” that we have lost 42,000 manufacturing jobs in Ontario in the past year. Can you point to one single initiative we heard about today in your economic statement that will directly address the fate of those 42,000 families, the companies they work for, and the communities they live in—one thing?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): Obviously, I cannot possibly share the very negative, pessimistic outlook brought by my friend opposite when it comes to opportunities and prosperity in the province of Ontario. He cannot have had the opportunity recently to interact with business, for example, which has, as a result of its efforts, generated 193,100 new jobs since we've had the privilege of forming the government, and the fact that our economic growth has exceeded expectations during the first half of 2005. So we are increasing our growth assumption from 2.0% to 2.2%, some 193,100 new jobs; and our assumptions with respect to growth are on the rise. We think that's a pretty good record.

Mr. Tory: Well, in fact, the assumptions with respect to growth are not on the rise. If you look at your budget of earlier this year and the statement today, GDP growth is down, housing starts are down, retail sales are down, personal income is down, and job creation is down. All of those things are going down if you compare this statement today to the budget earlier this year.

Now, there was also in the statement today absolutely no relief, notwithstanding your windfall of money, for the hard-working families who are paying \$2,000 more each in taxes imposed by the McGuinty Liberals since they came to office. Do you consider it very good news, I ask the Premier, that families are working harder and falling behind, and that you couldn't find your way clear to put one thing in this economic statement to provide some relief for those families that are paying \$2,000 more in taxes and charges of various kinds since the McGuinty Liberals came to office? Not one thing for them. Is that good news?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, I just don't share the doom-and-gloom outlook brought by the leader of the official opposition, and it's not something that I would hazard to say is shared, either—his perspective of it, that is—by the people of Ontario. They are working hard, and as I say, they've generated 193,100 new jobs.

I can tell you that when I speak to Ontarians, either families or businesses alike, they are very enthusiastic

about the fact that we managed to find \$6.2 billion that we're investing into training, colleges and universities. That's the way of the future: developing our human capital. I think Ontarians are confident and pleased with the direction they themselves are pursuing.

Mr. Tory: In your economic statement today you claim to have identified \$407 million in program review savings on your four-year target of \$750 million, which itself is less than a 1% saving. I notice these claimed savings you found come with a very precise number: It's not \$408 million and it's not \$406 million; it's \$407 million. My question to the Premier is this: With this very precise number there is obviously a very precise list that totals \$407 million. Will you table that list in this Legislature tomorrow so that we can all see how it is you've achieved those savings of \$407 million?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I am proud of the efforts we are making to realize efficiencies and find savings so that any precious tax dollars we have can be devoted to ensuring that we're getting real, positive results for Ontarians. I know the leader of the official opposition doesn't like to hear this because it's good news. I want to say it again: 193,100 new jobs; retail sales are 5.1% ahead of last year; Ontario new vehicle sales are 4% ahead of last year's pace; Ontario home resales rose 10.8% in August; manufacturing shipments have jumped 5.7% to almost \$27 billion and that's the highest level in 12 months. The Minister of Finance said a few moments ago that we have the lowest level of unemployment now since—

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Since 2001.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Since 2001. I think the numbers speak for themselves. Ontarians are confident in their economy.

Mr. Tory: My question is to the Premier and it again concerns the economic statement. Earlier today a coalition of northern Ontario mayors and business and forestry industry leaders were here urging you to act further to address the crisis situation faced in communities across the north with respect to their industry and others. They have clearly stated, and they did clearly state to us this morning, that your current initiatives are not enough. Since 2002 the forest industry has shed more than 5,000 direct jobs, and according to a CIBC report on the pulp and paper sector, "Ontario has the dubious distinction as the leading province in Canada ... when it comes to job loss and mill closures."

The coalition visiting here today asked you, the Premier, and your government to guarantee there would be no increased charges and fees, no new charges and fees and no more burdensome regulations until these issues are addressed and the forestry situation improves. Are you prepared to make that commitment even though there wasn't a word of this in your statement today? Are you prepared to make the commitment they ask for in respect to charges and fees and regulations?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: We acknowledge that the forest sector is a major contributor to Ontario's economy, not just in the north but here in the south as well. We also, I

think, all understand that the forestry sector is undergoing an international shake-up. Rather than sit on our hands, we have put together a package of \$680 million. That strategy consists of a \$150-million forest sector prosperity fund, \$28 million annually to help support maintenance of primary access roads, \$10 million by way of a new annual inventory program, a \$1-million annual Ontario Works promotion program, and this is on top of a \$350 million loan guarantee program—\$680 million. What I would ask my friend opposite to do, and the leader of the NDP as well, is to call upon the federal government. We've thrown down the gauntlet. We've asked them to match this program. We think working together we can do a lot for the forestry sector in Ontario.

Mr. Tory: I ask the Premier: Have you phoned the Prime Minister and asked him personally whether he would come on board to match your initiative? Have you bothered to do that? Why don't you tell us?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I did, in fact, speak with the Prime Minister on the weekend. We spoke specifically about issues pertaining to Kashechewan and the affected families there. However, I would suggest to the leader of the official opposition that if he would like to prepare a list of issues that he would like me to raise, strictly by way of phone calls, I will see if I can work it into my schedule.

1450

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Stop the clock. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: The fact of the matter is, it's your job to prepare that list and to make the calls, and you're not making them. Nothing whatsoever can cover up for that.

Another subject you might put on that list is farming. Again, in the statement today, nothing but disappointment: 76% of Ontario's farm and agri-business members reported a decline in farm income in the past year, fuel costs have risen for 82% of those surveyed, and insurance costs are up for 75%. Premier, these are real people living on farms and in rural communities across this province, and they're finding it difficult to make ends meet. Last week, they called for a substantial amount of help from you, and in the budget, you literally bragged about cutting the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Can you point to one single thing that addresses the needs and the struggles of the farmers and the agri-business and rural economy of Ontario in this statement today? Is there one thing there, other than one line referring to them, that's going to help farmers?

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

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I'm very happy to have the opportunity to remind the Leader of the Opposition of this government's commitment to the agriculture community in the province of Ontario. We have provided \$175 million to grains and oilseeds people; we have provided \$138.5 million to beef farmers in the time of the BSE crisis. Our government has made it very clear. We

committed \$20 million to assist farmers to establish their nutrient management plans for large farms. We've always said we committed \$20 million. The program was oversubscribed, and just last week, our government added \$3.7 million to that commitment to support farmers in Ontario. That's our commitment to agriculture.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Premier, today in Ontario, ordinary folks are paying more for electricity, more for home heating costs and more for gasoline. They're paying more out of their own pockets for delisted health services like optometry, physiotherapy and chiropractic care. They're facing out-of-control property tax assessments, and they're paying a lot more because of your unfair regressive health tax.

Can you provide hard-working Ontarians with your best estimate of how much more the average family will have to pay for electricity, gasoline, heating, fuel, property tax and health services in the year ahead under the McGuinty government?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Energy): There's no question that there will be an increase in the price of electricity and gasoline. We are committed to replacing the coal-fired plants, and we are committed to the people of Ontario having to pay the full cost of electricity for this province.

However, having said that, we are in the process of replacing, rebuilding, maximizing and developing a culture of conservation in order to meet our targets. Let me assure you—we have just received another for 1,015 megawatts from the Calpine—we are on our way to replacing coal-fired generation.

Mr. Hampton: Well, I don't think hard-working families will get any reassurance from that answer. The truth is that electricity rates will go up by double digits again under the McGuinty government in the new year; the truth is that the heating bill will soar by at least 30% this winter; the truth is that an unfair property tax system will drive property taxes through the roof again, and the truth is that this year the full amount of the McGuinty unfair regressive health tax will come off people's tax bills.

For ordinary citizens, this is the perfect economic storm.

Can the people of Ontario expect an answer from the Premier? Are you going to do anything to help people this winter, Premier, with all the new bills, all the new costs, all the new taxes you've heaped upon them?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: I just find this amazing. This was the government that actually put up hydro rates by 40%. They actually cancelled all of the conservation projects. They cancelled the Beck tunnel; they cancelled Conawapa. They do not like water; they do not like gas; they do not like coal. Now they don't even like water from Manitoba. I find it difficult to answer a question when it doesn't have credibility behind it.

Mr. Hampton: I think families that are having a hard time paying the bills are going to have an increasingly hard time with the fact that this is a Liberal government—a McGuinty government—that has absolutely no empathy for them.

Here is the reality: The McGuinty government's policies—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock. We're having a difficult afternoon, aren't we? We need to be quiet while people who have the floor are either asking a question or responding to one. The leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: Here is the reality: All kinds of people in this province are finding it more difficult. They are having a harder time under the McGuinty government than they had even under the previous Conservative government. The cost of living is going through the roof. The rent isn't coming down, tuition fees are going up, electricity rates are going up, gas prices are going up, heating fuel costs are going up and health taxes are going up. I say again, can the Premier tell us how he expects average Ontarians to continue to pay more and more under the McGuinty government with no help, no assistance—not even any empathy—from the McGuinty government?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: Actually, that simply is not totally complete in its information. The fact of the matter is that there are a number of programs supporting folks. One of them, for example, is Out of the Cold. Another is Share the Warmth in Brampton. We have an emergency fund for folks. As a matter of fact, in Hamilton, where we have some significant challenges, Hamilton Utilities has a policy where the hydro is not cut off. They actually work with people in order to find and manage—

Interjection.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: In terms of trying to respond, you would find that electricity prices have been stable. In fact, we had a rebate, which we are in the process of giving back, and we have put in place programs to mitigate costs. They're absolutely across this province, and we're developing that culture of conservation.

FIRST NATIONS REVENUE SHARING

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I'm sure that someone who is having a hard time paying the rent and putting food on the table is going to get a lot of satisfaction out of that response from the McGuinty government.

Premier, your aboriginal affairs minister claimed yesterday that your government wants to address First Nations poverty and challenges with revenue sharing. If your government is suddenly committed to First Nations revenue sharing, can you explain why your government deserted Bill 97, the First Nations Resource Revenue Sharing Act, this summer?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs.

1500

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): Bill 97, the one you referred to that was put forward by the member from Timmins–James Bay, was very narrow in its scope, in that it outlined that basically business, government and First Nations should discuss how this should happen. What I've done with our First Nations is said that we should have government-to-government negotiations and discussions with our First Nations about how we can all share more greatly from the benefit of our natural resources. We outlined that in the throne speech, and we will be commencing those discussions at the northern table starting next month.

Mr. Hampton: I attended a lot of the Bill 97 hearings, and First Nations were unanimous in saying this is what they wanted. In fact, they brought forward all kinds of constructive suggestions. Passing Mr. Bisson's First Nations revenue-sharing act would have ensured that First Nations receive tax revenues and other revenues from mining and forestry operations conducted on their lands, like municipalities do.

Instead, what you've done, and what we found yesterday, is you actually cut money out of infrastructure funds for sewer and water. At the very time when First Nations are having great difficulty with tainted water, not only are you not helping, you're cutting.

So explain: How does it help First Nations when on the one hand you cut money that otherwise would have gone to them to help them deal with tainted water, and then you come along and you desert the First Nations revenue-sharing act? How does any of that help First Nations?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: The member this afternoon, I guess, is consistent in his ability to ignore the facts. He knows that the program he has referred to involved indoor plumbing and not safe water or water treatment systems. He knows that and he should state that. That program had long expired.

I would say to the member that he knows that the bill he's referring to is very narrow in scope because it just involved revenue-sharing. As the member would know as a northerner, there are tremendous benefits to be shared with the development of our natural resources, far more than revenue: entrepreneurial activities and opportunities and jobs. So we want to have a complete discussion. I would never come into the Legislature and say, "I know what the answer is for First Nations," and plunk it down on the Clerk's table without a thorough discussion with our First Nation neighbours.

Mr. Hampton: The McGuinty government says that \$48 million under the NDP and \$70 million under the Conservatives to hook residences up to the sewer and water system was wasted. What nonsense. People wouldn't have been connected to the sewer and water system without those investments, and now you've cut them.

I want to quote Grand Chief Stan Beardy of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, who says that if the First

Nations revenue-sharing act isn't passed, "it's sending a very negative message from Ontario to my people and our youth." He says, "It really shows the [government] is not prepared to work with First Nations. That's what is most disappointing."

That's the grand chief of NAN. He attended the hearings. He commented on the bill. He said the bill had to move forward.

My question to the Premier is this: Is this how you take First Nations seriously, Premier? You ignore the grand chief and you cut the very money that would have helped some communities deal with tainted water?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I guess I would say to the member that the bill wasn't good enough, that we think we can do a more comprehensive job and look at all the benefits that we can all share from the development of our natural resources. It's more than just straight money; it's jobs and entrepreneurial activities throughout northern Ontario, and looking at new businesses, like we're going to extract or harvest the biomass from our forest floor. Instead of wasting it and putting it out into the environment, we can harness that for the great energy potential that it has to save our forestry jobs up there. We're starting to have those discussions. That's part of the new approach that this government has developed with aboriginal peoples, and I'm very proud of that approach.

PROVINCIAL DEFICIT

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): My question is to the Premier. Premier, we now understand why you're hiding your economic statement behind the skirts of the Gomery report. What has become very clear is that you reported a deficit last year of \$1.6 billion. Today your economic statement says the deficit has gone up to \$2.4 billion. Despite an increase of some \$13 billion that you've clawed away from Ontario taxpayers, you are increasing the deficit by 50% this year. Please explain how it's possible, with that revenue windfall, that you're increasing the deficit by 50%.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The budget last year projected a deficit of \$2.6 billion. The reserve was not needed. It came down to \$1.6 billion. In the 2005 budget, the budget projected a deficit of \$2.8 billion. We're now saying it's \$2.4 billion. That's where it is. If we don't need the reserve, it will be \$1.4 billion next year. The numbers are clearly laid out in the statement and present a very good picture about the downward direction of the deficit of Ontario.

Mr. Hudak: The minister says the numbers are clearly laid out, but you keep changing the plan. You've had about five different financial plans since taking office. There hasn't been a target that you haven't missed.

I cannot believe that despite a \$13-billion increase in revenue—despite the fact that you've reached deeper into

the pockets of working families, despite the fact that you're reaching into the pockets of seniors with higher hydro rates, despite the fact that you're reaching into the pockets of small businesses and slowing down our economy—how is it possible that in two weeks' time Dwight Duncan increased the deficit from \$1.6 billion last year to \$2.4 billion this year? How is that in any way possible?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: It's not possible, and it didn't happen.

Let me compare records. Let's talk about a government that said it had a balanced budget and left a deficit of \$5.5 billion. Shame on you. You have no credibility. Let's talk about a government that increased expenditures 21% in their last three years—more than this government has ever done—at the same time that revenues were declining. That's your record; that's your legacy. You ought to be ashamed of it.

We are on track to balance the budget according to the plan laid out by my predecessor, Mr. Sorbara. That plan is a good plan; it's working. The deficit is down; jobs are up; employment is up; unemployment is down. Everything that should be up is up, and everything that should be down is down—the reverse of what happened under that government. We're proud of our record. We stand behind it, and we're going to continue to fight for the people of Ontario.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock. Order.

New question.

ENERGY RATES

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. On Monday, Dofasco announced that its third quarter earnings fell 95% from 2004. Why? Ontario's skyrocketing electricity rates. To quote a Dofasco spokesman, "We are asking the government to do everything possible and sustainable to make Ontario's electricity costs competitive—to keep Ontario a competitive place to do business."

Ontario has lost 42,000 manufacturing jobs under your watch. Can you provide Ontarians with your best estimate of how many more good manufacturing jobs will disappear in Ontario because of the McGuinty government's failed electricity policies?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The Minister of Energy.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Energy): Let me also quote from that particular release, where it very clearly identifies that "there was a significant decline in spot market pricing" and a stronger Canadian dollar that negatively impacted the broader market. Oh, and by the way, they had bought some premium slabs the year before that they had to pay for this year. There is the question of high costs for iron ore and coal and, yes, there was a contribution on energy. If you're going to quote, I think you should do all of the quotes.

1510

Mr. Hampton: I want to tell the Premier that they didn't ask you to do anything about the cost of iron ore; they referred to the cost of electricity.

But it's not just Dofasco. Today, municipal representatives, industry representatives and some worker representatives came from northern Ontario to tell the McGuinty government once again that your electricity policies are putting virtually the whole of northern Ontario's forest sector at stake. Twelve paper and pulp mills are facing possible closure. That's 25,000 jobs in the north and 13,000 jobs in the south.

They're very clear on what the problem is. You're forcing paper mills and pulp mills in Ontario to pay three times what paper and pulp mills pay in other Canadian provinces. They have a simple request: Are you going to develop an electricity policy that is fair and rational for paper mills, pulp mills and sawmills in northern Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question has been asked.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: I thank the member for his question. We've created 193,000 jobs in this province. We just signed a deal with Manitoba to put in 200 megawatts of new supply, an additional 400 and, ultimately, 1,500 and possibly 3,000; looking at a discussion of an east-west grid; putting in place the necessary energy needs for production in this province that's fair and reliable and stable. For the first time, over \$3 billion has been invested in this sector by energy people. I think that needs to be accounted for. Even Dofasco itself said—guess what?—"In our fourth quarter, earnings will be up."

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay–Superior North): My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Earlier today, you met with a delegation of municipal and business leaders from northern Ontario to discuss the forestry crisis in our province. Like them, I represent a number of communities that have been hit hard by permanent layoffs and indeed are facing the threat of full closure of their forestry operation. Our communities do fear for their future, and understandably, they have turned to us, the provincial government, for help.

Minister, I recognize that you recently announced an incentive package to assist the forestry sector, and I want to thank you for working so hard to put together such a package. But I also know that our mayors and reeves in northwestern Ontario intend to keep this issue on the front burner, and certainly I intend to do exactly the same thing. Can you inform the members of this House what you were able to tell our municipal leaders at their meeting this morning?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I was very pleased to be able to meet with the leaders of northwestern Ontario today, and I'm very happy that the

member was there in support of that. I congratulated them for their continuing campaign in support of the forestry industry that is so important for all of this province, not just northern Ontario.

We certainly talked a little bit about the program, the \$680 million that we've put toward the forestry industry, rebuilding that right across this province, and how that contribution from this government is the largest of any sector of this economy. We're very proud of that.

I also told them, as they were getting ready to go to Ottawa, that that's where they really had to get their message next, because when I announced our phase 2, I said that phase 3 is in Ottawa. The Prime Minister made a commitment in June this year, at the very AGM for those municipal leaders in Kenora. They're going there to make sure that the Prime Minister lives up to his word and makes sure the federal government comes forward and makes that investment in this industry.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Supplementary.

Mr. Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay–Atikokan): Minister, certainly I share your hope that the federal government is going to provide significant help to this industry. However, dealing specifically with the province's incentive package, I'd like to know whether you can provide some details as to how these Ontario incentives are being received by industry? Additionally, have you had any specific discussions with industry leaders, and can you let us know whether we can expect any positive announcements?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: Over the last three weeks, I have met with all the leaders of all the major companies that invest in Ontario's forestry sector. There is a very positive reaction to our particular plan. They are very excited about the \$350-million loan guarantee program because, as members would know, this industry has been so hard hit, access to capital is difficult. Coming forward with a loan guarantee program for up to 50% of the project cost is a very effective way of promoting the transformation that is required for this industry. Over and above that, the \$150 million that basically is for grants to support this is also very much welcome.

We've had that discussion, and again, I'm in continual contact with the federal government, asking them to come forward. Quite frankly, I'd be very happy if they paralleled our particular plan, because our plan is very well accepted by the industry in this province.

WATER QUALITY

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): My question is for the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment. The municipality of West Grey and its mayor have been meeting with your staff for several years now regarding the erosion from the Saugeen River that is threatening its sewage lagoon in the village of Neustadt. You've known about this problem and the threat it poses for downstream towns, especially Walkerton. Your response today was to impose an order and tell

them to take a hike—this despite the fact that it was your ministry that took on the responsibility for the geotechnical study.

You are bailing out on this community and you are bailing out on Walkerton, which is threatened by this disaster. Your response to West Grey and Walkerton is to blame someone else rather than to step up and protect this water source and these people. When is this government going to finally take responsibility for protecting drinking water in this province?

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): The member should know—and I thank her for the question—that the sewage lagoon was downloaded to the municipality by the previous government. Your colleague, who is the member, will tell you the sorry state of affairs that resulted from that transfer. What I can tell the House is that the ministry recognizes, obviously, that the riverbank slope instability at the Neustadt sewage lagoon is a concern.

In response, I agree: The ministry funded a geotechnical assessment of the bank slope instability, which concluded that remedial work should be undertaken. On October 19, the ministry issued a provincial officer's order to the municipality of West Grey, and I just want to explain to you what that says: "The order requires the municipality to submit a plan detailing the steps to be taken to prevent the unstable riverbank from adversely affecting the lagoons at the Neustadt sewage works."

Ms. Scott: This is pretty much the response we expected: shifting the responsibility to the municipality here. This government is two years old, and it's certainly acting like it's only two years old. There are water disasters breaking out all over the province. Your standard answer is to blame someone else. Your minister has been informed of this problem by the municipality. The river is the problem. I'll say that again: The river is the problem. It is moving toward the lagoon. The lagoon hasn't budgeted. You're responsible for surface water and groundwater protection. When are you going to accept responsibility and help the people of Walkerton prevent an impending disaster, or are you waiting for a phone call from Andy Scott, like you did last week?

Mr. Wilkinson: The sewage lagoon is the municipality's, and I remind the member who gave it to the municipality. The second thing is that there is a provincial officer's order. It is legally binding on the municipality, and we expect every individual, every municipality, every industry in this province to abide by legally binding provincial orders.

Finally, I note that both my minister and the previous minister, meeting with West Grey, have urged them to apply for COMRIF funding—a COMRIF program that our government put in—that would provide a third of the money from the feds, a third from the province and a third from the municipalities. Instead, I note that the municipality has not applied. If they did, I'm sure it would be given serious consideration.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question.

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto–Danforth): To the Premier: I want to follow up on that. That is my question as well, because it's very worrisome. When drinking water in Ontario is threatened, Liberals have had the habit lately of blaming somebody else. First, your government failed to act on the water crisis in Kashechewan, despite the Ontario Clean Water Agency knowing for two years that the First Nations water was contaminated. Now you've decided to blame the municipality of Neustadt for an eroding sewage lagoon that threatens to dump sewage into the Saugeen River, the source of water for the town of Walkerton. Will your government learn from your past mistakes, rise above this jurisdictional squabbling and take action today to protect the drinking water of Walkerton residents?

1520

The Speaker: Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment.

Mr. Wilkinson: I want to start by assuring the member that we take safe drinking water very, very seriously on this side of the House. We inherited the legacy of Walkerton from the previous government, and we are committed, which is why we're introducing our source water protection act before Christmas.

Now, in regard to this case, it is very important, and I would hope that the member and other members would urge all residents in Ontario, whether it is a municipality, whether it's an industry or whether it's an individual, to respect the legally binding provincial officers' orders that are issued by the Ministry of the Environment. I would assume the member opposite would agree that that is important.

Ms. Churley: I want to come back to the Premier. Premier, I think you and I would both agree that the fundamental, most important issue here is protecting the drinking water for the citizens of Walkerton. Issuing a provincial order, which has been fought in court—and it doesn't matter whether we agree with that or not; they're doing it—is not precautionary and does nothing to safeguard the drinking water of Walkerton today.

The government loves to talk about the importance of water in the abstract but continually falls down when it comes to protecting it on the ground. We just saw that happen. What is it you don't understand about this? We're mentioning "Walkerton" and "water" in the same sentence here. It is a no-brainer. Will you step in today, given the fact that seven people died in Walkerton as a result of tainted water? We cannot play around with this. Will you fix it today and worry about who pays for it later?

Mr. Wilkinson: Yesterday the member said that we should scrap the environmental assessment process in this province. Today she says we should have provincial officers' orders not respected by the people in the province of Ontario.

I say to the member, there is a very simple solution: Like other municipalities, they should apply, in our opin-

ion, to COMRIF. I can assure you that for a project that is subject to a provincial officer's order, that would be given very, very serious consideration by the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. I'm assured of that. I know that the Ministry of the Environment would support that application.

But we do not say in this House—and I'm sure it was the same when the member was in government—that somehow things like the environmental assessment process or provincial officers' orders should be disrespected in this province. It is important that the Ministry of the Environment does what it must do.

There is an instability there. It is the responsibility of the municipality, as downloaded by the previous government. We have issued an order because this is a serious matter. And the drinking water in Walkerton comes from wells, not from the river in question.

NORTHERN ECONOMY

Mr. David Oraziotti (Sault Ste. Marie): My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. After more than a decade of neglect by the former NDP and Conservative governments, we have introduced initiatives to ensure that the residents of northern Ontario will once again share in the economic prosperity of our province. Minister, in addition to our \$680-million forestry plan announced by our Minister of Natural Resources, could you please tell this House and my constituents what role the northern Ontario heritage fund is playing in improving the economy of the north?

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): Thank you very much, Speaker. Before I answer the question, on behalf of all the people who live in northern Ontario, we want to congratulate you and tell you how proud we are as you assume your new duties as Speaker.

Let me say that the member from Sault Ste. Marie is such an ardent advocate for his constituents and for the people of northern Ontario. He was one who was instrumental in ensuring that the commitment that we made to refocus the northern Ontario heritage fund to a fund that targets job creation works.

Since October 2003, I am pleased to say that the northern Ontario heritage fund has invested \$117.3 million, which has generated an additional \$387 million, and this has helped to create 2,721 jobs. Clearly it's working.

Mr. Oraziotti: I know that in my community the new programs to refocus the northern Ontario heritage fund are clearly working. Eleven community partners in Sault Ste. Marie received funding through the NOHFC youth intern and co-op program, providing 19 young people with valuable internships at places such as the Sault innovation centre, the economic development corporation and the Group Health Centre.

Under the Conservatives, the number of youth aged 15 to 29 in the north decreased by 13%, while the rest of

Ontario experienced an increase of 2% in the same age group. Minister, how is this new program continuing to work to keep our youth in northern Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Bartolucci: Another part of the northern prosperity plan has been the creation of northern development councils, councils that were cancelled and eliminated by the New Democratic Party when they were in government. We charged them with coming up with strategies that would decrease the youth out-migration. You know what? It is working. The youth internship and co-op program has been very successful. Since its inception in January 2005, at the start of the new mandate, we've created 135 direct jobs throughout northern Ontario through this program, an investment of \$2.2 million, and the good news is only beginning. We will be continuing to make good-news announcements with regard to youth internship and co-op, unlike the New Democratic Party, which created 1,000 unemployed people every week of their mandate in 1995.

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Let's get things straight on Neustadt. The Ministry of the Environment has sent the wrong person the order. The order should have gone to the Ministry of Natural Resources. Who owns the river? Who, when you want to do something in that river, must you go to? The Ministry of Natural Resources. It is the river that's moving; the lagoons aren't moving. Minister, will you commit today to repair the bank on the Saugeen River before we have a disaster? That river goes downstream in Walkerton, Hanover, all kinds of municipalities, right through to Southampton. There are lots of fish in that river. Will you fix that river today? Will you commit to doing that?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): First of all, I'm quite flattered by the confidence that the member has in me and my ability to fix this problem. I have to say to the member that I wasn't aware of this problem. It's come to light to me in the House today. I will look into it and see if there's any assistance the Ministry of Natural Resources can provide in this.

Mr. Murdoch: We've heard this rhetoric before. You should have known about this. I don't know where this minister has been, because we have gone to your ministry about this.

Minister, the last time I asked you a question in this House, I didn't get the straight goods, so I'm hoping I'm getting the straight goods today. You said you've committed to looking into this, so you had better do something before the ministry wakes up and sends you the order, because they've sent it to the wrong people. It is not up to the people of Neustadt to fix your river. Your river is what's coming toward the lagoons, and again, I hope you can say today that you will fix this.

Yes, I have confidence. You've got the money. You are the expert on the rivers. It is your job as the Ministry

of Natural Resources to look after rivers. If you can tell me that's different, then you can tell me that today. But Minister, I need you and your ministry to go in there tomorrow and start to look at that river and fix it up before a disaster happens and those lagoons are in your river, killing your fish and hurting people downstream.

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I will commit to the member that I will be in contact with our district office this afternoon and get a full report about what is happening with the river. As you know, we have erosion problems, I believe in the clay soils in that area. We do get slumping situations in rivers such as that. I will get a complete report and get back to the member.

IMMIGRANTS

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): My question is to the Minister of Citizenship. The federal government has announced an increase in immigrants to Canada. Many will be coming to Ontario. But I tell you this: New Canadians and many immigrant advocates are worried. Funding for newcomer services has been flat-lined for many years, while the number of newcomers who have settled in Ontario has increased. Ontario is the only province with no immigration agreement. Why aren't you able to wrangle an immigration agreement from your federal cousins?

1530

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I do appreciate the question from the member for Trinity-Spadina, and I think it's a very serious question for Ontario. The Premier, for over a year, has put fair funding for newcomers to Ontario front and centre in his \$23-billion gap campaign. He has said that it is unfair that a newcomer who goes to Mississauga gets \$819 in support for English training etc., whereas a newcomer who goes to Montreal gets \$3,800. The Premier has said that is unfair.

The Prime Minister listened. In May of this year we got a commitment to have fair funding. That fair funding is coming to Ontario very soon, and we are anxiously waiting for that to happen. We're going to get some good news for newcomers to Ontario so they can reach their potential.

Mr. Marchese: Minister, you have been announcing that we're weeks away from an agreement for nearly two years. Children have learned to walk and talk while we've waited for a few weeks to pass. You used to attack the Tories for not getting an agreement. Now you have a federal Liberal government, you have a Liberal provincial government and you still can't get this deal two years later. You have no plan to help newly arrived immigrants: skilled professionals who come to this province and wind up in menial work, unable to practise their professions. When will you stop saying, "The money is coming soon," and actually produce it?

Hon. Mr. Colle: I haven't been here for two years; I've just been minister for three months. We are very committed and very close to getting that fair funding, and

we'll be the first government to have this agreement for adequate funding for the bridge training and language training we do. That's why, for the first time in the history of this province, we've created a stand-alone, robust ministry that is not just going to talk about immigration and fairness, it's going to do something about it—a lot more than you ever did and those people ever did.

TRAILS

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion. As you know, I represent a northern riding, and many of my constituents rely on trails for their businesses and for recreation. There are over 64,000 kilometres of trails in this province, which serve a broad range of users, from hikers to cyclists, cross-country skiers, ATVers and snowmobilers.

On September 30 this year, I had the privilege of attending the grand opening of the Voyageur Multi Use Trail System with the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs in Mattawa. This trail system serves over 4,000 ATV users a year. As well, in March, I was also delighted to join with a great many stakeholders in my community to meet with the member for Mississauga South as he did his consultation on trails across the province.

Two weeks ago, you launched the Ontario trails strategy, which begins to address the many issues of this sector. Why were trails not governed by a strategy in the past, and how does the trails strategy fit into your new Ministry of Health Promotion?

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): I want to thank the honourable member for Nipissing for the question. The trails strategy was something I was very pleased and proud to release a few weeks ago, but I do have to give credit to my predecessor, the Honourable Jim Bradley, who worked very hard on this strategy.

The trails strategy is an important part of our Active 2010 campaign to get Ontarians physically fit. Sadly, less than 50% of adults in this province are physically fit. The trails strategy also contributes to the tourism economy, particularly of the north—almost \$2 billion to the provincial economy.

We went through an extensive consultation process, led by Mr. Tim Peterson, who did a wonderful job. Mr. Peterson travelled, conducting nine workshops and 14 regional consultations.

In conclusion, I just want to leave—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. I'm sure there will be a supplementary.

Ms. Smith: Minister, I know that this strategy was eagerly awaited by the sector, and I'm wondering if you can elaborate on what the strategy actually proposes to do.

Interjection.

Ms. Smith: I'm sure the member for Niagara Centre would like to know as well.

As you noted, the trail sector is very important to the northern economy, as people stay in our hotels for the

weekends, they stop in our towns and shop, have lunch and buy supplies at our local shops. Minister, how does our government intend to implement the Ontario trail strategy?

Hon. Mr. Watson: I was in the midst of thanking Tim Peterson for the consultations he did.

I also want to make the point that this is not a study that's simply going to collect dust. The McGuinty government has put \$3.5 million into this strategy so that we can do a couple of things. First of all, a proper and thorough mapping of all the trails is important for tourism development in the north and throughout the province; also, a centralized Web site is being developed so tourists and Ontario residents alike can engage in this wonderful physical activity.

Finally, a quote from the chair of the board of directors of Go For Green, Mr. Bjorn Nielsen, who says, "The new Ontario trails strategy, by promoting urban routes and active transportation, in addition to more traditional wilderness trails, can make a significant contribution, improving the health of Ontarians by providing the essential walking and biking infrastructure for active, healthy living in the province."

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a question for the Minister of Natural Resources. As you know, the forestry industry supports many communities. Today, a delegation of northern mayors visited Queen's Park to attempt to get on your radar. I'd like to commend them for their many efforts to get your government to take action. These mayors are fighting for the very existence of their communities.

Minister, will you agree to implement recommendation number 3 from your Council on Forest Sector Competitiveness report that the province assume 100% of the cost of primary roads and 50% of the cost of secondary roads? Will you do that for the sake of northern communities that depend on the forest industry?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): First of all, as a northerner, I share your concern about the forestry industry in northern Ontario and, of course, across this whole province. It is facing an incredible challenge right now, and the Premier talked about that earlier in question period.

As the member knows, your government and the government previous to you downloaded the cost of constructing and maintaining forest access roads. We have started to reverse that trend and are now contributing \$28 million a year toward the maintenance of our primary access roads in our forests in northern Ontario. I think this is important because, as we know, it's the high cost of delivering the wood to the mills that is really hurting the industry right now, and this is a great contribution to that. I would say to the member also that, in response to the leader's question earlier, I have committed to the industry that I will not raise royalties—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Miller: To the minister: So far, you haven't made significant progress on the made-in-Ontario costs in the forest industry. Delivered wood costs have skyrocketed in the last three years, high energy costs, excessive red tape. CIBC Wood Gundy says that your announcements won't have a meaningful impact on the viability of the industry. Your road funding doesn't even cover fuel cost increases. One company I spoke to spends \$3 million on 1,000 kilometres of primary road, so I don't think the \$28 million announced in your package to cover maintenance on primary roads is going to go very far. The delegation we met with today was talking about \$60 million, or trying to address \$5 per cubic metre US of the delivered wood costs.

Minister, why won't you fund the roads based on the recommendations of the expert council that you appointed? Why won't you go and do that, sir?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: While the member is zeroing in on one particular aspect of the report and our response, which is \$28 million a year over the next five years, I would remind him that we're talking about a \$680-million program to this industry, the largest response this government's ever made to any part of this economy in this province, and we're very proud of that.

1540

I would say again to the member, and put it on the record for sure, that I have committed to the industry not only that we would not raise stumpage fees on wood coming into the mills until we get rid of that international tariff from the United States—the softwood lumber dispute—not only to not imposing any new regulations, but we're going to make sure that MNR—and I've asked our officials to start reducing the red tape in our industry from our ministry so that we can show further savings for delivered wood cost.

SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITY

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is to the Premier. Today is Diwali, the largest and most joyous holiday on the Hindu calendar. In a statement I made to the Legislature on October 18, I spoke about the Hindu temple in Hamilton and how it was burned to the ground as a result of a racist attack after 9/11. It's particularly special for the Hindu community to be able to celebrate Diwali in their new temple, but it's too bad they're not getting a response on their request to get some support from your government around the rebuilding of this community centre and temple. What can I tell them about what you are prepared to do, Mr. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Attorney General.

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): I thank the member for raising this matter in the House. It was just a horrific thing and such an un-Canadian moment when that happened. What was truly remarkable about it—and I know because I have been to Hamilton and met

with a number of people from all faiths who got together immediately to try and provide assistance to the community and worked together to see the wonderful story that we hear today whereby in fact we have the temple rebuilt.

We need to continue to be vigilant on hate crimes. That's why I've asked members of the member's community, including people who were very active in showing leadership with respect to this particular matter, to join the Hate Crimes Community Working Group to ensure that we not only prevent hate crimes but assist all victims of hate crimes on an ongoing basis.

Ms. Horwath: Hate crimes are certainly an issue, but the issue I'm getting at is that the government had talked about possibly helping out this community. The silver lining in this tragedy is that our local community in the city of Hamilton has pulled together and much has been raised. The problem is, they're still significantly short and they're wanting to know—a simple question, yes or no—is the McGuinty Liberal government prepared to help this community in the rebuilding of their community centre and temple?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: I thank the member for her question. Again, we'll continue to work with leaders of that community, to play the appropriate role that the provincial government ought to play, not only the Ministry of the Attorney General but all ministries involved, so that we can make this a moment in our history that we can look back on and say that we all pulled together to assist that community during a very difficult time.

PETITIONS

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

“Whereas quality supports are dependent upon the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

“Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community.”

I affix my name in full support.

FALLSVIEW CASINO

Mr. Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): I have a petition on behalf of my riding of Niagara Falls signed by many of the residents from my community, including Mary-Anne Kennedy, Jim Hess and June Foxwell. The petition reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Falls Management Group made numerous commitments to the city of Niagara Falls when it was awarded the Fallsview Casino contract in 1998” by the previous government.

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

“Niagara Falls residents are still waiting for the on-site amenities and the off-site attractors. We believe that the government of Ontario should ensure that all promises made at the time of the awarding of the contract be fulfilled.”

I'm pleased to submit this on behalf of my residents.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Petitions? The member for Durham.

ONTARIO FARMERS

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Thank you for recognizing me. The member from Burlington will probably be next.

Anyway, from the riding of Durham to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas the Rural Revolution believes that rural Ontario is in crisis due to lost property rights and a crushing regulatory burden,” and they were demonstrating this spring at Queen's Park;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to consider the issue of municipal jurisdiction brought forward by the Rural Revolution's resolutions to respect property and prosperity” rights:

“Resolution number 5: Municipal governments shall be constituted to take control and jurisdiction over matters that pertain to their constituents.

“Resolution number 9: All municipalities forced or coerced into amalgamation shall hold a binding referendum on de-amalgamation at the next general election.”

I am very pleased to present this on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham.

MANDATORY RETIREMENT

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition here to the Ontario Legislative Assembly about mandatory retirement. It reads as follows:

“Whereas existing legislation in Ontario enforcing mandatory retirement discriminates against healthy and

able Ontario men and women on the basis that they are older than age 65; and

“Whereas the provinces of Alberta, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Yukon and the Northwest Territories have ended mandatory retirement in various forms; and

“Whereas ending mandatory retirement will enable many principal family income earners, especially among families of new Canadians and those headed by single mothers, to maintain their careers, earn incomes, support their families and contribute to society; and

“Whereas Ontario faces a labour shortage in the coming years as skilled knowledge workers and tradespeople approach retirement age, and Ontario companies do not wish to lose their investment in the skills and experience of their most senior people;

“Be it therefore resolved that the government of Ontario should abolish mandatory retirement in the province of Ontario through the swift passage of Bill 211, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code to end mandatory retirement.”

I read this petition on behalf of many in Mississauga West. I've affixed my signature, and I'm going to ask page Jasmine to carry it for me.

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we are asking for funding for Velcade to be available in Ontario. Ontario is the only province in Canada not currently making funding available for this drug, even though approximately 40% of people diagnosed with multiple myeloma” cancer “in Canada are from Ontario;

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

“To push the approval of Velcade through the review process and make funding available for patients in Ontario immediately, as it is in every other province of Canada.”

I present this on behalf of my constituent George Petrunas, who has been struggling with this disease for the last 10 years. It has my signature of support, and I'd like to give it to my dear friend Charlie, who will present it to you.

QUEENSWAY CARLETON HOSPITAL

Mr. John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): I have another petition on the Queensway Carleton Hospital and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Queensway Carleton Hospital is one of the most efficient hospitals in the country;

“Whereas the Queensway Carleton Hospital's priority should be providing excellent patient care, not money for Paul Martin's Liberal government;

“Whereas the number of senior citizens served by the Queensway Carleton Hospital is growing rapidly in the west end of Ottawa and Nepean;

“Whereas the federal Liberal government led by Paul Martin has a surplus potentially as high as \$10 billion;

“Whereas all provincial political parties in Ontario have acknowledged the significant fiscal imbalance;

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

“The Ontario Legislature call upon the federal Liberal government to immediately cancel its plans to dramatically increase the rent for the land now being used by the Queensway Carleton Hospital, and that the hospital be charged only \$1 rent per year.”

I’m pleased to present another petition signed by me and a lot of constituents from Stittsville and Nepean, and to give it to Adam Rupani, a page from Nepean.

1550

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I’m pleased to submit this petition on behalf of my riding of Niagara Falls, signed by a number of people, John Kay and Pat Steeves. The petition reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government of Ontario’s health insurance plan covers the treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet) and there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered.

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

“There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment cost for this disease is astronomical for most constituents and adds a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should consider covering treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance plan.”

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

“Whereas quality supports are dependent upon the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

“Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to

address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community.”

I have also signed this.

PROSTATE CANCER

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I’m pleased to join with my seatmate the member for Niagara Falls in this petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the government of Ontario’s health insurance plan does not cover the cost of PSA (prostate specific antigen) test as an early method of detection for prostate cancer in men;

“Whereas mammogram tests for women are fully covered by the Ontario health insurance plan for early detection of breast cancer and PSA test for men is only covered once the physician suspects prostate cancer,

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

“We believe PSA testing should be covered as an insured service by the Ontario health insurance plan. Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Canadian men. At least one in every eight Canadian men is expected to develop the disease in their lifetime. Some five million Canadian men are currently at risk in their prostate-cancer-risk years, which are between the ages of 45 and 70. For many seniors and low-income earners, the cost of the test would buy up to a week’s worth of groceries for some individuals.”

This is a good petition. I’m pleased to sign it, and I’m also pleased to give it to page Charlie, who is my page for Mississauga West.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I have a petition signed by good citizens of Cambridge and the region of Waterloo, addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, headed “Save Our Hospital”:

“Whereas the \$80-million expansion of Cambridge Memorial Hospital was approved in 2002 pursuant to the mandate of the Health Services Restructuring Commission; and

“Whereas the plans for the project have been in the works for the past two years; and

“Whereas the residents of Cambridge and North Dumfries, the city of Cambridge and the region of Waterloo have contributed their share of the project; and

“Whereas the decision to cancel the expansion will adversely affect and diminish health care in Waterloo region;

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

“Resolved that the McGuinty government reverse its decision to cancel the Cambridge Memorial Hospital expansion and hospital upgrades.”

I will sign my name on that petition.

PROSTATE CANCER

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I am pleased to introduce this petition on behalf of my constituents for Niagara Falls. The petition reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government of Ontario’s health insurance plan does not cover the cost of PSA (prostate specific antigen) test as an early method of detection for prostate cancer in men;

“Whereas mammogram tests for women are fully covered by the Ontario insurance plan for early detection of breast cancer and PSA test for men is only covered once the physician suspects prostate cancer,

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

“We support Bill 201. We believe PSA testing should be covered as an insured service by the Ontario health insurance program. Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Canadian men. At least one in every eight Canadian men is expected to develop the disease in their lifetime. Some five million Canadian men are currently at risk in their prostate-cancer-risk years, which are between the ages of 45 and 70. For many seniors and low-income earners, the cost of the test would buy up to a week’s worth of groceries for some individuals.”

I’m pleased to submit this petition.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. John O’Toole (Durham): Again, I’m pleased to present a petition.

“Whereas many volunteer fire departments in Ontario are strengthened by the service of double-hatter firefighters”—and I know, Mr. Speaker, this will be important to you—“who work as professional, full-time firefighters and also serve as volunteer firefighters on their free time and in their home communities; and

“Whereas the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association has declared their intent to ‘phase out’ these double-hatter firefighters; and

“Whereas double-hatter firefighters are being threatened by the union leadership and forced to resign as volunteer firefighters or face losing their full-time jobs, and this is weakening volunteer fire departments in Ontario;”—indeed in my riding—“and

“Whereas Waterloo–Wellington MPP Ted Arnott”—the Deputy Chair here—“has introduced Bill 52, the Volunteer Firefighters Employment Protection Act, that would uphold the right to volunteer and solve this problem concerning public safety in Ontario;

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

“That the provincial government express public support for MPP Ted Arnott’s Bill 52 and willingness to pass it into law or introduce similar legislation that pro-

pects the right of firefighters to volunteer in their home communities on their own free time.”

I support this on behalf of MPP Ted Arnott and present it to Jeffrey, who will bring it to the table. Thank you very much, Jeffrey.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I’m pleased to again support my seatmate the member from Niagara Falls in this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the government of Ontario’s health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet) there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered.

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

“There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment cost for this disease is astronomical for most constituents and adds a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program.”

I’m pleased to add my signature in support of this petition and to ask page Anika to carry it for me. Thank you for the time.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES SERVICES À L’ENFANCE ET À LA FAMILLE

Mrs. Chambers moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 210, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l’enfance et à la famille et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d’autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I return to the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I would like to start by acknowledging the presence of supporters of the proposed bill, Bill 210: Jeanette Lewis, executive director of the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies; Pat Fenton, executive director of the Adoption Council of Ontario; Kenn Richard, executive director of Native Child and Family Services of Toronto. Thank you for being here today.

1600

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services was created just over two years ago, reflecting the importance our government places on the needs of children and youth in this province. Our government has a vision for Ontario's children and youth. It is one of hope, health and opportunity. We are committed to helping ensure that the lives of our children and youth can be as productive and fulfilling as possible. As one of our highest priorities, we have been working to strengthen our child protection system so that it will work better for children and youth.

While we work to achieve this goal year-round, it is particularly timely to be standing before you today, since we marked Child Abuse Awareness Month last month, October, and today marks the beginning of National Adoption Month. These designated months are an opportunity to draw the public's attention to the importance of protecting and helping our most vulnerable children. These children face significant challenges, and we must all recognize that we have a collective responsibility to protect them from harm and to support them as they work to overcome their challenges.

On June 6 this year, my colleague the former Minister of Children and Youth Services introduced legislation that, if passed, will help more children who are crown wards in the care of our children's aid societies find permanent, supportive homes by making adoption more flexible for children and less difficult for appropriate prospective parents. We're also providing more options so that more children will have the opportunity to grow up in a permanent family setting. As well, we are changing the way children's aid societies work by not only making them more stable and sustainable, but also making them more accountable to the children and families they serve, to our community partners and to government.

Since 1994, there has been a 185% increase in the number of investigations conducted by children's aid societies into reports of child abuse and neglect. As troubling as that number sounds on the surface, it signifies—

Mr. John R. Baird (Nepean–Carleton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: This is a very important bill. I notice there's not one cabinet minister joining the minister. I think we've lost quorum in the House.

The Acting Speaker: It's not appropriate to make reference to the absence of any one member, which you didn't do.

Is there a quorum in the House?

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): A quorum is present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I want to thank the member across the floor for his support.

As troubling as that number sounds on the surface, it signifies a positive shift in our attitudes about child abuse. There was a time when communities turned a blind eye toward what went on in other people's homes

behind closed doors. It was none of their business how other people raised their children. Today, not only is it our business as a society; it is our legal obligation. All citizens, and especially those who work directly with children, have a legal responsibility to report suspected cases of child abuse. We have made great strides in protecting the safety and well-being of our children, but we know there is more that can and must be done.

Currently, Ontario's children's aid societies receive almost 160,000 calls reporting child abuse and neglect each year. Consider that these could be children who may be regularly left alone to fend for themselves, or children who defend their mothers against abuse and suffer the consequences, or children who are sexually assaulted by someone they trust and then live in silence, or children whose self-worth is routinely diminished to the extreme by others. In many of the situations where a children's aid society is called, child protection staff can support parents so they are better able to care for their children. Experienced social workers and judges must sometimes make difficult decisions based on what they believe to be in the best interests of the child. The best interests and safety of the child is the driving force behind this legislation and behind all the work we do in the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Every one of the proposed reforms we are bringing forward has been considered from the vantage point of the child. Our goal is to help every child in Ontario have the best opportunity to succeed and to reach their own potential.

There are roughly 9,000 children in the permanent care of Ontario's children's aid societies. They live in foster homes or group homes. On average, they change homes every 22 months. They change schools. They have to try and make new friends in a new neighbourhood. A new foster family or group home can mean new rules and new expectations. That kind of instability can affect every part of a child's life: their education, their feeling of self-worth and their ability to form meaningful long-term relationships.

Many of these children are stuck in a system that doesn't work for them. Of the 9,000 children who are crown wards of children's aid societies, we are seeing just over 900 adoptions a year. I think we can do better than that. We must do better than that. That's why our government is changing the child protection system for the better. We need to help more children find a permanent, caring home by making adoption more flexible for individual children and parents.

This legislation would, if passed, modernize the rules around adoption so that they work better for children and families. These proposed changes would remove the rigid restriction that a child must completely sever all ties to his or her birth family before being eligible for adoption. Right now, 75% of children in permanent care cannot be adopted because their birth family has a court-ordered right to contact them.

When judges make an order that a child becomes a ward of the state, they may be hesitant to seal off all contact with the family except in those cases where it's

obviously necessary for the child's safety. So the birth family might have the opportunity to visit the child, say, twice a year. That often makes sense, so that the child doesn't completely lose touch with their birth family. But it should not automatically make the child ineligible to become a permanent member of a new family.

Let me provide a hypothetical example: A five-year-old boy is a crown ward, which means he is in the permanent care of a children's aid society. His mother suffers from mental illness. She loves her son, but she can't provide the care a five-year-old boy requires. When the child is taken into the care of a children's aid society, the judge orders that the boy's mother has the right to visit or contact her son twice a year.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I am sure the members of the assembly would like to know that there are two chiefs from northern Ontario here, Chief Mike Metatawabin from the community of Fort Albany and Chief Leo Friday from the community of Kashechewan. If we would give them applause.

The Acting Speaker: Unfortunately, it's not a point of order, but we do welcome you to the Legislature today.

I would return to the member who has the floor, the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Under the current system, the court order means that the boy cannot be adopted unless that access order is terminated. That means he may continue living in foster care until he is 18 years old. Proposed changes mean the birth mother and adoptive parents would have new options to allow the boy to be adopted into a caring home, while still being able to maintain some contact with his birth mother.

Similar types of open adoptions have been the norm in private adoptions for many years and are always dictated by the best interests of the child.

1610

These proposed changes would mean a child could keep those important ties to their family, community and culture and still be adopted or placed in a permanent home. We know that adoption will help a number of children find a secure, stable family, but we also know it is not the answer for every child. Instead of trying to make the child fit the rules, we're changing the rules to fit the child.

Proposed changes would give children's aid societies more flexibility to meet the unique needs of each child. For some children, it would mean being placed with extended family, people they already know and trust—maybe an aunt and uncle. Under the current system, most children who are removed from their homes are placed in foster or group home care. Under our proposed new system, the children's aid society will have options to place that child with a suitable member of their extended family. Where it's appropriate and in the best interests of the child, this option could mean a child maintains ties to their family and community. It could mean less disruption in the life of a child who has already been through too much.

We know that not all children have a family member who is an appropriate caregiver; however, there is sometimes another adult who can provide a loving, stable home. It could be a child's long-time foster parent. This proposed legislation aims to provide the children in the care of children's aid societies with more stability. That's why we are providing children's aid societies with yet another option: legal custody or guardianship.

Let me provide another hypothetical example. A 15-year-old girl has been in the permanent care of a children's aid society since she was 10 years old. She understands that her parents cannot take care of her and she knows she'll never live with them again, but they are her parents nonetheless and she does not want to be adopted. She has been living in her current foster home with a wonderful, caring family for two years. It's a good situation, but as a foster child, she still receives visits from her social worker at school and at home and lives under the supervision of the children's aid society. This young girl would love to stay with her foster family and, like most other 15-year-old girls, yearns to belong to and be part of a family. But under the current system, this girl has only two options: being adopted or being a foster child. Proposed changes would allow the foster parents to become her legal guardians. The children's aid society may continue to provide some support to the foster family, but the girl could be discharged from the society's care and placed in permanent legal custody of her foster parents.

For this particular 15-year-old girl, it would mean she is given some stability in her life and in her future. She knows where she'll graduate from high school and who will be there sitting in the audience to see her walk across the stage to get her diploma. There is strength in knowing that there is someone who will be there for you. This is what we must work toward for the children in the care of our children's aid societies.

I've said that through this proposed legislation we are providing more options to give our children a stable, permanent home to grow up in. Instead of making a child fit the rules, we're changing the rules to fit the child. We know, for example, that aboriginal children are disproportionately represented in our child protection agencies. This is a trend that cannot continue. We will work closely with our aboriginal partners in the child protection sector to address our shared concerns. Under the current system, aboriginal children who come into the care of a children's aid society are often placed in non-aboriginal foster care, sometimes away from their own community. With an emphasis on customary care, we will work with aboriginal leaders to build capacity so that children can stay in their communities and maintain important cultural and family ties, as well as incorporating First Nations' traditions into their upbringing.

The proposed changes I've discussed here are part of our government's plan to help more children and youth in the care of children's aid societies thrive in a safe, stable and supportive home. We are committed to providing the caring, stable environment that comes from a permanent

home. We are doing this because it is in the best interests of our children.

But that is not all we are doing. We are also removing some of the barriers that often discourage people from adopting children in Ontario. Parents who have tried to adopt a child from a children's aid society will tell you it's a cumbersome, inconsistent process. We know there are prospective parents in Ontario who are eager to open their hearts and their homes to a child who needs their love and attention. Hundreds of parents attend events like the adoption resource exchange which took place in Toronto recently.

The adoption process includes an assessment of a parent's strengths and needs, as well as criminal reference checks. The adoption process also includes a mandatory adoption probation period during which children's aid societies regularly monitor adoptive families before the adoption is finalized.

We are improving the application process so there is a standard, consistent application for both public and private adoptions. This will make the process simpler for those parents who are looking to adopt a child in Ontario, either through a children's aid society or through a private adoption agency.

To ensure that appropriate protection and supports are provided for all children, there will be post-adoption support so that families who adopt a child from a children's aid society aren't left on their own, if they are indeed in need of support, and to ensure that the children we have had responsibility to protect are indeed better off than they were before their adoption.

We will want to make changes to our child protection system which will help more of our children find a permanent, loving home. We know that we can improve their prospects for a productive, healthy and overall successful adulthood by providing them with a loving, stable home in their childhood. We know that without strong support, our children and youth are vulnerable to other risks as they grow up.

But in order for these changes to work, we also need to make some changes to the way our 53 children's aid societies work. That's why we will introduce changes that will make our societies more accountable, more stable and more sustainable, so they will be there for children who need them in years to come, because the protection of our children and youth is our highest possible priority.

The process must always start with a rigorous safety and risk assessment for all children and families. After that initial step, the societies will be better able to match their level of response to the individual needs of the child. Our children's aid societies must be more accountable to the children they serve and to the community. Through Bill 210 and the regulations that will follow, we will strengthen the client complaint mechanism to provide a higher standard of accountability. I would also like to point out that even as Bill 210 is moving through the legislative process, I have asked my ministry to immediately develop a regulation to address situations

where a child may be placed with extended family or a community member. The completion of an appropriate assessment, including background checks, is a critical safeguard in such situations.

As well, to help children's aid societies achieve these goals, we began providing funding under a new model that puts a greater emphasis on the specific results we want to see for children, like more adoptions.

1620

One final legislative change, if passed, should result in more use of collaborative solutions to resolve child protection matters, such as mediation. A number of provinces and states already look beyond the courtroom to settle certain child protection disputes. They use mediation, family conferences and talking circles. Evaluations of these methods consistently show positive results, including more timely resolutions, higher rates of settlement, more satisfied families and better communication between the parties involved. I think it is safe to say that these are all outcomes we would all like to see for the children and youth in our child protection system.

Proposed changes, if passed, would encourage children's aid societies to consider options outside of the courtroom to resolve child protection disputes. We know that options like mediation will not work for every child or in every situation, but if the driving force behind these changes is the best interests of the child, then we need to consider which option will be best for each child in each situation.

Together, these changes will help children's aid societies place more children in an adoptive or otherwise permanent home so they can grow up with the security of a family that will be there for them in the long run.

I'd like to raise one final point about how we are working with children's aid societies to help them provide the best possible service for our vulnerable children.

As part of our reforms, the government is moving forward in developing a comprehensive information system that will be used by children's aid societies across the province. Currently, there is no uniform practice of sharing information.

In the year 2000, a province-wide system was established to allow children's aid societies to find out if families have received child protection services from another children's aid society in another part of the province. Children's aid societies have, since then, set up co-ordinated information-sharing processes. These are important steps, but we need a comprehensive, province-wide information system so workers and children's aid societies can quickly and easily reference information from across Ontario. We are working to develop this system together with the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. As well, the ministry is working with the Adoption Council of Ontario to strengthen an adoption-matching database, which will help workers in children's aid societies match available children with prospective parents.

We have seen these types of tools work well in other jurisdictions, and we want to provide our children with the best opportunities for a stable, loving home.

Across Ontario, there are thousands of children who need a permanent family, and a great many families who want to bring a child into their lives. We are working to help bring them together. By making adoption more flexible for children and parents, we believe the result will be more happy childhoods, and more loving, stable, permanent families.

The proposed legislation, along with the other changes we are making, is driven by a commitment to all the children and youth in our child protection system.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Baird: I'm pleased to comment on the speech by the minister. As a former minister of children as well—I often hear that she's the second; she's of course the fourth; I was minister of children's services, and I followed the Honourable Margaret Marland—I think we all want to ensure that we do the very best job we can for children. The need for adoption reform is something that is not new. There has really been a sea change in thinking over the last 10 years resulting from the child mortality task force or just from the various judicial inquiries into child abuse and child neglect and child sexual abuse. I think more can be done.

I think all of us want to ensure that we can make it as easy as possible administratively for families to adopt children. We are consistently moving the yardstick, moving the balance in favour of the children. I think that's something that's tremendously important.

I think all of us in this House—certainly those of us in the opposition—will want to hear from the stakeholders, whether it's folks who have worked in the adoption field, whether it's Jeanette Lewis and the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, whether it's talking to families themselves about what this legislation will do and if there are ways to improve it and if there are concerns. This is an incredibly complex area, one with which we want to tread cautiously to ensure that you get it right. I look forward to those public hearings. I look forward to learning what the concerns and suggestions of various stakeholders are. I know we have a terrific wealth of knowledge with us in the gallery, a number of people whom I had the privilege to work with for some three years. We look forward to having that opportunity to get it to committee.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I want to echo the comments of both the minister and the member from Nepean–Carleton and say that this legislation is extremely important. It really will, I think, after all is said and done, make a difference in the lives of children if it's done in a way that is sensitive to their needs and is sensitive to the various communities that have an interest in their children.

On that note, I would agree that the bill is complex. The bill seeks to transform a system that we would all agree needs transformation for the sake of our children and for the sake of their ability to find safe and permanent places to live and to be supported and to grow into contributing and confident young adults.

I'm concerned that when we make the attempts to speak to communities and to speak to stakeholders

around Bill 210 in the hearings process, we make sure that we make the extra effort to particularly get out to some of the more remote First Nations communities. I think we have an obligation there to make sure that the voices are heard from those communities. I've already heard from a few of them who are indicating that they would like to participate in a hearings process around this bill. I know that there are some things that have been shared with the government in the process of the review and perhaps in the process of drafting the bill with some First Nations representatives or some First Nations communities, but we need to make sure that we do that and we do it thoroughly.

Mr. Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to stand and speak for a few minutes regarding Bill 210, and there are a number of reasons. One is, I've been through the system. I remember my early, early days going through the system as a child, and I realize the importance of this piece of legislation. I'm quite excited about a number of the proposals that we are looking at taking forward, because I do remember the difficult times I had when I was a child.

Today has really been a special day. In addition to this bill, we've passed Bill 183, the adoption bill, which is significant.

On November 24, I'm going to have the opportunity to bring forward a private member's bill—I call it the grandparents' bill—ensuring that grandparents are recognized as a special opportunity for children, where it's appropriate, for them to be accessed or even raised by grandparents. I'm excited about having that opportunity.

In respect to this bill, it's long overdue. Even as a newly elected provincial member of Parliament, I'm quite amazed at the number of people who come into my office. Many times they're unhappy with family and children's services, with the way they feel that the system is working. I have been down, even in my own area, and sat with the agency to understand how it functions. They certainly need additional funding, and I understand that. But they've also told me—just privately when you sit and talk with the staff—there is a need for changes. I've asked them to give me some input about the bill—what do you think?—just a one-to-one, and it's always been positive; they are excited about the changes.

I think this is something that's long overdue. Certainly we're going to have public hearings on it, which is appropriate. I am looking forward, when the bill comes back into the House, to standing here and voting in favour of it. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to say a few words.

1630

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

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): It is indeed a pleasure to rise to comment on presentations at the present time on Bill 210. It's also a pleasure because this is obviously a bill where all three parties are united, and they are united for the betterment of those children who happen to be within the care of children's aid, for they

depend upon us lawmakers and upon the good offices of the people that assist them—children’s aid and other organizations—for their well-being. They have precious few resources unto themselves; they are not even persons with rights under our laws. So they depend upon us adults for their well-being, and it is a heavy onus.

I note from the briefing notes issued by the ministry the numerous briefings, but I emphasize that I look forward to the opportunity to have individuals and the relevant organizations and caregivers appear before a committee for hearings. I think that is most important when we are dealing with the well-being of our children, and I look forward to those hearings being arranged and carried out.

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Children and Youth Services has two minutes to reply.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Let me take this opportunity to thank my colleague members in this House from Nepean–Carleton, from Hamilton East, from Niagara Falls and from Cambridge for their thoughtful consideration of this bill.

It’s encouraging to know that we are united in understanding and appreciating the importance of strengthening our child protection system. It’s encouraging to know that we collectively see this as a very important priority. I commit to you that you will have the opportunity to participate in committee hearings. I am looking forward to hearing more from, and working with, stakeholders and the communities; a member mentioned First Nations communities in particular. It’s very important that we get this right.

I have also had the opportunity to speak with young people who, like one of my colleagues, have in fact been through the child protection system and experienced some of the difficulties that quite often occur even before the child is actually brought into the care of the child protection system. The challenges are great, and we are also aware that there are many success stories from this system, very successful outcomes for young people. We want to make sure that that is the norm, and that that is, in fact, the case for all the children for whom we have responsibility.

I thank my colleagues for their comments, and I look forward to further discussion of Bill 210.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): I will be sharing my time with the member for Cambridge.

I’m pleased to be able to join the debate on Bill 210, the Child and Family Services Statute Law Amendment Act. Protecting our children must be the number one priority for any government of any party. We read in the papers and see on television so many cases of children abused or neglected. The children’s aid societies and other child welfare agencies need all the support, funding and powers necessary to protect children.

The Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies, in a public survey, found that while 85% of the public would report child abuse, only 46% would report suspected child abuse. Ontarians need to know that they

have an ethical duty, and in many cases a legal duty, to report suspected child abuse. Child protection is not just a job for social workers or police; it is a duty for each and every individual. We all know of horrendous cases of abuse that have taken place in our province. Though I know that no system of protection is foolproof, we must learn from the mistakes made in individual cases to make sure that they never happen again.

The standard refrain we hear when talking about child protection is “the best interests of the child.” We all know that this includes protecting children from emotional, sexual or physical abuse. In 2000, we as a government expanded this to include neglect. I think it’s important to pause for a moment and recognize how important it was at the time, and still is, to move from the earlier, more narrow definition to include neglect, because of the fact that so often individual cases were clearly neglect but the law did not allow workers to move forward and find methods of protecting children who in some cases were suffering from long-term neglect. So I think it’s really an important point to see the progression. Certainly, in looking at the numbers of children in care, it became very obvious that once that particular area of definition was included in the law, it provided people in child protection agencies with the ability to move forward in so many cases.

We must also ensure, in any legislation, that we protect a child’s need for stability and certainty. The right of any child to a share of happiness and safety is paramount. We will be closely studying the bill before us today to see if it provides or enhances these standards of protection. The bill we are debating today contains many changes that on first glance appear to be positive for Ontario’s children in care. I hope that the positive changes in this bill can be passed without too much delay. But our caucus will want to make sure that the bill will work and that children’s interests will be put forward first.

Both my PC caucus colleagues and I will want to hear what child welfare agencies and ordinary Ontarians think of this bill. We look forward to a full process of committee hearings on this bill. We need to hear from the experts. We need to hear from children’s aid societies, social workers, foster parents and adoptive parents. Most importantly, we need to hear from children who have grown up in the system. Children and adults who have been crown wards or who have been taken into care are the most important experts whose views must be heard.

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The minister in her remarks outlined why the government wants to see this bill passed. I would like to provide a short history, at least from the 10 years I’ve served in this House, to give some background about the child welfare system.

Between 1991 and 1996, six inquests studied the deaths of 10 children. The inquests highlighted for government that improvements to the child protection system were needed. In 1997, the Ontario Child Mortality Task Force also made detailed suggestions concerning the

tools and resources available to front-line workers, their training and the legislative base for child protection. Following this, our government appointed an expert panel, headed by Judge Mary Jane Hatton. The panel told us there should be a better balance in the legislation between the interests of families and children. The panel recommended we make it clear that the paramount purpose of the act is to promote the best interests, protection and well-being of children. The former PC government considered their input and their recommendations very carefully and developed legislation to better protect children. These amendments addressed those changes most urgently needed to ensure the safety of children.

Introduced in 1999, our significant changes to the Child and Family Services Act were proclaimed on March 31, 2000. Our changes made it clear that the paramount purpose of the Child and Family Services Act is to promote the best interests, protection and well-being of children. Our changes expanded the reasons for finding a child in need of protection. For instance, the word "neglect" was specifically included and the threshold for risk of physical and emotional harm to children was lowered. This has encouraged earlier action to protect children at risk. These changes also allowed evidence of a parent's past conduct toward children to be used in child protection court proceedings.

Our changes clarified the duty of professionals and the public to report that a child is or may be in need of protection, to encourage more reporting of suspected abuse and neglect. Our changes also made it easier for children's aid societies to get the information they need to protect children. Our changes promoted earlier and more decisive planning for children's futures, so that permanent arrangements for children could be achieved as soon as possible. They also ensured that access by relatives or other individuals to children who have been made crown wards is granted only if it is beneficial to the child, and provided for a mandatory review of the Child and Family Services Act at least every five years.

Our government also committed the funds necessary to better protect children. Changing the law is not enough; we must always ensure that the funds and staff are available to protect children. Between 1995 and 2003, we increased funding to children's aid societies to over \$1 billion, an increase of 185% since 1995. Between 1995 and 2003, we hired 1,800 more child protection workers, almost a 69% increase. As of December 31, 2002, approximately 7,700 children's aid society staff had been trained under the Ontario child protection training program. I'm very proud of the changes and improvements that our government made. We made a difference when it came to protecting children. Our legal and funding changes received widespread support among child welfare experts and the media:

Mary McConville, executive director of the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, said about our legislative changes: "These amendments represent a profound change in child protection legislation, and they

are strongly supported by every children's aid society we represent."

Dr. James Cairns, deputy chief coroner, said: "With these changes, Ontario will take a huge step forward in its fight against child abuse and neglect."

A February 16, 2001, "Thumbs Up" editorial in the London Free Press lauded the PC government's reforms: "Queen's Park's overhaul of child protection laws and its commitment of money to keep kids out of harm's way is winning kudos in surprising areas, such as social services circles: The greater emphasis on protecting children in risky arrangements has meant rising caseloads for children's aid societies. The money is following up—spending in this area has jumped by 100% over the last five years."

Bob Penny, the executive director of the Kawartha-Haliburton Children's Aid Society, in the Lindsay Daily Post on February 16, 2001, stated what he thought of the PC government's actions: "The province made a commitment to the child welfare system, and I have to give them credit in responding to it. The government's response to child welfare has been incredible. This government has done more than any other government."

It's interesting, when we look at this particular government, that currently there are a couple of blemishes in contrast to the kind of information that we have—I'm sorry. I must go back.

This view of our PC government changes has been sustained over the last five years. A report published by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies just this year strongly supported the 2000 changes: "Amendments to the Child and Family Services Act in March 2000 represented a significant contribution to the enhanced protection of children. The legislative amendments, in combination with the implementation of the Ontario risk assessment model, initiated changes that were broadly welcomed by the child welfare sector. The new provisions lowered the threshold of intervention in terms of neglect and sought to ensure earlier resolutions, particularly for younger children."

I offer these quotes in being able to support the fact that the reforms that we made to better protect children have clearly stood the test of time.

However, as I started to say, when we look at the current government, there are a couple of contrasting messages that they have given with regard to children, and certainly one is reminded of the Premier's campaign promise to the families of autistic children. Of course, what we know is that they promised full autism treatment. The Premier promised the support and treatment children need, and that included children over the age of six. However, this promise was broken and the families then felt forced to take their issue to the courts. The courts now have ruled against the McGuinty government for violating the Education Act by not providing autism treatment beyond age six. Today we find that taxpayer dollars are used now to pay for an appeal in this process.

Ending the clawback of the child tax credit was another McGuinty promise. Again, we know this also has been broken.

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Such examples obviously reduce confidence in this government and the kinds of promises they have made in the portfolio for children. I simply point those out as broken promises that perhaps serve as a warning that we need to be sure that when we're looking at this piece of legislation, we're not looking at some changes that will come along later that somehow diminish the value of this initiative.

Today children's aid societies face combined deficits of about \$70 million, with a government that has no plan to deal with this issue.

Bill 210 could perhaps be a way for this government to shine on children's issues, but it's very clear that it must listen to concerns. It must listen to agencies and experts. It must listen to children who have experienced the system.

One of the comments made a few moments ago about the bill by the minister dealt with the issue of increasing the reliance on kinship and community care. I think this is a positive goal. The minister herself gave a couple of examples of the potential that this kind of relationship, this change in the proposed legislation, could make. There's no doubt that in many cases, if a mother or father or both are unable to care for a child, then a grandmother, an aunt, a cousin may be the best one to involve. If we have a parent with a drug addiction, giving custody to a grandparent may allow the child to experience the least possible upheaval. Reliance on the courts may also be reduced if the parent knows his or her child will remain within the family and not be put in a group home or given to a foster parent. We must recognize that extended families already play a great part in raising a child and it only makes sense that we turn to them first in need of care.

The area of kinship care must be guarded rigorously since many abusive or neglectful parents in fact come from families in which these examples have been passed on from one generation to the next. I know that in the area of abuse, one of the chilling statistics about child abuse is the degree to which children who have been abused become, as adults, abusers themselves. I think we have to be very careful in looking at that potential problem.

Nevertheless, kinship care from a loving grandparent or other relative can certainly provide a healthy and familiar environment for a child.

One area of concern that I would also like to see clarified is the definition of a child's "community." The bill states, and I'm looking at subsection 2(3):

"(3) For the purposes of this act, the following persons are members of a child's community:

"1. A person who has ethnic, cultural or religious ties in common with the child or with a parent, sibling or relative of the child.

"2. A person who has a beneficial and meaningful relationship with the child or with a parent, sibling or relative of the child."

In clause 1 of the part I just read, it seems to me that sharing an ethnic, cultural or religious tie with a child or relative is not the same thing as sharing a meaningful relationship. It poses the question of the relationship of the child to be placed with someone who knows nothing of the child or the child's family. The section also contradicts the government's plan for openness agreements. The bill states that openness agreements can be made with, among others, a member of the child's extended family or the community with whom the child has a significant relationship or emotional tie. The government rejected basing law on ethnic or religious principles when it rejected shariah law, but we're establishing the same principles in child protection. Obviously, this is something that needs greater examination.

The minister also made reference to the proposals for alternative dispute resolution. There are a number of opportunities for this, in a very meaningful way, and the minister provided some examples that would certainly be helpful in the process; we have examples in other areas of family law. But again, I would just pose rhetorical questions. The question of the cost of the legal process and going to court is certainly one of the drivers of this bill. One has to ask whether seeking this alternative dispute resolution is going to be more cost-effective and less time-consuming than going to court. There is also a fear that dispute resolution can be seen as simply a precursor to court if the dispute resolution mechanism is deemed unsuccessful in certain types of cases. Again, we need to look at that more carefully.

The third area in the bill that is a departure from what we currently have in the legislation is the question of openness agreements. There's a certain body of information and, certainly, examples where these have worked very well, but we also need to be concerned about whether or not they will impede adoptions because of the fact that one of the stated goals of this proposed legislation by the minister is, of course, to increase the number of adoptions.

1700

The question, then, has to be—and I understand that the legislation offers the openness agreement as an option. I understand that and would make it clear, but I think that certainly, through the public hearing process and expert testimony, as well as through people who have experience, we do need to look at the way openness agreements are done and how they, from time to time, may be an impediment. I think we just have to make sure that those options are understood and that we are going to ensure that the process does what its stated goal is, and that, of course, is to increase the number of adoptions.

The other interesting thing about the openness agreements is that when you look at the part of the bill that deals with them, they are done primarily through the courts. So I would just point out that they revert to a court process. Again I have to say rhetorically, does this create issues around timeliness and cost if openness orders are going to be done by the courts?

I think it's clear that we, as a group of legislators, are very conscious of the need to be able to provide ongoing

support for the agencies that are providing the service and child protection, and we have to be able to find the best methods for children, because the goal is clearly to make a process where a child's life is made better. But I think we have to be extremely careful, in going through this legislative process and the corresponding committee work, to make sure we have heard all there is to hear in order to be able to look at these processes and ensure that not only is there going to be the process that will work in the best interest, but also that we're not going to be looking at the cost being a driver of the whole process.

Obviously, the importance of cost is there. One has to be conscious of finding the most efficient methods. Nothing is wrong with saving money, but cost savings can't be the primary goal in a child protection system. So at every level and step in the process, the government must ensure that cost is not a deciding factor in determining what should happen.

I think the processes that are inherent in this bill have the opportunity to be efficient as well as beneficial to children, but I think we have to make sure we understand that we are first and foremost concerned with protecting children from abuse or neglect. So we, as a caucus, are committed to studying this bill carefully to ensure that it puts the welfare of children first. We want the government to commit to a full set of committee hearings on the bill because, as legislators, we need to hear from agencies, adoptive parents and those who have experienced the system. They are the experts on what is happening with child protection. We want to know what effect the changes in this bill designed to save money will have on child protection. We want an assurance that adoptions will be positively encouraged. We want to make sure that the openness agreements are going to be understood in a way that will not discourage people from adopting.

In closing, I want to reiterate that we stand for the protection of children and we look forward to helping to pass this bill, but only committee hearings will show that those who know and understand the bill are supporting this bill.

The Acting Speaker: The member indicated she was sharing her time with the member for Cambridge, and as such, I recognize the member for Cambridge.

Mr. Martiniuk: As I mentioned earlier, it's my pleasure to address Bill 210. It's a bill of some length—50 sections—and amends the Child and Family Services Act. By its workings, it effects amendments to a number of acts: the Children's Law Reform Act, the Child and Family Services Act, the Education Act and the Vital Statistics Act.

I'm not a social worker, although my younger sister—I'll keep her anonymity—fills me in periodically as to the workings of the children's aid that she happens to work with. What struck me was that I can remember as a young lawyer in the olden days doing a little bit of children's aid work, and it seemed to me it was rather simple in those days. It certainly is not simple today. The measure is still the same: the benefit of the children. However, it is complex.

My sister fills me in on a number of problems going on in the field, but there was one story that came to my attention, not through my younger sister but through other avenues, of a seizure—if you want to put it that way—of children from a young couple. The young couple had employment problems. When I give you the background, please, I in no way justify their behaviour. There is no justification for abuse of children under any circumstances. However, one has to look at the environment. For this young couple, the loss of work, money problems, family problems—things all young married couples have on occasion—caused something the neighbours complained about, and the children's aid became involved.

This is a happy story, because this bill deals with stories that, in many ways, are not so happy. This young couple lost their children on a temporary basis, and quite rightly so, and started the long course of rehabilitation. Fortunately, they were taken under wing by a group of young churchgoers who worked very hard with this young couple. I was amazed at the amount of work and love that—it was a project that lasted more than a year, and we're talking about the repair of human beings, of the parents and the other children who were in the care of children's aid.

1710

To make a long story short, there was a happy ending, through a very prolonged number of appearances before judges. The law has become much more complex and our courts have become much more complex. Unfortunately, it is expensive, it is time-consuming and it drains your human energy. If I recall correctly, this young couple had something like six or seven court appearances before the matter was happily resolved to the satisfaction of all.

Primary to the position of children's aid, they are there to protect the children, and they must be conservative and cautious, in my opinion. In my dealings with children's aid in the region of Waterloo, I have been most pleased with the co-operation that I have received. If there have been any problems within the bounds of privacy, which everyone is entitled to, any small problems have been relatively easily resolved. But for the most part, there are no problems. It is an organization that is functioning very well, in my opinion, and under severe duress or stress.

We do know that the children's aids in Ontario carry substantial liabilities or deficits, for the most part. When we were government, an added obligation and duty was placed on children's aid to deal with neglect for the first time, which I am certain has prevented—and that was the intent, rather than proving that actual harm would come to the child. Neglect is a lesser onus, and there's no doubt in my mind that this has saved many children from abuse and, I dare say, unfortunate death.

I have never had a problem with children's aid in our area. I recognize the stress and the workload that they are working under, but they take their obligations and duties to the public in our region seriously—and so they should—and it seems to be working quite satisfactorily, though I must admit I believe they are underfunded at this stage.

Adoptions have always been a problem. Gone are the days where we had orphanages. We use the euphemism of “foster child” but, in effect, they are still, of course, without parents. We have in Ontario approximately 18,000 children in care. The minister mentioned 9,000. The figure I had was that 8,000 of those children are crown wards and approximately 75% of those crown wards have access and, up to now, have been ineligible for adoption.

The total adoptions in 2002 in Ontario: Children’s aid adoptions totalled 768, private adoptions totalled 140 and international adoptions were 679. It’s interesting, if I just may refer to the international adoptions for the province of Ontario, and I won’t go through them all: for Chinese children, the number was 402, and they topped the list of international adoptions by Ontario residents; Haiti had 13; Russia had 54; the US had 22; South Korea, 28; India, 31; the Philippines, 12; and the remainder are of lesser amounts except for Jamaica, which stands out with 31. Those are the totals of the 767 international adoptions in Ontario. That compares with the total for Canada of 2,181 adoptions.

What are we to do with these children who unfortunately are not really eligible for adoption, or many of them are what one terms “high needs”? Individuals would, in many cases, like to expend their love for these children, but they cannot afford the costs of caring for them. This bill is meant to address that, and, though complex, it is there.

One of the little things that is missing—my predecessor Mr. Cameron Jackson, MPP for Burlington, has been asking for an important report that at that time had been addressed and filed with the Honourable Marie Bountrogianni, the Minister of Children and Youth Services, last spring. That was the Bruce Rivers report. Unfortunately, as I understand it, the report has still not been made public. As Mr. Jackson pointed out at that time, it’s very difficult to judge this particular reform of an overall program plan and business plan so that we can understand exactly where the changes are going to occur, not just for children’s aid societies but for families who are dependent on the government to manage child welfare issues. We do not have that information but, fortunately, we expect, and the minister has indicated, that there should be full hearings on this bill, as it is important, and mostly it’s important to the children who are presently not being adopted. They lack the stability of a family. This bill is meant to cure that deficiency, and I hope the minister is right.

It is a complex bill, however, and I can see the hearings taking a considerable length of time. If there are 50 sections to this particular bill, I would imagine that the regulations will exceed the size of this bill by five times, if that’s the usual measuring stick. So it will take a long time to ensure that all individuals, organizations and caregivers have an adequate opportunity to come forth and present their views as to the adequacy of this bill.

There is no dissension in this House that I’m aware of. The aim of all members is the same: the betterment of

these children who are under the care of the province of Ontario and the children’s aid societies.

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One of the concerns, as I mentioned earlier, is the injection of the new rules for neglect, because that has caused a great increase. The number of children’s abuse and neglect investigations has more than tripled since 1993. One of the problems I can see is that abuse cases are, of course, immediate. One cannot put them off. You can’t put them in the back of your filing cabinet, as we do sometimes in the legal game. That is a priority issue that must be acted on immediately, whereas adoptions can always be put off for a day or two. So we do have a problem and a conflict as to the expediency of the demands of those two avenues.

The number of children in care increased from 10,000 to over 18,000 in the early 1990s, so I think that viewers and members can see that there has been a substantial increase in the occurrences that have to be covered primarily by our children’s aids. In the past, from 1995 to 2000, there was an increase of 185% in the budgets, close to \$1 billion being the commitment at that time. Since 1995, more than 1,800 more child protection workers have been hired, and I’m assuming that there have been greater hirings since that date. However, as I mentioned before, my sister keeps me well aware that, notwithstanding the increases in budgets and the increases in the number of social workers and assistants, there is still a great deal of stress and overwork in our children’s aids right across this province.

One of the reasons for the injection of neglect, historically, as a measuring stick for actions required for the betterment of children was the number of provincial coroners’ inquests launched in 1996. There was a provincial child mortality task force report in 1997 and a minister’s panel of experts in 1998. So that’s where the revolution, if I may put it that way—it was more than an incremental increase in responsibility; in fact, it was a revolution in the work that was imposed upon our caregivers at the children’s aid societies right across this province.

The government did respond with legislative amendments. The new funding framework, mandatory risk tools: I did hear about those at some length and how it does complicate the routine and increase the paperwork of individuals who are working at high speed and having a very important job to do.

Initiated in the year 2002 was a stronger emphasis on outcomes. There was a greater investment in research. We developed a single information system, and more attention was paid to shared services and infrastructure.

At that time, it was encouraged to be less reliant on court intervention. Unfortunately, I question whether that in fact ended up as an outcome, though it was a worthy intention. There was a clearer and stronger connection with children’s mental health, a differential approach to intake and assessment and a rethinking of the interjurisdictional review.

Key areas of focus: a differential response; the permanency strategy in the court process. Accountabilities,

again, were linked to outcomes, comprehensive research and evaluation agenda, a single information system and a multi-year funding model.

I mentioned earlier the complication of the system. I was always somewhat dazzled when I was provided with what was headed Pathways to Permanence, which sets out a flow chart of the functions that would take place in the case of a report of a child in need of protection. It seems to go on and on. We start at the top with the report, and of course the referrals could be to admission prevention. But, more likely, the risk cannot be reduced with a child remaining in his own home and then all sorts of things happening, including the court hearings.

This is not an attempt to blame our court system. However, it has become so complex and so expensive that ordinary citizens can no longer enjoy many of the benefits that our court system provides. Our court system is renowned in this world, I think, for its lack of corruption. However, it has become unwieldy. The scheduling process is antiquated. It means that people with great skill—social workers, police officers, lawyers and judges—sit around waiting for a case to come on, when in fact there are eight other cases that could have been scheduled, or a case that is scheduled is adjourned on the courtroom steps, everyone goes home and a courtroom sits empty. This has become the norm.

What it means to us is that as citizens we can't afford to go to court any more. The courts are a primary foundation of our freedoms. I don't think we can rely totally upon elected representatives to protect our freedoms. We look to the courts. If you can't afford it, and if it becomes unaffordable, then you have a severe problem.

More than that, we taxpayers pay to have these highly skilled individuals, who should be doing the good work they were trained to do, sit in a courtroom and wait for a trial or their turn as a witness. On many occasions we're not talking about minutes, we're talking about hours. It's expensive, we pay for it and, most important, because of the delays, justice is not necessarily being done; certainly, justice for those who are unable to help themselves and rely upon us to help them places a higher onus on each of us. We have a problem and it's reflected in greater costs throughout our civil service.

1730

I look forward to an opportunity to attend these committee hearings. I can see, from the list provided as to the preliminary interviews and meetings with multiple organizations throughout the province, that we need a number of days for the hearings alone. In view of the size and complexity of the bill, no doubt clause-by-clause will take a considerable length of time. But it's all worthwhile, because we all are of one mind: the betterment and protection of children within the care of our province. I look forward to that day.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Horwath: I appreciate some of the insights and personal experiences that the member, as well as the critic for the opposition, raised in debating this bill. I have to say that I'm looking forward to participating

myself, in a very few minutes, from the New Democratic Party's perspective on Bill 210. We want to raise and flag a number of issues that revolve around some of the specifics in the bill, as well as some things we're concerned about that might be missing, that might need to be looked at a little bit more carefully in terms of some possible amendments and certainly, as I've already mentioned, the issue around consultation. I think everyone would agree—and the bottom line is—that we need to get this right. We don't need to get it right for our own sake; we need to get it right for the sake of the children who will hopefully be affected in a positive way at the end of the day if the time we take is productive and if the goal we keep in mind is their well-being and their ability to have successful adoptions or, in particular, successful movement out of crown wardship. There are many things we need to do in child protection to make sure that the system is able to provide opportunities for children not to be shuffled around and not to be without a warm roof over their heads and a stable place from which to build their futures. I look forward to participating in a few minutes in that regard.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for allowing me to speak and say something about this bill. I want commend the minister for bringing in Bill 210, the Child and Family Services Statute Law Amendment Act. It's long overdue. I think the minister met with and consulted a lot of people across the province of Ontario, and they told her about the problems they are facing in terms of the act.

I had a chance last year to meet with many stakeholders working with children's aid societies, and they told us about the act, and about what's going on in that industry and what's going on in many aspects and details of the bill.

I listened to different speakers who spoke before me, and I don't know their positions—if they're supporting it or not supporting it. I heard them talking about the past government, which allowed children's aid to protect children in this province. But many stakeholders in the children's aid societies told us differently. They told us that the act was old and needed some kind of transformation. That's why the minister is coming up with good ideas to transform the act and make it fit for many people in this province, in order to protect them, in order to create a safe environment for our kids who, for some reason, are not able to live with their family, with their mother and father.

It is a very complex issue, as has been mentioned many different times this afternoon, because we're dealing with a delicate, sensitive issue with very young children who are very sensitive psychologically and emotionally. Therefore, I think it's important to listen, to consult, and to transform the act to fit all people.

Mr. Jim Flaherty (Whitby–Ajax): I compliment my colleagues the members for York North and for Cambridge for their erudite comments with respect to this bill, which of course will go to committee.

I know there are some representatives from the children's aid societies here, and I acknowledge the chal-

lenges they face in their work and the work loads they face.

I also acknowledge the work of the previous minister, Minister Bountrogianni, on this portfolio and the current minister, Minister Chambers.

This is a difficult area. We all care about the best interests of the child. We also care about two things I want to talk about. One is the retroactivity of legislation, which concerns me. We had a bill go through third reading today in this House that retroactively affects the commitment by the province of Ontario, by governments of various stripes over many years, with respect to non-disclosure of adoption information. This government went ahead and pushed this bill through with its Liberal majority, which is not right. They also did it with the equity in education tax credit retroactive legislation, and that's simply wrong. It's not right for governments to do that. I mention that here because we are dealing with another bill now that deals with children's rights.

In the bill, it talks about community being defined as "ethnic, cultural or religious." We know the Premier says that we have the rule of law, that the rule is the same for everybody in this province. That was about shariah law. That was the Premier of Ontario. Surely that applies to children's aid issues in this province, that there is only one rule and it is the paramount rule. It's the rule I learned years ago in law school. It's a rule I hope we all share, and that is the best interests of the child. That applies always, in every case in Ontario. It must apply in this bill, and I hope that gets clarified when this bill goes to committee.

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): There are two points I want to make. First, in the last number of years—more specifically in the last number of years—we have seen more parents coming to our office to talk to us about the concerns they have from their own personal experiences in trying to adopt crown wards, and how frustrating it has been, how difficult it has been, how time consuming it has been, and in many cases how terribly disappointing and disheartening it has been that they have been unable to do what they wanted, which was to adopt a crown ward, because of the legislation that was in place.

If the government's intention here is very much to try and make that process easier, then that would certainly respond to a number of concerns that have been raised with us in the last four to five years, where we have seen increasing numbers of families coming to us to describe the problems they have had in this regard.

But the point that I think needs to be brought in here is, what is going to be the agencies' capacity to allow that to happen then? I raise that in the context of changes that were made under the former government that really saw a dramatic increase and focus on child protection, where so much time of so many people was spent really taking kids out of homes so that they became the responsibility of the state, with very little support for those families where those children might have been able to stay, and very little support for any kind of adoption of those children.

Our own executive director for our own CAS has told me on more than one occasion that virtually all their staff resources have been tied up in dealing with protection. If we're going to change the law that allows for easier adoption, what is the mechanism by which we're going to have the staff resources in place in the agencies to allow that to happen? I think that's a legitimate concern and it's a question that needs to be raised.

It's very clear that the province is spending much more money right now, more than ever before, on child welfare. I'm not sure how much of that is going to be spent, though, on adoption issues, and we're going to have to have a real realignment of financial resources.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Would the member for Cambridge care to reply?

1740

Mr. Martiniuk: For their comments, I'd like to thank the members for London–Fanshawe, Hamilton East, Whitby–Ajax and Nickel Belt. Perhaps I did not make my position clear: I am wholeheartedly supporting the intent of this bill. I compliment the minister. I think it is the aim of each member of this House that we have no permanent crown wards eventually. That is the best possible outcome that I would enjoy so much. We must, however, ensure that the government's plan, as outlined in Bill 210, will in fact meet that aim, and I'm certain that if we all work toward that end, we can end up with a bill that everybody can be proud of.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Horwath: I'm proud to be able to begin the debate on Bill 210 from the perspective of New Democrats. I think it's been said many times already in this evening's discussion that everybody is interested in making sure that these children have a fighting chance at a decent life, and that means a lot of different things need to change in the system. I guess what we are dealing with in Bill 210 is what some of those things are that need to be changed and how we change them in a way that meets the interests of the children, respects the experience of the children and respects their needs and their connections with their community. Those are things that will help them to eventually grow stronger, as opposed to make them feel that they are being ripped out of one place and put in another place and then, unfortunately, another place and another place, which is what's happening in the current system.

In fact, according to government figures, Ontario now has about 9,000 crown wards. Fewer than 10% of these are actually adopted each year. Only 900 were adopted in 2004, and last year, 882 crown wards, less than 10% of the total, were adopted. The remainder of these children, then, are in foster care, they are in group homes and are unfortunately moved around and moved around, in some cases spending an average of 22 months in any single place. How the heck do we expect children to survive, let alone thrive, when they are being bounced around in these kinds of situations? It's just not acceptable.

The problem is that the current rules prevent children in the care of children's aid societies whose birth families

currently have a court-ordered right to visit or contact them from being adopted. So the very system is such that it dissuades, or almost rules out the ability of children to be adopted. Half of the families that in fact have these court-ordered rights to visit or contact don't even visit or contact. The issue becomes, then, that there's a systemic problem Ontario that prevents about three quarters of Ontario's estimated 9,000 crown wards from being adopted.

In fact, statistics from the Adoption Council of Ontario suggest that the number of international adoptions is climbing significantly to something like 600 a year, when we can't even ensure that our children in Ontario are being placed with families. At the same time, we've only been able to adopt out about 170 children to families in the province of Ontario.

While this bill would attempt to address some of these issues, it would also attempt to provide an open system so that birth parents and relatives can, when necessary, when desirable by all parties, maintain contact with the child. There are really interesting ways in which that will be negotiated, and again, that's something that I think we need to look at seriously in terms of the process by which these arrangements are undertaken because we really need to make sure that we're doing the right thing when it comes to the children.

I wanted to spend a very few minutes to talk about what some of the children's aid society voices are saying in this process, because I think it's important. Certainly they have a stake here. They have the experience. They are the ones who, I think other speakers have indicated, are currently struggling under a broken system. They're the ones struggling in their professional and probably their moral hearts, wanting desperately for the system to be fixed, but at the same time recognizing that the resources they have to fix the problem, not only from the perspective of the legislative resources but also the financial resources, simply have not been there. While Bill 210 will look at some of those legislative pieces, we must never take our eye off the ball in terms of what needs to happen from the financial perspective. Certainly New Democrats will be keeping a close eye on how the implementation of the bill, when it eventually gets to that phase, actually meets the needs of the children.

The executive director of the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto, Mary McConville, said in an interview that only 52 out of 550 children who were crown wards with the agency were adopted last year. In Hamilton, in my own children's aid society, we have an excellent executive director as well, Dominic Verticchio. He says that the Hamilton CAS has 690 children in its care, about half of whom are wards or permanent wards of the crown. He said that 70% of those wards of the crown aren't even available for adoption because of the continued access of their biological parents or the requirement that currently exists in their situation. The Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton: About 360 children under the care of the Catholic children's aid society, and 160 of them are permanent wards. Last year, it was only able to finalize 21 adoptions.

That is the system that I think we all agree is in failure. I think we all acknowledge and understand that children in care deserve stable, supportive, loving family arrangements, and anything we can do to make that happen is not only our desire, but in this House it's our obligation to make sure that happens. However, we also have an obligation to ensure that it happens in a way that is transparent, that is accountable, that is responsive to all of the stakeholders involved in the process.

As New Democrats, we on this side of the House are certainly prepared, as we go through this process and, as we go through any changes that come as a result of it, to hold the Ministry of Children and Youth Services accountable to those changes. In fact, the ministry has been criticized very often in the past by the Ombudsman, and has been called the Ministry of I Don't Know. I'm hoping that changes like Bill 210, if we get a bill that we can all support—and we're not sure we are there yet. At the end of the day, we want to make sure that the accountability is in place and that the ministry is committed not only in legislation and in sentiment, but in action, particularly in regard to funding children's aid societies and other children and family services. That certainly is an important piece.

We know that right now children's aid societies are struggling. They are in deficit positions. They need to be sustainable and they need to be accountable, because they need to be there for the children. That's their job. They need to be there for them and we need to make sure that they're able to do that job.

I know that the minister mentioned in her remarks, and it's something that she flagged for us during some of the briefing that we had not too long ago, that in her opinion the bill was lacking around a complaints process. We've certainly flagged that and identified it as well as a problem. We are looking to make sure that there is a fair complaints process for children in care and their families and their caregivers. Again, there has been a commitment to take action on that. We look forward to seeing what that's going to look like because we think it's extremely important, one of those checks and balances that absolutely needs to be in place.

1750

We also had some concerns around the alternative dispute resolution process. We have to be very careful about that. We have to be sure that it is implemented in an appropriate way.

There are so many more things to say about this bill. I wanted to mention a number of other pieces. I think it's a good first step here, but—I can see you're getting ready to get up, Mr. Speaker. Oh, you're not? You're just stretching your legs? OK, good. That gives me a little more opportunity to get a few things on the record before I do run out of time. I keep glancing up at the clock, thinking, "I'm running out of time already."

The review of the Child and Family Services Act that was undertaken is certainly a good step. It was long overdue. We know that it's a requirement. We saw the report that came out of it. But we've also heard from

stakeholders that in the process of the review, many other issues were raised. I probably won't get into that in today's debate, but I do have some further time to do that in the future, and I will be looking forward to just flagging a couple of other issues that are out there that people indicated to me were very important and thought should perhaps be addressed at this opportunity.

When it comes to looking at where New Democrats might want to see some changes, will we be making recommendations not only around this particular bill but also around changes that may in fact hopefully lead to a broader process of the required review as we go forward. We think it's extremely important that we look at the child welfare system from as broad a perspective as possible, and we look forward to making some specific recommendations around that.

Of course, a piece that didn't come up that we were hoping would come up, which was in fact the subject of a media article recently, is the situation of children who age out and what we can do to put the supports in place that make sure—I mean, let's face it. Children who are living within their families are living within their families a lot longer than they used to, and in many cases are living within their family unit until upwards of age 25. They're going through post-secondary education with that support around them and they're achieving things that are extremely difficult. Oftentimes, young people need that support not just financially, but in many other ways, to make sure that they are successful. I'm going to touch on that in a little greater detail, but what is clear is that the results are obvious. Children who age out of the child welfare system have dismal results compared to other children who are not part of the child welfare system.

I know there's an understanding of that in this Legislature and I know that the minister and the ministry are aware of that. I also know that other jurisdictions have taken particular steps to try to reduce the gap, to try to change the unfortunate situation that exists with children who age out of the system. That has to do with many aspects, including covering tuition and increasing the age for which children are able to receive support. There are a number of things that can be implemented that will likely show some positive results with regard to children who age out of the system.

I wanted to spend a few minutes on the process that we're going to undertake for the remainder of the review of this bill. I raise it because it came as a surprise to me that a number of stakeholders were unaware that the bill had been tabled at the beginning of the year for first

reading—not the beginning of the year. I guess it was—I can't even remember—May or June.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: June.

Ms. Horwath: June. So I can only surmise that what happened was that there was a consultation around child welfare—the required consultation that took place. The report was tabled in June 2005. So the review took place and many stakeholders were contacted and participated in that process, but I think, when it came to the actual drafting of the bill, perhaps some of those stakeholders were no longer at the table. I'm hearing from stakeholders that they had no idea the bill had been tabled for first reading, that they haven't even had a chance to look at the bill yet, and, further to that, that there are many concerns people have about having an appropriate voice.

I want to speak particularly to the issue of the First Nations in Ontario, of their interest and concern in having a voice on this bill. I'm going to quote from a document I have from the Anishinabek First Nation. Here is what they say. Here is a quote from a document they produced, and it says:

“The imposition of federal and provincial legislation on First Nations continues to impede the inherent right of First Nation sovereignty and self-determination in the area of child welfare.

“What is required is the recognition of First Nation jurisdiction regarding child welfare and a renewal process whereby First Nation governance deals with child welfare within the Anishinabek territory. Developing First Nation legislation, customary child welfare codes and conducts will ensure the protection of Anishinabe children from being apprehended by mainstream child welfare agencies.”

As we go through the process of debating this bill in the next little while here during second reading, and then when we get into the hearings process, New Democrats will be making sure that we urge the government to take this bill to places like Timmins and the communities of James Bay, to make sure that we are not short-changing First Nations and that we are, in a most extremely cautious and appropriate way, engaging them in a dialogue about their children. I think that is an extremely important piece that we cannot in any way miss during the process of continuing the debate on Bill 210.

I know it's that time, and I look forward to finishing my leadoff debate at another time. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: It being 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until tonight at 6:45.

The House adjourned at 1757.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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