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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 22 November 2005

Mardi 22 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 22 November 2005

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 22 novembre 2005

The House met at 1330.

Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jim Flaherty (Whitby–Ajax): I rise today to express the serious concerns of the people of Whitby–Ajax, and indeed of all of Durham region, about yesterday's large layoff announcement at General Motors in Oshawa. Many people and their families will be affected negatively, not only those employed directly at General Motors but also those in the related parts and service industries.

On their behalf, in 2002-03, as minister responsible for economic development, I worked for Ontario to resurrect the Canadian Automotive Partnership Council to develop an auto strategy for Ontario and Canada. This was accomplished successfully with the co-operation of industry leaders, including Michael Grimaldi of GM and Buzz Hargrove of the CAW. The strategy called for the federal and provincial governments to invest in skills training, research and innovation, and infrastructure.

In research and innovation we have the Beacon project going ahead at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, in co-operation and partnership with General Motors. Now we need some urgent action on skills training at Durham College in Whitby, which needs to expand, and at our other skills training facilities in Ontario. In infrastructure we must move urgently, particularly at our border facilities in Windsor and Fort Erie, and I urge the government to do that; and the expansion of the 407 east, urgently, to serve General Motors in Oshawa. These projects are essential for the auto sector east of Toronto, and I urge the government, on behalf of my constituents, to act.

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): It seems that every week, as regular as a Schwartzwald cuckoo clock, we can count on a security breach at one of our financial institutions, where thousands of our private financial records are stolen. I'm speaking of identity theft, the quickest-rising crime in North America.

While I applaud the Minister of Government Services on his public awareness campaign on how to guard against identity theft, we must give those financial insti-

tutions and credit reporting agencies notice that if a personal credit record has been stolen or even compromised, the affected consumer must be notified—no ifs and no buts. How else can we protect ourselves? How else can we be more vigilant?

A recent survey by First Data Corp. found that 6.8% of adults have been victimized by identity theft and a striking 43.4% have been contacted by scam artists trying to get personal financial information. It gets worse: Most of our financial institutions had security breaches, and Equifax credit reporting agency had 2,400 files stolen. These incidents are only the tip of the iceberg.

What should we do? Our government was on the right track to consider my private member's Bill 174, which passed second reading unanimously on March 3. It died in the last session of Parliament. When it is resurrected, I hope I can count on all of your support.

GREATER TORONTO TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I rise in the House today because I'm still upset with the response from the Premier yesterday. Members will be aware that transportation congestion in Toronto is costing the economy an additional \$1.8 billion per year. These are jobs, Mr. Speaker. Gridlock hurts the economy, our environment, our health and indeed the very quality of life we enjoy.

Yesterday at Queen's Park, we heard GTA business leaders call for immediate action. The Toronto Board of Trade, along with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and other boards of trade and chambers across the GTA and Hamilton, have asked for the creation of a Greater Toronto Transportation Authority. Unlike this government, Ontario business leaders and municipal leaders understand that you need to have a plan if you want to ease gridlock.

However, establishing a GTA transportation authority takes leadership, and therein lies the question. We might expect that this would be something for the Premier to lead. However, his recent decision to avoid gridlock by catching an airplane from Toronto to Hamilton, a distance of 70 kilometres, shows he's simply out of touch with this, and indeed many, issues.

So, Premier, who is going to take the lead? In my view, the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority should not be led by any single municipality, nor should it become just another government bureaucracy. The leadership needs to come from all stakeholders who understand the problem and how to bring about solutions.

I urge this government to take its election promise seriously and work with business and municipal leaders, and indeed with all citizens of the GTA, to resolve gridlock by using the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority.

EVENTS IN BRANT

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): I'm pleased to rise today to tell all members of this House about the good things happening in Brantford and Brant county. In Places to Grow, the riding of Brant is identified as a growth node, and we are ready.

Business has recognized what we have to offer. The Ferraro Group is investing \$150 million to build a new plant. This plant will hire 600 new skilled employees when it opens. More exciting are phases 2 and 3. When—not if—these phases are completed, the job total will rise to 1,300 jobs. Mohawk College and Laurier University, along with the province, will work with business to offer courses to develop a workforce that meets the skills that our industries need.

Brownfield areas are ripe for redevelopment. I will continue to push for even more action on this file for the future. The riding and the province of Ontario recognize that we are on the cusp of a boom. The Oak Park interchange is an integral part of this boom, and it is ready for realignment. I'm proud to have taken the leading role I have taken to bring the two sides—the city and the province—together and the private sector. I continue to encourage all the partners to work co-operatively to get this interchange signed off on and shovels in the ground.

I am also convinced that, again working co-operatively, we will have a family health team in Brant and a CHC in Brantford to meet the health care needs of my constituents.

Finally, I am pleased to say that today a new YMCA will officially open to our citizens. I invite all my colleagues to visit. As Walter Gretzky says, it's the centre of the universe.

1340

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): After being missing in action over the summer, we've recently heard considerable noise from the McGuinty Liberals in response to gun crime in Toronto. Mr. McGuinty and his Attorney General have attempted to portray themselves as law-and-order advocates, but even a cursory look at what they've done since assuming office and what they plan to do over the next few years tells the real story.

We know that, overwhelmingly, the gun violence now plaguing Toronto primarily involves young offenders. One of the first things the McGuinty Liberals did upon taking office was close down Project Turnaround, a strict-discipline facility that had an impressive record of turning young lives around. They followed up the closure

with a transfer of violent young offenders from the corrections ministry to a children's ministry. We know that under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, supported by the McGuinty Liberals, serious youth criminal acts such as car theft do not result in charges—give Johnny a warning letter. Also, this spring's budget indicated a \$300-million cut to the justice ministries, reductions that have serious implications for public safety.

The Liberal government's attempt to portray themselves as law-and-order advocates is a charade, a public relations exercise that gives political expediency and cost-cutting the priority over community safety. That, as Paul Harvey would say, is "the rest of the story."

NATIONAL HOUSING DAY

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto–Danforth): Today is National Housing Day. I had the pleasure this morning at the Home Depot store in my riding of Toronto–Danforth of helping to launch this year's toque campaign, put on by Raising the Roof. This is something they've been doing for nine years now. I wanted to tell everybody here about it, because it is an opportunity for all of us to go out and, for just 10 bucks, buy a really warm toque.

You can go into any Home Depot in your own riding across the country and buy a toque. You can get it in fabulous red, which I know the Liberals will like, or your basic classic black, and it will keep you very warm, especially for those politicians and their supporters who might be out on the hustings in the near future.

I want to say that this is an important campaign. They're hoping to raise \$750,000 by the campaign's end on February 28. The Raising the Roof national day is Toque Tuesday on February 7, 2006. They want to raise this money to help homeless people and organizations who advocate for them across the country. They are the only national charity doing this, and it's important to support them. I would ask all members to go and put down their \$10 and buy themselves either a classic black toque or a nice red one.

ELECTRICITY GENERATION

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron–Bruce): I am so pleased to rise today to speak about another positive government announcement. Yesterday, the Minister of Energy announced nine clean, renewable energy projects that will provide 975 megawatts of energy.

Three companies in my riding of Huron–Bruce signed agreements for a total of 434 megawatts. The four projects are the Kingsbridge II wind power project in Goderich, 158 megawatts; Enbridge leader wind project A in Kincardine for 100 megawatts; Enbridge leader wind project B in Kincardine for 99 megawatts; and Ripley wind power project, 76 megawatts.

I can tell you that this is good news not only for Huron–Bruce but for our rural communities around the province of Ontario. We can harvest the wind, and we can harvest our fields. This is a good announcement for rural communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Members' statements. The member for York West.

YOUTH CRIME PREVENTION

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are ahead of the game.

I am proud and delighted to have here today in the members' gallery at Queen's Park two very special young leaders from the riding of York West. I would like to welcome Jamal Clarke and Amanda Parris, who are here from the Friends in Trouble Youth Initiative. These movers and shakers have demonstrated that adversity proves a person's mettle. They are actively involved in a project in the York West riding which seeks to help teens break the cycle of violence, manage anger, teach youth how to have healthy relationships with others and help instill life skills which help our youth succeed.

I am also proud to say that our government has endeavoured to give our young people as many choices as possible with our flourishing youth apprenticeship program, and helping to keep them safe in schools with our innovative bullying prevention strategy.

Faced with increased gun violence on our streets, the government introduced a weapons enforcement unit, the guns and gangs task force, the gun amnesty program, the mandatory gunshot wound reporting bill, increased border security, the hiring of 1,000 more police officers and the summer jobs and PEACE programs.

I am confident that with the proper coaching our young people will make the right decisions in governing their lives—

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

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): I know I speak for every member on this side of the House when I express my concern for the families affected by General Motors' announcement yesterday of some 30,000 job cuts across North America.

It has been widely acknowledged that Ontario's record of productivity, its publicly funded health care system and its highly skilled workers helped to minimize what could have been an even harsher blow to the auto sector, yet we are still troubled by the cutbacks earmarked for GM's Oshawa and St. Catharines operations. My thoughts today are certainly with the workers and their families who may be affected and the suppliers that support the assembly function that may also be affected.

As a government, we will maintain our determination to seek out new auto investment in Ontario. We have helped to secure over \$5 billion in new auto sector investments in Ontario so far, and we have a responsibility to all Ontarians to continue to aggressively pursue even more new investment. Ontario is one of North America's leaders in the auto industry, and we'll do our part to keep Ontario where it rightly belongs: as leader of the pack.

Yesterday, Canadian Auto Workers president Buzz Hargrove spoke of the Premier's vision and foresight,

saying, "He's the first Premier that really understands the auto industry." Last year, when we made a record \$500-million investment in the auto strategy, Hargrove said, "This strategy ... is going to be good for Ontario.... This is a positive and welcome change from previous governments who took our sector for granted, when other jurisdictions were stepping up to attract investment and jobs that we want for Ontario."

VISITORS

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: I wish to inform the House that the family of one of our pages, Cameron McLean, has joined us today. Cameron's parents, John and Joyce, and Cameron's brothers, Stuart and Andrew McLean, are here in the gallery, and I'd like to extend a warm welcome to them from the Ontario Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Welcome, and that is not a point of order.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ARCHIVES AWARENESS WEEK ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 SUR LA SEMAINE DE SENSIBILISATION AUX ARCHIVES

Mr. O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 34, An Act to proclaim Archives Awareness Week / Projet de loi 34, Loi proclamant la Semaine de sensibilisation aux archives.

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

The member for Durham may have a brief statement.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Ontario has a rich and colourful recorded history. Archives play an essential role in the preservation and use of that history. By acquiring, preserving and making available documented material from all aspects of society, archives promote the heritage of this great province. This bill proclaims the first Monday of April each year as Archives Awareness Week.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY AMENDMENT ACT (HARASSMENT), 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SANTÉ ET LA SÉCURITÉ AU TRAVAIL (HARCÈLEMENT)

Ms. Churley moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 35, An Act to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act to protect workers from harassment in the workplace / Projet de loi 35, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la santé et la sécurité au travail pour protéger les travailleurs contre le harcèlement dans le lieu de travail.

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

The member for Toronto–Danforth may have a brief statement.

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto–Danforth): I'm reintroducing this bill in light of the tragic murder of Lori Dupont. I introduced a similar bill or the same bill in the last session after the horrible death of Theresa Vince in the workplace in 1996. Hopefully a bill like this would help prevent those deaths from happening.

It amends the Occupational Health And Safety Act to require employers to protect workers from harassment in the workplace, to give workers the right to refuse to work in certain circumstances after harassment has occurred, to require an investigation of allegations of workplace-related harassment and to require employers to take steps to prevent further occurrences of workplace-related harassment. I do hope that all members in the House will support quick passage of this bill for obvious reasons.

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 22, 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 1352 to 1357.

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

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Hoy, Pat	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bartolucci, Rick	Jeffrey, Linda	Racco, Mario G.
Bentley, Christopher	Klees, Frank	Ramal, Khalil
Bountrogianni, Marie	Kular, Kuldip	Ramsay, David
Bradley, James J.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Rinaldi, Lou
Brownell, Jim	Leal, Jeff	Ruprecht, Tony
Cansfield, Donna H.	Levac, Dave	Sandals, Liz
Caplan, David	Marsales, Judy	Scott, Laurie
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Martiniuk, Gerry	Sergio, Mario
Chudleigh, Ted	Mauro, Bill	Smith, Monique
Colle, Mike	McMeekin, Ted	Smitherman, George
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Delaney, Bob	Miller, Norm	Sterling, Norman W.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Milloy, John	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol	Tascona, Joseph N.
Duguid, Brad	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Tory, John
Duncan, Dwight	Munro, Julia	Van Bommel, Maria
Dunlop, Garfield	O'Toole, John	Watson, Jim
Flaherty, Jim	Oraziotti, David	Wilkinson, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Wilson, Jim
Fonseca, Peter	Parsons, Ernie	Witmer, Elizabeth
Gerretsen, John	Patten, Richard	Wong, Tony C.
Gravelle, Michael	Peters, Steve	
Hardeman, Ernie	Phillips, Gerry	

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

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Marchese, Rosario	Prue, Michael
Horwath, Andrea	Martel, Shelley	
Kormos, Peter	Murdoch, Bill	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 70; the nays are 7.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

BIRTH CERTIFICATES

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): I would like to tell the members about an innovative new service for consumers applying for a birth certificate from the Office of the Registrar General. I announced this service at an event earlier today.

A few weeks ago, I gave the members some background on the service challenges at the ORG. I told the House and the public what has been done to date and what other actions are being undertaken to help fix the problems. Today's announcement is another step in our plan to modernize government. Our goal is to set a new standard of excellence in delivering services to the public.

I am pleased to say that our government has introduced a money-back guarantee for on-line birth certificates.

This guarantee means that anyone who applies for their birth certificate on-line will get their certificate delivered to them within 15 business days or they will get their money back. Anyone born in Ontario can now apply on-line for a birth certificate and get it within 15 working days. Whether they are new parents seeking a birth certificate for their baby or an adult seeking a replacement certificate, the guarantee still applies. In order to qualify for the service guarantee, the birth must already be registered with the province and the information provided must be complete and accurate. The service guarantee does not apply to on-line applications, of course, that contain errors.

The people of Ontario have busy schedules. This quick and easy application will help eliminate unnecessary delays for birth certificates.

Since June, the on-line application has been available to parents of children eight years and younger. The Office of the Registrar General has received more than 45,000 applications on-line, and about 99.7% of eligible applications have been processed and delivered within 15 business days. This has been a huge success.

As of today, we are officially extending the on-line service and the money-back guarantee to all consumers born in Ontario. We have received excellent feedback from the consumers using the application: 97% of the

people find the application easy to find, use and understand. All consumers have to do is to go to the ServiceOntario Web site at www.serviceontario.ca.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I'm going to write that down.

Hon. Mr. Phillips: Write that down. In just a series of steps, they can complete the on-line application at their convenience, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Within 15 days, their birth certificate will be at their doorstep.

We believe this is the first public service guarantee of its kind in North America. This desktop-to-doorstep guarantee is something we plan to extend to a wide range of on-line government services.

While this initiative is just one way we are making government services surprisingly simple, I want to assure the Legislature and the people of Ontario that we will ensure the safety and security of their private information. The Office of the Registrar General has security measures in place that are more extensive than any other Canadian jurisdiction. These security measures are built on recommendations from a number of third-party experts. These include the OPP, the Vital Statistics Council of Canada, former RCMP Commissioner Norman Inskter and the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

The on-line application uses secure Web technology similar to on-line banking. It has undergone rigorous testing, including a review by external IT security experts, and is regularly monitored to ensure security and that personal information is protected.

We also continue to require guarantors for subjects over the age of eight. Ontario is one of only two provinces with this additional security requirement.

After all, protecting the privacy of personal information is one of my ministry's key priorities. This is just one more way we are fulfilling our commitment to both service excellence and smart security.

In the future, we plan to extend service guarantees to a range of on-line services for other areas of government. Ontarians want and deserve better service, and through Service Ontario, we are making it happen.

SPORTS AND RECREATION FUNDING

FONDS POUR SPORTS ET LOISIRS

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): Last Friday, I was pleased to be joined by two federal cabinet ministers, the Honourable Stephen Owen, Minister of State (Sport), and the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of State (Public Health). We were pleased to announce, at the Boys and Girls Club in Ottawa West-Nepean, the Sport for More program, a bilateral agreement between our government and the federal government, totalling \$6.1 million over four years to support grassroots sports participation initiatives across Ontario.

This agreement is proof positive that the Premier's campaign to the federal government for fiscal fairness is

resulting in better agreements for all Ontarians. This agreement means that over the next year, \$1.3 million in total funds will go to provincial level not-for-profit organizations for sport participation initiatives among underrepresented groups. Additionally, over the same period, \$500,000 will go to aboriginal groups.

So far, project proposals from two organizations, the Metis Nation of Ontario and the Boys and Girls Clubs of Ontario, have been approved for funding under this program. There are an additional 31 proposals for funding from 30 organizations currently being reviewed.

La diversité des projets proposés par ces organisations fera en sorte que plus d'Ontariens de tous les horizons participeront plus souvent à des activités sportives de qualité, selon leur niveau, leurs capacités et la façon dont ils voudront y participer.

The initiatives under this program are aimed at encouraging regular physical activity among young people, developing provincial athletes, improving the quality of coaching and increasing leadership skills within the aboriginal community through aboriginal sports programs. Aboriginal communities across the province currently lack affordable and accessible opportunities to participate in sport and recreation. This agreement will include specific initiatives to increase the participation of aboriginal communities across Ontario in sport activities.

In addition to this agreement, our government's investment in amateur sport will total \$12.62 million for fiscal year 2006-07.

Recent estimates indicate that sedentary living costs our health care system approximately \$1.8 billion every year. Childhood obesity is on the rise, and many Ontarians still lack the opportunities or skills to be full participants in sport and physical activity. We are in the midst, sadly, of an epidemic of unhealthy weights. Almost 50% of Ontario adults and 15% to 20% of Ontario youth are overweight or obese.

Les membres du gouvernement McGuinty, les citoyens, ainsi que les intervenants du domaine des sports et de l'activité physique de partout dans la province expriment leurs préoccupations croissantes en ce qui a trait au niveau trop peu élevé d'activité physique et de pratique des sports.

There are numerous benefits associated with habitual physical activity and sport participation. These include increased longevity, psychological well-being, promotion of pro-social behaviours, improved social cohesion, increased labour force productivity and higher student achievement. Research findings have also established strong links between sport participation and physical activity and the prevention and management of certain chronic diseases such as colon cancer, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity and depression. Although there are numerous documented benefits associated with leading an active lifestyle, the current rate of participation in sport and physical activity prevents us from fully realizing these benefits.

That's why our government introduced the Sport for More program as part of a comprehensive new strategy to

increase participation in sport and physical activity throughout Ontario.

This bilateral agreement—I was pleased to be joined by some grade 6 students from Our Lady of Fatima school in my riding—is just a start. The statistics I briefly outlined earlier show that even more needs to be done to support amateur sport and physical fitness in Ontario, and I'm committed to bolstering our commitment to young athletes.

As the Ministry of Health Promotion delivers on its commitments, the people of Ontario can take comfort in the knowledge that their government is working hard with them to grow a generation of active children and youth, enable adults to promote healthy lives for themselves and their families, and empower older people to age in good health.

1410

BIRTH CERTIFICATES

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford): I'm certainly pleased to respond to the minister on the introduction of this guarantee. He says that on the government Web site there are some terms and conditions applied for this service, and I guess the devil is in the fine print, because as to the service guarantee terms and conditions, there are 14 of them. I would call them basic loopholes for the government to get out of their guarantee.

Here's condition (2): "The application must be complete and accurate. If the ORG contacts you (by mail or phone) to complete processing of your application, you are not eligible for a refund"—if they contact you, you're not eligible. Condition (4): "You must be eligible to receive the requested document(s)." Well, what does that mean? You have to be eligible. Next is number (8): "The delivery date is the date on which the courier first attempts to deliver the document(s) to the address provided on the application. If no one is present to sign for the delivery, the courier will leave a delivery notice providing further pickup or delivery options. The service guarantee does not apply if you decline the delivery." The biggest kicker is number (13): "A request for a refund must be made no later than 30 days after your certificate(s) are delivered to you."

So the onus is on the applicant, not on the government. Where is the government accountability in these terms and conditions?

The other part of the statement, which the minister doesn't even address, is the security measures. I put order paper question 38 a number of weeks ago for the minister to "explain what security measures and procedures will be utilized to prevent identity theft in the on-line application for all birth certificates, both children and adult." At this time, I haven't received a response to that order paper question.

Also, the service guarantee does not apply to birth certificate applications arising from a name change or correcting errors to your first or last name on your existing birth certificate. Minister, you are going to have to look at extending the service, because there are a lot of

errors out there caused by your ministry with respect to existing birth certificates, and you haven't done that.

But I guess the fundamental question that has to be answered on this is, if you get your money back, do you have to reapply to get your birth certificate?

SPORTS AND RECREATION FUNDING

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): I was listening on the radio in Ottawa last week when the minister was making his announcement at the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa. The comment by the announcer was that some of the kids were putting the basketball in the hoop, but the minister was having great difficulty in doing that.

This announcement makes one very wary about this whole new ministry, because I'm not sure this is about health promotion. I think it may be about Liberal government promotion. This announcement amounts to \$1.5 million in total, federal plus provincial, per year. That amounts to a provincial contribution of five cents a head per population in all of the province of Ontario for health promotion to help groups promote physical education. We already have an organization, the Trillium Foundation, a non-partisan foundation, that does this kind of work. What this government has shown in the past is that they've cut back the money out of the Trillium Foundation, and now they're using it for health promotion.

I read a press release today: "Health Promotion Minister Jim Watson says he likes the idea of 'using a carrot instead of a stick' to encourage people to join health clubs, ride bicycles or buy other fitness equipment.

"Watson will travel to 10 cities in January to get feedback on ideas such as eliminating the provincial sales tax on gym memberships and bicycle helmets.

"But Dalton McGuinty says Ontario can't afford the ideas Watson will be looking into."

Why are we doing this? Why is Mr. Watson spending the taxpayers' money to go around all over Ontario to consult with people about ideas that the Premier has put the nix to already? We have a health promotion ministry to promote the provincial Liberal government. This isn't about improving the health of the people of Ontario; this is about improving the health and the perception of the Liberal government of Ontario.

BIRTH CERTIFICATES

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): There was some, albeit muted, excitement amongst New Democrats at the prospect of an announcement today by the Minister of Government Services. We thought the government might sweeten the deal: perhaps, in addition to your money back, a coupon for \$10 off your next driver's licence renewal or a certificate for a 15% reduction in your 407 fees or, at the very least, a set of steak knives. But what we got today is a rather embarrassing, rehashed, recycled reannouncement of what the minister somehow felt compelled to say but a couple of weeks ago.

Look, the problem is with the problem cases. The fact is that name change applications have not been speeded up in any way, shape or form, and those piles are lingering for months and years at your ministry and within the office of your Registrar General. The fact is that corrections to defective birth certificates or defective legislation, which are sometimes discovered only many, many years after the fact, are still lingering in your Registrar General's office for months and years. The issue is all about staffing. It's all about stability of that staffing, adequacy of that staffing, training of that staffing, and your failure to acknowledge that that ministry and that Registrar General's office remain gutted of an adequate staffing level. That should have been the real announcement today.

But I've got to tell you, Minister, the phones calls in our constituency office yesterday and today—although frequently in the past they have been about inadequacies in your ministry and the Office of the Registrar General—have not been focused on lengthy waits for birth certificates. The folks calling my office down in Welland and calling other MPPs' offices are the spouses of GM workers who know that their jobs are going to be not just taken away from them but are going to be lost to the community forever. The phone calls received in our constituency offices over here in this caucus are phone calls of desperation by people because their jobs have been taken away in the course of this orgy of job loss during the Dalton McGuinty government's term—over 42,000 manufacturing jobs. Their concern is there may be no doorstep left to leave that birth certificate on when it's delivered by the courier.

I say to you, sir, that this government's failure to recognize, acknowledge and respond to the crisis around the significant job loss, around the significant loss of value-added manufacturing jobs and the serious loss of wealth-creation jobs should be a source of shame and embarrassment.

SPORTS AND RECREATION FUNDING

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): In response to the Minister of Health Promotion, I want to talk about the complete inability of children from families on social assistance or families who are working poor to ever be able to access community-based sport organizations, and I doubt the announcement that was made by the minister today is going to change that one bit.

The fact is that the fees alone that are associated with many community-based organized sports are far beyond the reach of even modest-income families, never mind the working poor or those on social assistance. Take a look at hockey, which is played in communities big and small right across this province. I'm telling you that the fees alone associated with hockey, even house league, are totally beyond the reach of working poor families or kids on social assistance. By God, if you have a child who's actually talented enough to be on a select team, that child could never imagine the possibility of having an opportunity to play on that team, because his or her parents

will never be able to afford the equipment, never mind the fees associated with that. There's nothing in the minister's announcement today that's going to change any of that.

With respect to aboriginal communities, the real issue is, does the aboriginal community in question even have the infrastructure necessary to have sports and recreation? The community of Martin Falls has a half-built arena. They came to this government over 18 months ago. They met with the Minister of Northern Development and Mines and the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal and asked for provincial funding so they could finish the arena, so they could actually give sporting opportunities to kids in their reserve—nothing from this government two years later: no money, no arena. How is this money going to help people in Martin Falls or any other aboriginal community that doesn't even have the necessary infrastructure?

Do you want to make some change? End the clawback so poor families can enjoy organized sports. Stop the win tax so that aboriginal communities can pay for this. Finally, why don't you put some—

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

DEFERRED VOTES

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005

SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 197, An Act to implement Budget measures / Projet de loi 197, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures budgétaires.

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

The division bells rang from 1421 to 1426.

The Speaker: Mr. Bradley has moved third reading of Bill 197, An Act to implement Budget measures. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Jeffrey, Linda	Pupatello, Sandra
Bartolucci, Rick	Kennedy, Gerard	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bentley, Christopher	Kular, Kuldip	Racco, Mario G.
Bountrogianni, Marie	Kwinter, Monte	Ramal, Khalil
Bradley, James J.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ramsay, David
Brownell, Jim	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
Cansfield, Donna H.	Levac, Dave	Ruprecht, Tony
Caplan, David	Marsales, Judy	Sandals, Liz
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Mauro, Bill	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	McGuinty, Dalton	Smith, Monique
Crozier, Bruce	McMeekin, Ted	Smitherman, George
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Meilleur, Madeleine	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dombrowsky, Leona	Milloy, John	Van Bommel, Maria
Duguid, Brad	Mitchell, Carol	Watson, Jim
Duncan, Dwight	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wilkinson, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Oraziotti, David	Wong, Tony C.
Fonseca, Peter	Parsons, Ernie	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Gerretsen, John	Patten, Richard	Zimmer, David
Gravelle, Michael	Peters, Steve	
Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry	

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

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Hudak, Tim	O'Toole, John
Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	Prue, Michael
Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Runciman, Robert W.
Chudleigh, Ted	Marchese, Rosario	Scott, Laurie
Churley, Marilyn	Martel, Shelley	Sterling, Norman W.
Dunlop, Garfield	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tascona, Joseph N.
Flaherty, Jim	Miller, Norm	Tory, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia	Wilson, Jim
Horwath, Andrea	Murdoch, Bill	Witmer, Elizabeth

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 61; the nays are 27.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

LAYOFFS

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. While literally thousands of men and women left their jobs yesterday in Oshawa and St. Catharines with an uncertain future, you downplayed the 3,660 job losses at GM and said the job losses were “a little bit of contraction.” Automotive analysts today say that between 15,000 and 21,000 spinoff jobs will also be lost as a result of the GM layoffs. In fact, in May 2002, you said, “I’m sure you will understand, Premier, that when an assembly plant is shut down, the parts plants are sure to follow.”

Premier, your “Don’t worry. Be happy” approach to manufacturing job losses across Ontario is no comfort to the families involved or to the communities devastated by these layoffs. After yesterday’s overwhelming understatement on your part, you gave yourself a general shake this morning. Can I ask you now what specific measures you propose to take to give some sense of relief and hope to these communities and these families affected by these layoffs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): It didn’t take the leader of the official opposition that long to assume an all-too-traditional role, unfortunately, for the Leader of the Opposition, which is one of a very bleak outlook on the world around us.

I want to quote Gerry Fedchun of the Automotive Parts Manufacturers’ Association.

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I know that the members opposite will be very much interested in hearing this. They don’t like the news of 214,000 net new jobs during the course of the past two years. That seems to rile them unduly, but perhaps they’ll listen to what Gerry Fedchun, head of the Automotive Parts Manufacturers’ Asso-

ciation, said yesterday: “It’s not all doom and gloom. Canada’s still doing reasonably well. We’ve still got a good percentage of the assembly business in North America, and we’ll continue to have a pretty good percentage of business.”

Mr. Tory: The problem is, on account of the kinds of answers you gave yesterday, it is necessary for somebody to come here and speak on behalf of people who actually find their circumstances a little bit bleak. They’re looking for some sense of hope, maybe, coming from you, as the leader of the government, when they’ve just been told that they’ve lost their jobs.

Now, this morning, 550 employees at the Cascades coated paper plant in Thunder Bay were devastated by news that their plant will be shut down completely, just in time for Christmas. The company says that high energy costs in northern Ontario are largely to blame. This will be yet another body blow to Thunder Bay.

Premier, again, your “Don’t worry. Be happy” approach to these layoffs is no consolation to these families being affected. What exact measures—including perhaps some of the measures so far, the many recommendations of your own council report that you’ve ignored—do you intend to take to help Thunder Bay, to help these communities and to help these people who are losing their jobs?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: It is indeed interesting and heartwarming to hear from this new-found champion of the working people. Let me tell you about something that one Mr. John Tory said as president and CEO of Rogers. In 2001, you see, he laid off 170 people; in 2002, he laid off 187 people; in 2003, he laid off 175 people. When he was asked about it—Speaker, I know you’ll be interested in hearing this—he said, “It’s a sign of the times. Most businesses today are finding that they have to reduce their costs and that includes, unfortunately, people costs.” Again, I wonder where it is that we have suddenly found this newly discovered champion of the working people.

Mr. Tory: That is a pathetic abdication of your responsibility as Premier of this province.

Premier, the Prescott Shirt Company announced it is closing. The maker of Hathaway shirts will leave over 60 people out of work, just in time for Christmas. The company started this year, on your watch, with 125 employees.

In the town of Campbellford in the riding of Northumberland, they were hit with terrible news two weeks ago. One of the town’s largest employers, the World’s Finest Chocolate factory, is closing and moving jobs to the United States; 125 employees will be laid off on your watch.

Premier, these are jobs that are affecting real people, real families across the province. To say to them, “Don’t worry; be happy,” to say that kind of thing is not good enough. They need to see you in their corner to give them some reason to be optimistic. What exact measures are you prepared to take to help the families in Campbellford, Prescott, Thunder Bay, Oshawa and St. Catharines? Specifically, what are you prepared to do about it?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The 214,000 net new jobs—our biggest responsibility on this side of the House is to lay the foundation in this economy for new jobs to be created, and that's what we're doing. I know they don't like to hear it on that side of the House, but we believe 214,000 net new jobs to be somewhat meaningful.

In September, 17,300 new jobs were created. In October, 21,200 new jobs were created. De Beers is moving ahead in their next phase of a new diamond mine in northern Ontario. That is a potential \$1-billion investment. It will create 600 construction jobs and 375 jobs during production. GlaxoSmithKline: a \$23-million expansion that secures 75 new jobs. The Automodular Corp. is building a new plant in Oakville for 400 new jobs. Stream, a voice over Internet protocol company, is adding 700 full-time new jobs. In my home town of—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you, Premier.

Interjection.

The Speaker: The member for Timmins–James Bay.
New question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question again is to the Premier. Can you detail for the House today exactly what measures you are prepared to undertake immediately to ensure that patients are not left to literally wait until it's too late in the emergency rooms of this province?

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

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The first thing I would say to the honourable member whose name bears the name of a party that took 7,110 beds out of circulation in the Ontario health care system is that the question might better be posed to the person who sits beside you. After all, it was she for three years as Minister of Health in this province who poured hundreds of millions of dollars into hospitals and produced very little, to the point where it was said by her one day: "In meeting with our stakeholders, no one can quite identify the reason for the problem."

I believe the reason for the problem can be found in the reduction of beds at the same time that there was no investment in community-based care. Accordingly, in addition to the \$2.35 billion that we've invested in our hospitals since coming to office, we have made the largest single increases in community-based care, to the point where we're seeing at hospitals like Credit Valley in Mississauga, in a high-growth area, a level of emergency room visits that is in decline. That's a message that our efforts to build community-based care and primary care are working for patients, and we will continue along this path.

Mr. Tory: I've been to a good number of those emergency rooms, and they're saying that the decisions that

are taken, that have been taken on your watch, by you and by the McGuinty government, are responsible for the backlog we see today.

According to a recent CIHI report on ER wait times, patients in Ontario are having to wait, in some cases, hours to see a doctor, when they should be seeing one in minutes. This is a report written by an objective organization. Physicians working in our ERs are asking the Ombudsman—they've now gone to the Ombudsman—to investigate why this is the case.

We've seen the story of a man who arrived at a hospital with chest pains. He was determined to have a life-threatening condition and should have been seen within 15 minutes, according to your standards. In fact, he waited one hour and 40 minutes and suffered a heart attack in the process.

Premier, your government and you have had very little to say about what specifically you are doing in the places where there are still problems; one of them I've just mentioned. What is your plan to deal with the places that have these kinds of unacceptable waits that don't meet the standards you have adopted?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: It's very interesting that an honourable member who has a policy platform on the record of reducing health care spending by \$2.4 billion has the gall to ask questions about this. It's astonishing. When will this member stand in his place and tell the people of the province of Ontario how things are going to get better when you cut \$2.4 billion out of health care spending, as is your stated goal and plan, sir?

1440

With respect to the initiatives that were undertaken related to emergency rooms, in addition to providing care for people in more appropriate settings and diverting from the emergency room those people who are better treated elsewhere, we are working with the Ontario Medical Association. These doctors who are here today at the press conference are a separate organization. We are in the midst, in the province of Ontario, of having emergency room doctors sign an alternate funding agreement. This is money that is on the table to enhance the number of doctors working in our emergency rooms. Three quarters of the hospitals in the province of Ontario and the emergency room doctors there, through the OMA, have signed it; several of the representatives of the group that you stood beside today have not. This is evidence—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Tory: Well, whatever it is you're doing, it's not working. According to the ER doctors filing a complaint with the Ombudsman—they've tried dealing with you; they're now filing a complaint with the Ombudsman—our emergency rooms in this province cannot meet the standards that your government has accepted. The Coalition of Ontario Physicians in Emergency, the group filing the complaint, have said that those patients requiring emergent care ought to see a doctor within 15 minutes. That's a standard you accepted. Patients are waiting

30 minutes in the province of Ontario. Those requiring urgent care ought to see a doctor within 30 minutes. Here in your McGuinty-Smitherman Ontario, they are waiting 60 minutes. These are real doctors, and real people who are waiting to be seen with real problems in these emergency rooms.

Are you prepared to stand in your place today and give us a guarantee that the standards you've bought into, the standards your government has bought into, will be met? It's fine to guarantee a birth certificate. Will you guarantee that people who are seriously ill will have the standard met that you have guaranteed them in this province?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: It's very interesting that when given an opportunity, this honourable member won't stand in his place and tell us what the standards are going to be when you reduce \$2.4 billion from health care spending in this province. You have some obligation, sir, to come clean on that. You have not yet, and all Ontarians await your transparency on the commitment that you've made.

Our government has invested \$2.35 billion in hospitals. In addition, we've spent more money on community-based care, to the point where we have hospitals in this province that are seeing lower numbers of people seeking care in emergency rooms.

This is the party that closed 28 hospitals and 7,200 hospital beds, and promises to cut \$2.4 billion from health care. That is your plan, sir; ours is different. We work with our partner, the Ontario Medical Association. We make the payment of emergency room doctors a priority in our agreement. We work with doctors in emergency rooms across Ontario to sign an alternate funding agreement. And some doctors, a small group, come forward today with a different organization and a different viewpoint. We will consider—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

LAYOFFS

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I have a question for the Premier. Yesterday, General Motors swung the axe and cut 3,900 auto assembly jobs in Oshawa and St. Catharines. Your response was incredible. You said it's "a little bit of contraction." For 3,900 GM workers and their families losing their jobs, for thousands of other workers in the auto parts sector and for yet thousands of other workers who are employed in spinoff jobs, this isn't a little bit of contraction; this is a crisis. Maybe you can tell them, Premier, when did this become just "a little bit of contraction" for the McGuinty government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I can say with all objectivity that never has the Ontario auto worker had a greater champion than they have found in this government and our determination to grow this sector and create new jobs—never.

We've had a very aggressive auto plan that's been in place for a long time now, and I'm proud to say that On-

tario is competing and Ontario is winning. We've secured \$4.5 billion in new investment, and then yesterday, DaimlerChrysler announced another investment of \$750 million; GM announced an investment of \$400 million. We're up to \$5.7 billion in new investment.

The member opposite may not like to hear these things, but those are the facts. Toyota's new plant alone will create some 1,300 direct jobs. Thousands of other spinoffs will also be created as a result of that new investment alone. When it comes to the CAMI plant, that new investment will create 1,000 jobs both at Ingersoll and Oshawa.

I can say again: Never has the Ontario auto worker had a stronger champion than they're finding—

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

Mr. Hampton: Never has Ontario lost so many auto assembly jobs on a permanent basis in this province.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock. Order. Leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, we saw recently how you flew to China to flog Ontario's tobacco, and we saw this weekend how you flew from Toronto to Hamilton to attend a Liberal fundraiser. Can you tell us, have you flown to Detroit, to the GM headquarters, to fight for the 3,900 jobs at Oshawa and St. Catharines? Have you flown to General Motors headquarters to fight for the auto parts jobs that are being lost? Have you flown to GM headquarters in Detroit to fight for the thousands of spinoff jobs that are being lost? Have you done any of that, Premier?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I have done that; I've done that and a lot more. While the leader of the NDP is mired in intractable pessimism, we are very optimistic about the future of the auto sector in Ontario. To quote Buzz Hargrove, CAW president, "We have almost three years to work on it. So that gives me some comfort. We have some time."

I'm telling you, our responsibility right now is to work with Ontario auto workers, to work with GM, whether here in Canada or south of the border, and ensure that we have, in time for the 2008 planned closure, a new line working hard on a brand new product. We've got the workers in this province, who are the most productive in North America, we've got a medicare advantage and we've got a government that is committed to—

The Speaker: Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: Here's what the thousands of General Motors workers see: You boasting about your accomplishments in the auto sector while they get pink slips. That's what they see.

Premier, not long ago you boasted about your \$100-million contribution to Ford, yet we know that Ford is also prepared to make an announcement about cutting thousands of jobs. Can you tell us, when you made that \$100-million contribution to Ford, did you get an ironclad clause that says they won't be laying off thousands more workers in Ontario?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Just so I understand this, is the leader of the NDP actually saying that we should not partner with auto companies, that we should not work together to strengthen our auto sector, that we should not do everything we can to create new, high-paying jobs in Ontario for auto workers? Because I differ with him significantly in that regard.

We have a plan in place. It has secured \$5.7 billion worth of new investment. We see great things in the future for the auto sector. We will continue to work with the auto workers. The member opposite may not be prepared to work with Buzz Hargrove. I can say that on this side of the House we are more than willing to do that and to ensure we have a strong, vibrant, robust auto sector long into the future.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. New question. The leader of the third party.

1450

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): If you're going to boast about hundreds of millions of dollars for GM and Ford, thousands of Ontario workers shouldn't be losing their jobs, Premier.

To the Premier: I want to ask you about the 500 workers who have now lost their jobs through the closure of the Cascades paper mill in Thunder Bay. You see, Premier, this is a paper mill that's closing after you announced your much-vaunted, much-boasted-about strategy to help save the pulp and paper industry. Obviously, this company doesn't think much of your so-called loan guarantees. It doesn't think much of the photo ops and the announcements you've held already; otherwise, they wouldn't be putting 500 workers out of work just after Christmas.

Premier, can you tell those 500 workers, is your government prepared to do anything to ensure that their jobs are maintained, that they can continue to contribute to society and contribute to the community of Thunder Bay, or are you just going to—

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The Minister of Natural Resources, I know, met with representatives of the head office, in Montreal, of this company. There was an article that appeared in the Chronicle Journal that talked about a statement made by one of the workers at the plant in Thunder Bay. The worker said, in reference to the employer, "You and your company have chosen to not modernize the plant. What do you expect when productivity lags because old machinery is constantly breaking down?"

Our plan is open and available, and we have yet to receive an application from this particular company. But we have a plan in place. We've made \$150 million available, and it's designed specifically to upgrade tech-

nology, to ensure that we put the plants on a more sustainable footing by increasing the value-added component of their product and enhancing productivity. The plan stands. We are more than prepared to work with this company and any other company that feels they are up against it and are unable to make the necessary investments. We're prepared to work with them, to partner with them to ensure that we have a vibrant and sustainable—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, I too read the press release from the company. They're moving the production and they're moving their jobs to a mill in Quebec. Why? They're very clear. Because in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, electricity rates have been driven so high they can't afford to pay them in comparison to electricity rates in Quebec, and the cost of delivered wood fibre in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario has been driven so high that they can't afford that either. Premier, what they want to know, and what thousands of other workers across northern Ontario want to know, is when is the McGuinty government going to realize that if you drive electricity prices to the point where they are double or triple the electricity prices in other pulp and paper jurisdictions, mills will close here? When is the McGuinty government going to realize that, and when are you going to do something about it?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I would strongly recommend to my friend opposite that he actually get his hands on the press release that was issued today so he could better understand the reasons behind this closure. I will cite some of those for him. The company specifically talks about the "current economic situation within the pulp and paper industry." It talks about "recent sales price decrease in the fine papers sector." It talks about "reduced demand." It talks about "increased price of raw material." It talks about these being in combination with "an increase of the Canadian dollar compared to the US dollar." Yes, there is a reference to energy as well, but there are a number of factors, just in case the member opposite was somewhat remiss in leaving the impression that somehow energy was the only factor. In fact, there are six all told. We have lost plants in BC. We have lost plants in the Maritimes. We have lost plants in Quebec.

We have stepped up to the plate with a \$680-million strategy that is designed to support the forestry sector. We are more than willing to work with any partner that's prepared to make the necessary efforts—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, I have read the press release. You quote the American dollar. In 1993, when this mill was successfully repositioned and the jobs sustained, the American dollar was even lower in value than it is today. In fact, paper prices in 1993, when this mill was successfully repositioned, were even worse then. Do you know what has changed, Premier? What has changed is this: You've got the McGuinty government hell-bent to drive the price of electricity through the roof, so that pulp and paper companies can't afford to stay in Ontario, so that companies like Dofasco, a leading steel company, are

telling you you're going to kill jobs there, so that even General Motors this past summer told you that you have doubled their hydro bill over what it was two years ago.

Premier, this is your government and your government alone. You're driving the price of electricity through the roof, you're driving the cost of wood fibre through the roof and you're driving these companies and these jobs out of Ontario. When are you going to—

The Speaker: The question has been asked.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the NDP is riding this poor, feeble, one-trick electricity pony into the ground. If it snows later this afternoon, it somehow is going to be connected with electricity prices in the province of Ontario.

They lost 14 mills in northern Ontario on their watch. When the leader of the NDP was in cabinet, the number of people in northwestern Ontario employed in the forestry, mining and oil and gas industries collapsed from 11,700 to 6,600. In northeastern Ontario, the number of people working in the forestry, mining and oil and gas industries plummeted from 27,700 to 21,700 between 1990 and 1995.

We've stepped up to the plate. We've got a great plan, a \$680-million strategy. We're prepared to work with any plant, any company that's prepared to make the effort and prepared to make the investment in improving the quality of their plants.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. In looking at the things you can do to show some leadership and some urgency on the gun crime epidemic in the Toronto area, people in the communities affected, people across the community, are repeatedly saying that they want to see people working together: governments, community leaders, political parties, police forces and so on.

We've seen some areas of law enforcement in which there has been great operational co-operation—child pornography and white-collar crime, to name only two. Recognizing we have some joint effort taking place in this area because of the guns and gangs task force, are you willing to consider expanding that model by putting someone in place in co-operation with the federal government, with the municipalities, with all of the police forces involved to launch an all-out crusade on this epidemic of gun crime in Toronto? Are you prepared to consider that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I know that the leader of the official opposition will recall the statements I made yesterday and the invitation I've extended to representatives of the police and the judiciary to meet with our Attorney General and possibly to have representation there from our crown attorneys as well. The purpose of that meeting is to review the initiatives that have been made by each of us separately to determine whether or not there is more that we might do together to be more

effective in terms of addressing the guns and gangs issue, especially here in the city of Toronto. I think that is very much in keeping with the spirit of the suggestion put forward by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: It's always nice when you comment on the spirit of the suggestion I put forward. I had a specific idea I put forward, on which you didn't comment at all. But anyway, let's move on to another topic, same subject.

Last week, in dealing with a notice of dissatisfaction I filed in respect of a non-answer from the Attorney General, the member for Willowdale said, "The crown does not support three-for-one credit"—this is in pretrial sentencing—"as a general policy." It's the last few words I want to focus on—"as a general policy"—because there's always a loophole. This kind of language clearly leaves open the kind of deal-making in our justice system which has eroded public confidence and made a farce of sentencing decisions, especially for gun crimes. I hear that over and over again, as I'm sure all members of this House do.

Are you and your Attorney General prepared to tell his crowns they cannot propose or agree to these get-out-of-jail-free deals—no ifs, ands or buts—and that you're going to take the reforms necessary to give people comfort that the justice system is working for them?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I know that the leader of the official opposition will also be familiar with the policy put forward by the Attorney General providing as much of a directive as he might to crown attorneys here in Ontario with respect to dealing away gun charges. He will also be aware that we have been pressing the federal government, as has he, with respect to ensuring that we have tough laws on the books with respect to any crime involving any use of a gun, and the federal government has made a commitment in that regard of late.

But beyond all of that, beyond all these separate and individual initiatives advanced by various levels of government, I think the next best step that we might take is to bring people together to review those steps to see if there's anything that we might do further, either separately or collectively, to ensure that we have safer streets, especially here in the city of Toronto.

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

1500

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. When I asked you yesterday why your government wasn't treating the issue of gun violence on the streets of Toronto more urgently, you said that your government was. You said that you now have 50 new crown attorneys in place under the guns and gangs task force. But we listened to your Attorney General, who said, "No, there aren't 50; there are only 32, and only 24 of them are in fact working on the task force."

Premier, who, between you and your Attorney General, is mistaken about these important issues?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The Attorney General is always right.

Mr. Hampton: The problem here is that young people are dying while you and your Attorney General can't get the numbers straight. You also said that there are 34 new judges. Well, Premier, we checked that as well: As far as we can determine, your government has only appointed 15 new judges, and none of those new judges has been appointed since this gun violence started breaking out on the streets of Toronto.

I ask you again, Premier: Were you mistaken in what you said on that issue again yesterday?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: With respect to the crown attorneys, 32 are specifically hired to deal with the new guns and gangs task force. With respect to judges, I'm advised that there are in fact 39 on the job.

I can tell the member opposite that we are working as quickly as we can, as hard as we can, to ensure that we have the necessary crowns in place and the necessary judges in place to attack this problem of crime in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Today is National Housing Day, and on a day such as this I think it's important for Ontarians to understand a major difference between our Premier and the opposition leader.

In a recent interview, John Tory had this to say about affordable housing: "The government should not be in the housing business, except, perhaps, for people who are sort of mentally disabled or addicts, like assisted housing where you have special housing and so on. But the government, you know, they shouldn't build or operate housing, in my view, because it's just not what government's good at. And I'm just being straightforward with you. That's my view."

I'm sure we all appreciate Mr. Tory's honesty. Thankfully, Premier McGuinty and our party hold a different view. We believe that the role of assisting Ontario's most vulnerable citizens in finding a place to call home is an important one for our government to play.

Minister, can you tell me what action our government has taken since our election to provide affordable housing for Ontarians?

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I certainly would like to thank the member for his question. I know that he's a great advocate for social housing in the Peterborough area.

As he well knows, for the first time in almost a generation—at least in the eight years that the Tories were in office—earlier this year, this government signed an agreement with the federal government in which we matched the dollars for affordable housing that the federal government had put forward some two or three years ago in the amount of \$301 million. We also put \$50 billion aside as part of our strong communities rent supplement program, and of course there's the rent bank of \$10 million, which is to help individuals who are involved in emergency situations and need help with a

month or two of rent when they are involved in those kinds of situations.

We're also very pleased with the pilot project, which was quite successful here in Toronto, that gave the opportunity for 400 families to get safe and affordable housing.

Mr. Leal: I'm pleased to hear from the Minister that indeed our government is back into affordable housing in a meaningful and significant way after the previous government did absolutely nothing.

Since our election, we've broken ground and completed a number of projects across Ontario in communities such as Waterloo, Guelph, Hamilton, Brantford, Vaughan, Peterborough and Kingston. I also understand that new, affordable homeownership units are being built in Markham, Pickering and Scarborough. Specifically, Minister, can you tell us, through this government's enhancement improvements to the affordable housing agreement, how many units are now under construction and development, and how many units are now complete and occupied by Ontario families who desperately need affordable housing?

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: I'm sure the member realizes, and all the members realize, that it takes a while to get the housing programs up and running, to get the necessary approvals from the municipalities to get the zoning in line. But I can tell him that, so far, \$85.7 million has actually been spent and 983 units have been completed in some 20 projects throughout the province. Most of these are occupied right now. Another 800 are under construction, and another 2,300 are currently under development.

I should also tell you that in the new affordable housing program that we announced earlier this fall, all 47 service managers have submitted an expression of interest to get involved with both the housing allowance program, which will create some 5,000 units, and the 5,000 units of affordable housing. We have some work to do, but we believe we're on the right track. If there are any projects that are immediately ready to go, they will be eligible under the strong start program, which was allocated about \$25 million. Ontario is back in the housing business.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): My question is to the Minister of Health. Doctors in this province are becoming increasingly concerned about the inability of your government to respond to patient needs. Earlier this week, the OMA said in a press release, "Physician Resource Crisis Continues to Deepen in Ontario," and today, the emergency room doctors told us that worsening wait times in emergency rooms are contributing to more adverse patient outcomes and more suffering and pain as patients wait longer.

Minister, will you at least acknowledge, as these doctors have indicated today, that emergency room wait times are worsening. Will you also, as they have asked, work with health professionals to create a sustainable plan to reduce wait times for patients in this province?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Well, holy moly, Mr. Speaker—is that OK?

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The first thing I want to ask is why that honourable member, who is part of a party that's a proponent for a \$2.4-billion cut to health care, won't stand in her place and acknowledge it.

You want to pretend that you guys aren't part of that connection to Mike Harris, but we see lots of evidence every day that that continues: no honesty in terms of the decisions made by the previous government to reduce by almost 7,200 the number of beds in health care. That occurred on your watch, when you were a minister of the crown.

You ask me to stand in my place and acknowledge something that can't be proven. In fact, I'm the only one who has offered any statistic today, and that's about the declining number of people who are seeking care in the Credit Valley Hospital emergency room in a high-growth part of our province. We've made a \$2.35-billion investment.

Yes, we have challenges in our emergency rooms. This is a long-standing challenge in the Ontario health care system. It's been here for decades, and we're going to work on solutions that are different from the one the honourable member tried, which was to pour hundreds of millions of dollars down the drain and get no result for it whatsoever.

Mrs. Witmer: I don't believe that people in this province who are waiting in emergency rooms are very impressed with your response or your lack of compassion or understanding. We actually launched the most comprehensive emergency room strategy in Canada in 1998 and we increased the capacity in our emergency rooms.

We have heard from the emergency room physicians. They came here today because they're concerned for their patients. They say there's an immediate need for resources—for beds and for nurses—and they're saying that your decision to force hospitals to balance their budgets is forcing hospitals to lay off nurses and close beds. I am asking you today, Minister, will you guarantee today, particularly with flu season upon us, that no more nurses are laid off and no more beds are closed in our hospitals?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I think this honourable member should be ashamed. I don't say this lightly. She talks about her program in 1998, this fantastic ED program. Here's what she said about its effect two years after:

"In meeting with our stakeholders, no one can quite identify the reason for the problem. It seems that at certain times in the day and on certain days there are more people who are presenting themselves at the emergency room door.... No one quite understands why, at certain times, there seems to be a tremendous pressure." That was September 28, 2000.

1510

At the same time, the government she was so proud to be part of was just wrapping up closing 28 hospitals and

7,200 hospital beds in this province. Contrast that with a \$2.35-billion investment: ED alternate funding arrangement for emergency room doctors—more money for them, more resources; 3,000 new nurses; 69 family health teams; 39 new community health centres; a 13% investment in community care last year alone. This is a government investing across the breadth of health care and—

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

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto–Danforth): Premier, today I reintroduced my bill to make sexual harassment a charge under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. I introduced it last fall. It was allowed to die on the order paper. Experts say that had such legislation been enforced, it could have helped to prevent the murder of Lori Dupont, the nurse and single mother who, tragically, was stabbed at her workplace by a co-worker whom she feared.

Premier, there is evidence now, and there has been for some years, that this type of legislation can save lives. In light of that, will you pass it today?

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

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): Once again, on behalf of the government, we send our condolences to the family of the nurse.

I think it's important to realize that, as the Ministry of Labour, we are waiting for notification of the completion of the police investigation and a coroner's report that is going to be completed. I think it's appropriate in those circumstances, since there are two ongoing investigations, that we need to wait and see what the results of those are and what recommendations may be forthcoming.

Certainly, as a government, we do not tolerate violence in the workplace. We encourage employers in this province to review the practices and procedures that they have in place, to ensure that they have good policies in place to prevent workplace harassment.

Ms. Churley: Making sexual harassment a charge under the Occupational Health and Safety Act has been called for for a long time. It was called for after Theresa Vince was murdered in the workplace in 1996.

Last year, the Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children and the Ontario Federation of Labour again called for such reform. Your caucus colleague Pat Hoy presented a private member's bill when he and you were in opposition that is very similar to what I have introduced now. Had Pat's bill or mine been acted on, Lori Dupont's life might have been saved.

Premier, will you pass this legislation before you today to prevent another woman's murder in the workplace because of sexual harassment?

Hon. Mr. Peters: Again, I reiterate that, as a government—and I think every one of us in this chamber—we do not tolerate workplace violence. Again, we ask that

employers review the procedures that they have in place. I think it's important to recognize that we are going to be hiring an additional 69 health and safety inspectors. Certainly as those inspectors come on the job, one of our focuses is going to be in our health care sector.

But for the member to know as well, I have asked my ministry staff to look at other jurisdictions. You've cited Quebec as an example. Most provinces in Canada right now are undertaking a comprehensive review of this issue. I have asked my staff to look at what other jurisdictions are doing.

Specifically on the Windsor situation, since there are the police investigation and a coroner's investigation, it would be inappropriate to comment on that. But we are prepared to look at this issue because, again, workplace violence shall not be tolerated.

IMMIGRANT SERVICES SERVICES AUX IMMIGRANTS

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): My question is to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

This province is dependent on the skills new Ontarians bring with them as they settle in our province. Unfortunately, the process of becoming part of our communities has traditionally not been easy, with cultural and language barriers impeding their ability to truly feel part of our provincial landscape.

Yesterday, you signed an historic agreement with the federal government that will increase federal funding for Ontario's newcomers, and for that I congratulate you and the Premier. Minister, can you tell us why this agreement is so important and what this money will do to reverse the trend of difficulty faced by Ontario's new arrivals?

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I'd like to thank the member from Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh for his question. I would like to say to him that, due to the persistence of the Premier in insisting that the federal government fund newcomer settlement fairly in Ontario, and after 20 years of trying, the government of Ontario has finally gotten the federal government to invest in Ontario's newcomer settlement programs. That's after government after government either wasn't interested or didn't succeed. Our Premier succeeded in getting that money. That's \$920 million invested in these newcomer settlement programs that will go directly to the integration of our newcomers to overcome barriers. Those are programs that are going to mean more success. It is also going to mean more success for Ontario's economy. That's what the Premier has achieved. That's what the NDP does not support. That money is for Ontario.

Mr. Brownell: Thank you, Minister. I know that this government appreciates the contributions of our immigrant population.

Once they have settled into their new communities, the next big hurdle many face is mastering one of the two

official languages. Comme j'essaie maintenant d'améliorer mon français et d'apprendre un peu de mohawk, je connais bien la difficulté d'apprendre une nouvelle langue.

Applause.

Mr. Brownell: That's my contribution.

Minister, although many consider English to be the major tongue for much of western and northern Ontario, French is equally important in the east of the province, in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh. For many new arrivals to be able to participate fully in our communities, they must have the opportunity to learn this language as well. Can you tell us how this new funding will ensure that Ontarians receive proper training in both English and French?

Hon. Mr. Colle: This investment of \$920 million will ensure that there are more robust English-as-a-second-language programs and French-as-a-second-language programs that will meet not only basic English or French needs, but the English or French they need to achieve success in their jobs. Whether they be in business or whether they be in the field of science, it will be career-based English or French.

And let me say: ce nouveau financement va nous permettre d'offrir plus de classes de formation linguistique aux nouveaux Ontariens, à plus de niveaux. Les nouveaux arrivants pourront ainsi apprendre la langue de leur profession, qu'ils travaillent dans la technologie ou dans les affaires commerciales.

This is going to finally—

Applause.

Hon. Mr. Colle: It would have been easier in Italian. But I would say this is about investing in our franco-phone communities. This is investing in the capacity to—

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

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): My question today is for the Minister of Education. Last year I stood up with the member from Simcoe North and asked you to resolve a transportation issue affecting students and families in the Carden–Dalton areas of my riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock. I told you then about the approximately 150 students in these former townships who for generations have taken their elementary and secondary school education with the Simcoe County District School Board. Many of them have travelled and are in the galleries today.

Minister, a year has passed, and still your government has not found a way to resolve this issue. The local municipalities, student councils and myself believe it is time to put politics second and students first. Surely these students and families have a right to expect a decision. When are you going to make that decision?

1520

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I hope that the member opposite has spoken a little more

frankly to the people in the gallery about her own position. Last year, she came to us, and I have a letter here from the director of education that says, "As a direct result of the intervention from the minister, Gerard Kennedy, we have provided transportation that will gain time for the two boards to resolve" this issue. We resolved this problem once.

This is a local school board issue. At that time, I found the member opposite was in favour. There are 89 children in one board; 69 children in another board.

The member opposite, in her supplementary, I'm sure, will stand up and say what solution she advocates, because some are advocating a boundary change; many who have written to me want it to be left the same. For me, this is clearly an issue to have the local boards resolve, but I ask the member opposite to express in her supplementary what she wants done in that area. Does she want her residents moved outside of her area, and give up on them, or does she want to hang on to them and have another solution in mind? I look forward to seeing the solution she has.

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

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Minister, today we have in the gallery, all around us, from Carden and Dalton, parents and students who have had to live with this uncertainty for the last two years. They have travelled here today to ask you to permanently find a solution so that the children of Carden and Dalton can attend Simcoe county schools. Those are the same schools that the Ministry of Education has funded in the past with major expansions. They are also the schools that the Carden and Dalton families have attended for the last 50 years.

Minister, please provide a decision today. Please put these students first. Please tell this House and these people who are visiting us here today what you plan to do to resolve this situation permanently.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Again, each of the local members, and I appreciate this very much, has written, and they were responded to. We helped the local boards in an intervention to make sure that transportation was sustained.

I want to say very clearly: We do expect, on behalf of any of the families that are affected, certainty from the education system. We are paying for the transportation of children who may have to go to school in another place, but as far as we're concerned, the dollars are being provided.

I would say this, because the government opposite was always blaming school boards and so on: We are looking forward to the boards finding a resolution. If the boards cannot find a resolution, we will move with mediation, with other assistance to find a resolution, because we have 90 students on the one hand that are being educated in one county; 70 students on the other hand.

The local members have no idea what they want done about it. We ourselves at the province will work with the boards. We will get an equitable solution, and we will

take this anxiety off of the backs of families, where it doesn't belong.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to Minister of Health. The Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors today confirmed what I've said for many months now: that most of the funding you've announced for long-term care has not gone to direct services for residents in our homes who need those services. OANHSS said: "What you find is that most of this increased funding has not been allocated to direct care and services. In fact, only about a third of the total announced increases can be legitimately described as enhancing care."

Minister, during the election your government promised to provide an additional \$6,000 in care for every resident in long-term-care homes. When are you going to deliver on that promise?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Using the honourable member's logic, when you open a new bed in extended care, you haven't enhanced care for the people of the province of Ontario. This is the math that that member, who was not so good at it during her days in government, likes—

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): George, do you have to put everybody down?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Why don't you get another question, Elizabeth, please?

The circumstances that we're dealing with in 2005-06 include, in the long-term-care homes program budget, an investment increase of \$264 million. Part and parcel of that, and this evidence has been presented to the honourable member in response to an FOI request, indicates that, of the commitment to hire 2,000 new staff, by surveying, 1,627 full-time equivalents have been hired to date.

In addition, we've got new regs in 2005 for 24/7 RN coverage and an extension of the number of baths per week. We've increased the comfort allowance for the first time in 20 years. All of these things cost money, and all of them are about enhancements to care for the people of the province of Ontario.

Ms. Martel: It wasn't only OANHSS that was here today to express concerns about the lack of adequate funding for residents in long-term-care homes. They were joined by the Canadian Pensioners Concerned, Concerned Friends of Ontario Citizens in Care Facilities, Ontario Association of Residents' Councils, Ontario Society of Senior Citizens' Organizations and the United Senior Citizens of Ontario. All of these organizations were here today to make it clear that despite the election promise of the McGuinty Liberal government to increase funding per resident in every home by \$6,000, in fact this government has only increased funding by \$2,000 for every resident in this province. The result is that residents are receiving about two hours of hands-on care a day when they need at least three, there are not enough personal support workers to meet needs, the staff can't

provide the rehabilitation that's needed and only a fraction of residents who need mental health services are receiving them. I ask you again, Minister, on behalf of all of these organizations—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Response, the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I appreciated the honourable member's question, particularly the acknowledgement of the efforts and the progress that we have made toward putting more resources to enhance the care in our long-term-care homes. We're the first to acknowledge many accounts—this is not the only one today—of organizations that have come forward indicating that several hundred million additional dollars would do the trick just nicely. This, of course, is the challenge that we grapple with.

Accordingly, our commitments have included a \$264-million enhancement to the funding on long-term care this year. I think that speaks as a pretty good example of the progress we're making. In addition, we've moved forward with freezing resident co-payment fees. This creates more cash on hand for residents in these homes. This is an additional cost of \$72.8 million. We supported family and resident councils, tougher compliance and enforcement, a 1-800 action line and a public reporting Web site. The point is that on a variety of files in health care, there's more work to do. There's also ample evidence that we've done quite—

The Speaker: New question.

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): My riding of London–Fanshawe is home to many students and young people looking for ways to improve their quality of life and the quality and variety of work experience in the future. One of the ways young people in my riding are able to gain knowledge and learn new skills is through apprenticeships. There is a great need and a great demand for more apprenticeships in Ontario. I have had many people ask me when the government would move forward on the creation of an apprenticeship program. We are all aware of the need for more apprenticeships across the province, and many in my riding are hoping to get an apprenticeship in their field of interest.

Today there was an announcement made by the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities regarding the Ontario youth apprenticeship program. My question for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities is how his announcement today will affect my constituents, who are hoping—

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

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I'd like to thank the member from London–Fanshawe for his advocacy on behalf of the young people in the riding.

Interjection: Hear, hear.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: That's absolutely right. He has been a passionate advocate for opportunities for all young people, particularly those who might be interested

in the trades. He's correct in saying that the Ontario youth apprenticeship program is a marvellous opportunity for trades.

Today, I had the opportunity to announce an additional \$1.25 million for OYAP this year. What does that mean? That means another almost \$60,000 to the Thames Valley board, and London–Fanshawe will benefit. It means an additional 1,500 students are going to have the opportunity for the youth apprenticeship program this year. It means greater exposure to apprenticeships. It means a brighter future—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Ramal: I am happy to hear the minister's response. This is going to be a great investment for people in my riding and across the province. I believe there will be many in my constituency who will be able to apply for this program, and I will be more than happy to help them in their search for new skills and knowledge.

Minister, I am happy that the government is keeping skills training and apprenticeship a high priority, but I imagine that this is not the only initiative taken by your ministry to improve and advance skills training and apprenticeship. Could you tell me what other initiatives have been taken to improve skills and training in Ontario?

1530

Hon. Mr. Bentley: You know, there's so much to say in so little time, but I'll make an effort.

In addition to OYAP for young people, just a few weeks ago, we announced a co-op diploma program extension, which will provide 1,000 students with the opportunity to get both the beginnings of an apprenticeship and a college diploma. What a great opportunity that is. In addition, a program for 100 youth at risk through five different programs. We have more good news to come, because we have pre-apprenticeship programs, an expansion to our apprenticeship training.

I know you want to hear more, but we have to save some time. I'd like to thank the member for London–Fanshawe for all his hard advocacy on this issue.

PETITIONS

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): To the Legislature of Ontario:

“Whereas students of (the former) Carden and Dalton townships are entitled to accommodation in and transportation provided to Simcoe county schools, yet now are being treated as out-of-area students;

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

“(1) Transportation is provided immediately to all students of Carden and Dalton townships from their homes/previously established bus stops to the most appropriate schools within the Simcoe County District School Board boundary;

“(2) Modify the Trillium Lakelands District School Board (TLDSB)/Simcoe County District School Board (SCDSB) boundary to include (the majority of) Carden and Dalton townships within the Simcoe county boundary. Such boundary change is implemented prior to December 31, 2005.”

It is signed by hundreds of parents from my riding. Mr. Kennedy, I hope you're listening.

Interjection: He's not.

Ms. Scott: He's not.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I hope that everyone can hear me. My voice is a little better today.

I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It read as follows:

“Whereas property assessment now occurs to an annual basis;

“Whereas the Mike Harris government created the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) to deflect criticism of property assessment methodology from the province;

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government promised to create a fair and equitable system of assessment; and

“Whereas property values are not related to the cost of municipal services nor to the ability of taxpayers to pay,

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately create a new system of property assessment that provides property and business owners with fair and equitable assessments that are stable and transparent that a property owner will clearly be able to understand.”

I'm in agreement and affix my signature thereto.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario sent to me by a group of residents of Brampton and Georgetown. It deals with access to trades and professions for newcomers to Canada, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

“Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

“Whereas Ontario, its businesses, its people and its institutions badly need the professional, managerial and technical skills that many newcomers to Canada have and want to use;

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

“That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the other institutions and agencies of and within the government of Ontario, undertake specific and proactive measures to work with the bodies regulating access to Ontario's professions, trades and other occupations in order that newcomers to Canada gain fair, timely and cost-effective access to certification and other measures that facilitate the entry, or re-entry, of skilled workers and professionals trained outside Canada into the Canadian workforce.”

I agree with this petition. I'm going to affix my signature to it and ask the page, Richard, to carry it for me.

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas students of (the former) Carden and Dalton townships are entitled to accommodation in and transportation provided to Simcoe county schools, yet now are being treated as out-of-area students;

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

“(1) Transportation is provided immediately to all students of Carden and Dalton townships from their homes/previously established bus stops to the most appropriate schools within the Simcoe County District School Board boundary;

“(2) Modify the Trillium Lakelands District School Board (TLDSB)/Simcoe County District School Board (SCDSB) boundary to include (the majority of) Carden and Dalton townships within the Simcoe county boundary. Such boundary change is implemented prior to December 31, 2005.”

On behalf of all these folks who have signed this, I'm pleased to sign it as well.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): 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 on 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.”

It has been signed by many of my constituents, and I affix my own name and submit it.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that was delivered to me by Roxanna Spruyt-Rocks of the Independent Living Residences for the Deafblind in Ontario. It reads as follows:

“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 on 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 am pleased to affix my signature to this petition.

DIABETES TREATMENT

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I have two petitions today.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“We are” requesting “that all diabetic supplies as prescribed by an endocrinologist or medical doctor be covered under the Ontario health insurance plan.

“Diabetes costs Canadian taxpayers \$13 billion a year and increasing! It is the leading cause of death and hospitalization in Canada. Many people with diabetes cannot afford the ongoing expense of managing the disease. They cut corners to save money. They rip test strips in half, cut down on the number of times they test their blood and even reuse lancets and needles. These cost-saving measures often have tumultuous and disastrous health consequences. Persons with diabetes need and deserve financial assistance to cope with the escalating cost of managing diabetes.

“We think it is in all Ontario’s and the government’s best interest to support diabetics with the supplies that each individual needs to obtain optimum glucose control. Good blood glucose control reduces or eliminates kidney failure by 50%, blindness by 76%, nerve damage by 60%, cardiac disease by 35% and even amputations. Just think of how many dollars can be saved by the Ministry of Health if diabetics had a chance to gain optimum glucose control.”

I affix my signature to it.

1540

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition here that is similar to the ones being read. It’s such an important issue on behalf of my constituents.

“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 on 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 signature, as I agree with it.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): My petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario reads:

“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 on 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 support the intent of this petition, and I will sign my signature to it.

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound): I must say at the start that I’m really pleased to see that the Treasurer, Mr. Dwight Duncan, is here to listen to this petition, because I know he is very interested and is probably going to look after it. It’s 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 on 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've also signed this.

AGGREGATE EXTRACTION

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I've got a petition to rescind the joint board decision of June 8, 2005, approving the applications of Dufferin Aggregates to extend its mining licence in the Niagara Escarpment World Biosphere Reserve.

“To the Legislature of Ontario:

“There are numerous reasons for rescinding the joint board decision including the following:

“Whereas the decision contravenes the purpose of the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act;

“Whereas the decision sets precedent for quarry expansion licences on the Niagara Escarpment;

“Whereas this decision could lead to habitat destruction for species of concern;

“Whereas escarpment rural lands are equivalent to buffer designation under the United Nations' framework for biosphere reserve...;

“Whereas to attempt to maintain the significant wetlands and the streams course water will have to be pumped in perpetuity;

“Whereas this decision allows for pumping 50 feet ... below the water table;

“Whereas the 50-foot dams to be constructed have a potential for failure;

“Whereas aggregate can be readily accessed close to market off the Niagara Escarpment in land that is not protected or at risk;

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

“We call on the government of Ontario to:

Issue an order by the Lieutenant Governor in Council ... rescinding the decision made by the joint board dated June 8, 2005, approving the applications of Dufferin Aggregates in regards to this matter;

Issue an order by the cabinet substituting for the decision of the board on this matter, a decision rejecting the applications of Dufferin.”

CANCER CARE

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm pleased to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which reads as follows:

“Whereas people of all ages with cancer have the right to seek treatment in their own area without the added trauma and obstacles imposed by having to travel great distances while unwell; and

“Whereas the citizens of Barrie and Innisfil”—and Bradford West Gwillimbury—“have shown their good faith and continue to fundraise for their share of the cost for the development of a regional cancer centre, enabling area patients to receive their life-saving treatment close to home, near their family and friends; and

“Whereas the building of a regional cancer care centre will remove the barrier for area patients to receive their life-saving treatment close to home;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to provide the approvals and funding necessary to commence construction of the Royal Victoria Hospital cancer care centre.”

I affix my signature.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition to the Legislature of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas Portuguese Canadians number 171,545 in the Toronto census metropolitan area, many of whom encounter serious barriers (language, culture and location) to accessing community and long-term-care services; and

“There are no long-term-care homes dedicated to the needs of Portuguese Canadian seniors; and

“Camões House for the Aged and Portuguese Community Centre of Toronto is proposing a partnership with a local long-term-care provider to purchase up to 160 existing beds in the Toronto area (for a nominal fee), to develop a Portuguese Canadian long-term-care home in Toronto. This partnership is tentative and is dependent on the approval of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care;

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

“We encourage the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, his staff, and members of the Legislature to support the Camões proposal; and to make the appropriate administrative and policy changes required to develop a Portuguese Canadian long-term-care home in Toronto.”

Since I agree with this petition, I'm delighted to sign it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2005 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2005

SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES (N° 2)

Mr. Duncan moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 18, An Act to implement 2005 Budget measures and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 18, Loi mettant en

œuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2005 et modifiant diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Would the minister choose to lead off the debate? I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I'm pleased to rise to speak about Bill 18, and I'll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member for Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge.

I'm proud to be here today to speak to this bill. It's an important part of our government's budgetary policy. This bill implements measures arising from this year's budget—a budget that delivers on what Ontarians want. This bill proposes amendments to some 23 provincial statutes. However, I don't propose to go into a great deal of detail on all of these amendments at this time. As I stated, my parliamentary assistant will be speaking to this bill as well, and at this time, I would like to focus my comments on those measures that fall under two broad areas: those that would support investment and job creation in the province, and those that underscore our commitment to fairness, accountability and transparency. I will begin by discussing some of our proposed changes to the tax system.

Seniors have given, and continue to give, so much to our communities. Their contribution, their commitment to building a stronger, more prosperous Ontario has been key to our collective success. We owe them more than just a debt of gratitude. We owe them a dignified life, befitting who they are and what they have accomplished in their lives. Indeed, the author Tom Brokaw wrote the book about the greatest generation, and indeed, our parents and grandparents were part of the greatest generation—the generation that lived through the Great Depression and fought two world wars. We owe them a dignified life, befitting who they are and what they've accomplished.

So in this bill, we are proposing changes to the Income Tax Act that would ensure that seniors get to keep more of their hard-earned income. With the consent of the Legislature, our bill will ensure that seniors are not financially penalized by having their property and sales tax credits reduced for 2005, if there is a cost-of-living increase in the amount of federal old age security and the federal guaranteed income supplement. This is not only good news for seniors, but good news for everyone. I hope that the opposition won't vote against this bill or block this bill, because that's an important part of the bill, and something I think we would all want to support.

1550

This amendment builds on the positive initiatives this government has already put in place for seniors, such as increasing the available property tax credit to \$625 for low- and middle-income seniors—\$625, something we on this side of the House are very, very proud of. I know my colleagues voted in favour of it and spoke in favour of it. Unfortunately, the New Democrats and the Conservatives voted against it, voted against helping our

seniors stay in their homes—something they all speak a good game about, but again, I remind you that they voted against it when they had the chance. I can only hope that they won't vote against this particular bill, which provides, I think, this tremendous incentive for seniors.

As we continue to help Ontario's aging population, we have not forgotten the other end of the spectrum. Young people who are just entering the workforce are equally important. As members will recall, we introduced the apprenticeship training tax credit in our first budget, in 2004. This bill contains a number of provisions to help ensure effectiveness of this tax credit, which is a key element in our plan to increase the number of new annual entrants into apprenticeship by 7,000, reaching 26,000 new entrants annually by 2007-08. Imagine that: a policy that increases the number of apprenticeships and trains young people for high-paying, high-skilled jobs. In this budget, the goal in turn supports our \$6.2-billion Reaching Higher plan, the most ambitious investment in post-secondary education in this province in 40 years.

We are also taking steps to parallel a new federal tax credit for adoption and a recent federal enhancement to the medical expense tax credit. Similarly, we are proposing to adopt the tax shelter rolls in the federal Income Tax Act as they relate to corporations. Those who follow our venture capital sector will know that we have already announced our intention to phase out the provincial tax credit for labour-sponsored investment funds by the end of 2010. The bill before us would give legislative and regulatory force to key elements of our plan, including additional information about the timeliness for an orderly windup of this tax credit and other important new rules. We continue to consult with those involved in this area of our economy and will report back on future developments in due course.

I want to turn my attention now to another important area of our economy, and our culture, and that is book publishing. Although Ontario's book publishing sector accounts for 39% of the country's book publishers, it produces 49% of new or reprinted titles, and generates, indeed, 71% of total book sale revenue; all this, while employing more than six out of every 10 people who work in the business in Canada and generating \$1.7 billion in annual revenues—some 71% of the national total. I am particularly proud that this bill would expand the Ontario book publishing tax credit to recognize the importance of children's books. Specifically, we're proposing to increase from one to four the categories of children's books eligible for the credit. It would also increase the number of eligible authors, making them eligible for up to 12 books, as opposed to three now. As a father myself, I value the contribution children's authors make to our society and I am proud that we are expanding the tax credit, and again, I would be most surprised if the opposition parties voted against this very, very important initiative.

For instance, the New Democrats voted against cancelling the corporate tax credits. They voted against that. They voted against our government's plan to re-

invest in education and health care. Of course, we know that the priority of the Tories is tax cuts for their wealthy friends, whereas this government is investing in education, health care, economic infrastructure and renewal.

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The members laugh, but their voting records are clear and unequivocal. They've already indicated they're going to vote against these important measures—

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): They're at the Albany Club.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Yes, they're at the Albany Club. They would probably vote for tax credits for members of the Albany Club, but when it comes to children's book authors and senior citizens, they'll vote it down. I really hope they'll think long and hard before voting against these important measures, because their record has not been, in our view, the best record when it comes to that.

As we evolve to become a more knowledge-based economy, the small corner stores of yesterday are increasingly finding that software vendors and computer service outlets are becoming their next door neighbours. Historically, they faced a menu of taxable and non-taxable items, requiring them to determine their tax liability. Our fall budget bill proposes a way to address this situation and simplify matters for small vendors—once again, the government responding to our small business community, once again reducing red tape. Yet once again, I fear the Conservatives will vote against this.

Certainly I would expect the New Democrats to vote against something of this nature, and they probably will. I hope they won't try to block the bill but will allow it to be passed in an orderly fashion so that these important measures, which will help our small businesses, will become the law of the province.

Under our proposed program, small software vendors would be able to charge a blended rate of 6% on certain bundled transactions, provided the customer agrees. Spared from having to figure out which parts are taxable and which are not, vendors could realize substantial administrative and cost savings.

While we're on the subject of recognizing changes in our economy, I'd like to spend a moment talking about our proposed amendments to the Pension Benefits Act. When the act was last rewritten in 1986, there were a small number of jointly sponsored defined benefit pension plans with very few members. The act did not explicitly recognize this type of pension plan. Today, as we all know, they have become much more prevalent. The five largest such plans account for one third of all pension plan members in Ontario.

Earlier this year, the officials in my ministry consulted with our stakeholders on a number of proposals that would enable jointly sponsored plans to comply with the Pension Benefits Act and be much easier to administer. I am proud to say that the response we received to our proposals from pension plans, employers, unions and pension professionals was overwhelmingly positive. The measures we have proposed in this bill would not affect

the benefit provisions of the affected pension plans. They update the regulations in a way that I believe all parties will find satisfactory.

In a similar vein, we are proposing a number of changes under the Securities Act reflecting our commitment to modernized securities regulation and encouraging high standards of investor protection and corporate governance. Our proposed changes also address a number of recommendations made by the standing committee on finance and economic affairs in its unanimous report on the five-year review of the Securities Act.

I want to pause for a moment. I see the government House leader here. This government listens to what members of provincial Parliament have to say—all members of provincial Parliament—through their committees. Here we have a unanimous report from that committee. Unlike the previous government, we're prepared to act on those kinds of recommendations, and we've contained them in this bill. I do hope again that having supported this in committee, the members of the opposition won't now vote against the budget bill that contains, as I have indicated, a number of proposals and a variety of pieces of legislation, most of which have been accepted by stakeholders and I think most of which we can agree form the basis of good public policy.

Some of the examples of the new provisions with respect to the Ontario Securities Commission: We will enhance the ability of the commission to design governance frameworks for investment fund conflicts of interest. This would give the OSC the flexibility to respond as best practices for the governance of public companies continue to evolve. We are also preparing measures for enhanced legislative oversight of the OSC. I'm very proud of these measures, and I know that my colleague the Honourable Gerry Phillips would be happy to provide additional detail to interested members in his role as the minister responsible for securities regulation. Accountability must also be a watchword in the public sector. This government, more than any previous government, has shown genuine leadership in this regard.

1600

I am pleased to report that at the request of my colleague the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, we've included in this bill provisions affecting the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corp. Specifically, we have proposed two amendments that would support the corporation's transition from planning to implementation. Think of the significance of that to Toronto: moving the waterfront corporation from planning to implementation. That is extremely important, and I think it marks an important turning point as we the government of Ontario work with the people of Toronto on the eventual development of their waterfront in a way that all of us would be most proud of.

The first specific amendment that we're proposing would support the corporation's transition from planning to implementation, as I said. It would also allow the province and the city of Toronto to appoint one elected official each to the corporation's board of directors. The

second would allow the corporation to act as an agent on behalf of the province and the city on a case-by-case basis. Taken together, the elements of this bill, especially when seen in combination with Bill 197, accurately and fully reflect the priorities of our government.

I would like to conclude with a quotation that provides a degree of insight into our approach to this bill and to the management of government in general. Former US President Calvin Coolidge said:

“Good government cannot be found on the bargain counter. We have seen samples of bargain counter government in the past when low tax rates were secured by increasing the bonded debt for current expenses or refusing to keep our institutions up to the standard in repairs, extensions, equipment and accommodations. I refuse ... to endorse that method of sham and shoddy economy.”

I would point out to the members that President Coolidge was in fact a Republican, but clearly a politician of vision, compassion, caring and commitment. I'm proud to say that our government also shares these values.

Our budget legislation advances our plan for the province's long-term growth and prosperity. It reiterates and builds on our commitment to transparency and accountability, and it demonstrates the continuation of our track record of sound, prudent fiscal and economic management. These are the same qualities I believe you will find in this bill, and they are the qualities that infuse our government.

I appreciate the members' attention in this matter, and I look forward to the debate. Again, I want to re-emphasize that this government's commitments are to the best public education system we can have, to the best public health care system we can have, to investments in our infrastructure and to getting the fundamentals right. To that end, we have moved to undo the damage of eight years of Conservative government in this province.

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Finance indicated he is sharing his time with his parliamentary assistant. I recognize the member for Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): It gives me great pleasure to rise in the Legislature today and add my voice to that of the Minister of Finance regarding the fall budget bill, Bill 18, an Act to implement 2005 Budget measures and amend various Acts. This important piece of legislation delivers on our spring budget commitments to build a strong economy in a culture of transparency and accountability. I'm particularly pleased that we managed to complete both debate earlier this afternoon and third reading on Bill 197, another aspect of the 2005-06 budget process.

As Minister Duncan mentioned, the bill proposes amendments to some 23 provincial statutes in total. I'd like to begin my tour of Bill 18 by highlighting just a few and by focusing on one issue in particular that alone affects some three different statutes within the overall legislative framework, the three statutes being the Insurance Act, the Highway Traffic Act and the Compulsory Automobile Insurance Act.

We're proposing amendments that would, if they were enacted, help keep automobile leasing and rental companies vibrant and would ensure that consumers have competition and choice in the automotive market. How do we propose to achieve that? First, by amending the Highway Traffic Act and the Insurance Act to provide for a \$1-million cap on the vicarious liability of leasing and rental companies. Certain commercial vehicles would even have a higher cap, because it seems appropriate to provide that higher level of protection in those particular instances.

What we're doing is amending priority rules to provide that for leased automobiles, those that are on a long-term rental arrangement, in effect, the auto insurance carried by the leasing customers—called the lessees in this case—is first in line for liability for damages arising from accidents caused by the negligent operation of a motor vehicle.

This is about fairness. Leasing and rental companies don't have control over the actions of the drivers. Those vehicles are in the hands of the drivers for an extended period of time, and there's no direct business relationship, save and except the rental, between the owners of the company and the actual drivers. Continuing to impose uncapped vicarious liability on the basis of ownership may unfairly drive up the cost of doing business for the leasing and rental companies. This would, in turn, drive up the cost of those leased or rented vehicles and thus the cost to the consumer who is choosing that form of auto usage.

A recent settlement for some \$13 million has highlighted the risk exposure for leasing and rental companies. The potential for high awards has led the leasing industry to reconsider, not only in this jurisdiction but in jurisdictions throughout North America, whether they can continue to provide leasing as an affordable option for consumers in this province.

I want to clarify that all other responsibilities and liabilities associated with vehicle ownership are maintained. It's only when a customer causes an accident and the rental or leasing company is being sued only on the basis of its ownership of the vehicle that the company would have a cap on its liability. In all other cases, the status quo would remain. By changing the priority rules, we're placing primary responsibility for accidents on the people with day-to-day care and operation of the vehicle: the lessee, the renter or the driver of that vehicle. For liability purposes, people would be treated the same whether they choose to lease, rent or purchase a vehicle.

It really is about fairness, and it's about helping to ensure that leasing remains an affordable option for drivers in Ontario.

Bill 18 is also about fairness for lower-income senior couples in Ontario. We're proposing to increase the income threshold for senior couples for the Ontario property and sales tax credit. The proposed threshold of \$22,250 would ensure that senior couples, including couples receiving GAINS benefits, do not experience any reduction of their credits as a result of federal adjust-

ments to the old age security and guaranteed income supplement benefits. Without implementation of this change, a senior couple would experience a loss in benefits due to cost-of-living increases in federal seniors' benefits. I don't think I need to explain to anyone in this Legislature that such a loss in benefits for a couple on fixed incomes would be very unfair.

Every \$1 of income over \$22,000 would reduce seniors' benefits by four cents. That doesn't seem like a lot. This in effect means that an increase in income of \$250 would reduce their Ontario property and sales tax credit by some \$10, and incrementally the loss to senior couples increases. If passed, this proposed enhancement would deliver \$2 million in benefits to about 215,000 senior couples in the province of Ontario.

Ontario businesses would also benefit from Bill 18, and one way they'd benefit would be through reduced red tape and increased efficiency in tax administration. For starters, we are proposing to establish a pilot program, which was first announced in the 2005 budget, for small software businesses that would simplify the calculation and collection of retail sales tax. This program would use a method for calculating the tax on software services contracts involving both taxable and non-taxable components.

Businesses that register for the pilot program would no longer have to separate the taxable software services from the bundle of services in a sales contract just to calculate the RST. Instead, with the consent of their customers, they would apply one lower tax rate to the whole price of the contract. The intent of the pilot is to help ease the administrative burdens for small vendors of software services. We will be announcing more details about this program shortly.

1610

It's not the only proposal in this bill, however, that would help to improve administrative efficiency and modernize government. A proposed amendment to the Ministry of Revenue Act would smooth the transition to tax administration by electronic or other alternate means. Despite living in the 21st century, most tax administration is often still done through filing paper documents by mail or by sending cheques. Bill 18 would authorize the minister to approve alternate delivery channels for such things as filing returns, making remittances and conducting business with the ministry. These alternate channels would include the use of electronic forms and e-banking. Many of us are familiar with this in our day-to-day personal banking and business transactions, but it's something that it truly is time for business to have the opportunity to use as well.

This amendment would help us keep up with the changes in technology that would improve efficiency in tax administration. We want to reduce the paper burden for Ontario businesses so they can focus on growing, expanding, and creating jobs here in the province of Ontario.

The minister earlier mentioned that Ontario's publishing industry would also get a boost from Bill 18.

We're proposing to enhance the Ontario book publishing tax credit to increase from one to four the number of categories under which children's books would be eligible. Children's books would now be eligible in the categories of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and biography. This would bring the treatment of children's books published after May 11, 2005, in line with the current treatment for adult books.

There are various administrative amendments proposed in the legislation as well. These measures, while hardly glamorous, will result in some significant changes for Ontario taxpayers and businesses.

Bill 18, however, would also introduce changes of a different sort. If passed, this bill would ensure a number of smaller but still necessary administrative amendments. For example, it would enshrine in law September 1, 2005, as the effective date for the exemption from retail sales tax for car booster seats. That has been a matter of some considerable discussion here in the Legislature over the past year. It would also clarify the application of Ontario's fuel tax to clear fuel and provide authority for calculating, paying, collecting and accounting for retail sales tax on the consumption or use of reusable containers acquired in Canada but refilled in Ontario.

Measures such as these may not be the stuff of headlines, Mr. Speaker, but they are important nonetheless. Ensuring the effectiveness of Ontario's tax laws is part of our commitment to governing our province responsibly, and it's a commitment we take extremely seriously.

We want to parallel some of the federal measures in our 2005 budget measures as well. As is often the case with budget bills, Bill 18 would legislate certain amendments to parallel actions of the federal government. Under the personal income tax system, Ontario automatically parallels many federal changes in accordance with our tax collection agreement. Other changes are often made to provide simplicity for taxpayers.

In our 2005 budget, we announced a proposal to parallel a federal adoption expense tax credit. We also announced an increase to the maximum amounts that can be claimed for dependants through the medical expense tax credit, from \$5,000 to \$10,000. And there is no question that those who are burdened with a large medical expense bill will certainly benefit from a doubling of that tax credit provision. This too would parallel a proposed federal amendment.

Bill 18 also proposes an amendment to adopt the federal rules that restrict the deductibility of charitable donations of a corporation where there is a change of control to the corporation. Currently, there are no provisions in the federal Income Tax Act that allow individuals or corporations to sell or otherwise transfer unused donations. We're proposing to ensure that unused charitable donation deductions cannot be traded, but would rather be treated in a manner similar to the treatment accorded capital losses. This measure would help make our tax system fairer. Our government understands that the effectiveness and fairness of the tax system can be improved and that improvement is some-

thing worth striving for. Bill 18 is a big step in the right direction.

Another amendment that parallels similar amendments made by the federal government concerns the Ontario Corporations Tax Act and the general anti-avoidance rule in the federal Income Tax Act. Recent federal amendments were made to protect tax revenues that would be lost through tax avoidance transactions involving the abuse of provisions in the federal Income Tax Act regulations and tax treaties. Bill 18 would extend the anti-avoidance provision in the Corporations Tax Act to harmonize with the federal changes. This would deliver on a commitment made in the 2005 budget.

To this point, I've had the opportunity to provide a very brief tour of some of the highlights of Bill 18. I know that colleagues in the Legislature will have the opportunity to speak to it and add considerably more detail as the debate through second reading continues. We're determined to deliver on our budget commitments to build a strong economy within a culture of transparency and accountability. That's why Bill 18 would also increase investor confidence in capital markets by moving on recommendations of the standing committee and the five-year review committee for Securities Act reform, and reduce the use of tax credits no longer required by phasing out the tax credits for labour-sponsored investment funds by the end of 2010. The merits of these and other provisions within Bill 18 will be expanded upon during the course of the overall debate.

The minister during his time took the opportunity to comment on a particular matter of interest that I would just like to reiterate. That has to do with the Toronto waterfront corporation. The provisions there, in particular, ensure that there is an opportunity for the municipality and for the province to appoint, if they so choose, elected members to that corporation. I can think of no better opportunity, with the amount of tax dollars being expended, whether municipal dollars or provincial dollars or federal commitments, to ensure that there's an opportunity for the direct representation important to Toronto's waterfront and important to investments in the province of Ontario.

I would like to draw attention to one other aspect of the legislation, under schedule 9, the GO Transit Act, 2001. This legislation will provide for the extension of the municipal development charges bylaws of the act, having them stay in force until the end of 2006, unless they are repealed earlier. I can tell you that municipalities in the greater Toronto area who are dealing with GO Transit will be very pleased with this provision in the act, because the last thing they want to see would be legislation related to their development charges bylaw for GO Transit purposes to lapse. Certainly, with our interest and initiative in enhancing and ensuring transit as a viable means of operation and travel within the province of Ontario and within the GTA in particular, we need to ensure that municipalities continue to collect a development charge related to that.

The legislation covers a wide array of areas. Certainly a number of administrative matters are considered within

the legislation. I'm pleased to have had the opportunity to add a few comments in support of the minister's earlier comments and look forward to the debate from other members of the Legislature during second reading of Bill 18.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): I was interested to listen to the Minister of Finance's comments on this bill. He was investing in education, he was investing in health care, he was investing all over the place, and he was very critical of our government in his comments, because we weren't making these kinds of investments. As I recall, I think we invested a significant amount of money—I think it was about \$10.5 billion—in health care, and several billion dollars in education. I believe it was \$5 billion or \$6 billion over the term of our government.

One thing I think the minister didn't comment on is where this vast amount of money that he's going to reinvest in these areas is going to come from. He will know, as the Minister of Finance—at least I certainly hope he knows; otherwise, the minister of brown out, which he was when he was in energy, is going to brownout this province in a very financial and economic way. The money that is going to come for that reinvestment is going to come from jobs in this province: good, full-time, long-term manufacturing jobs. That's what is going to sustain this province and pay the bills so that we can invest in health care, so that we can invest in education, so that we can invest in the protection of our environment; so we can invest in those things that Ontarians hold true, so we can invest in more roads, controlling to some degree, anyway, the gridlock that paralyzes this province in the morning and the evening drives. Those are the kinds of things that are going to create prosperity in this province, so that we can reinvest the new tax dollars in new jobs.

That's not happening. Over the last two months, we have seen 8,000, 10,000, 12,000 new manufacturing jobs disappear from this province. With every one of those jobs that disappears, a taxpayer goes with it and that money no longer flows into the coffers of the Ontario government. Without that money flowing into the coffers of the Ontario government, it becomes more difficult to reinvest in those things that Ontarians hold dear.

1620

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I listened intently to the Minister of Finance and to his parliamentary assistant, the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge, and what they had to say about this bill. This bill is one of those omnibus bills, one of those bills that contains everything. There are 23 schedules, 23 different acts, and what they are talking about, of course, is the heartthrob, talking about seniors. Well, if you go to the section of the bill, you will see that this bill, I am sure, is being visited in 10 provinces across this country. The provision of this bill will be identical in Quebec, will be identical in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Alberta and British Columbia, because this is simply mirroring what is happening federally in Ottawa.

It will allow seniors to get a maximum of \$625. The provision of the bill is not some kind of tax rate, that seniors are going to end up with \$625, as was intimated. In fact, the provision of the bill quite clearly says that it's a re-enactment and will ensure that property and sales tax credits for a senior who resides with a cohabiting spouse etc. are to a maximum of \$625, or the occupancy cost, whichever is lesser.

When the minister stood up and said that the opposition parties voted against a similar provision in the past, I don't think the opposition parties were opposed to giving seniors more money; we were opposed to Bill 2, and we were opposed to Bill 2 precisely because it was retroactive. I think if you remember that debate, Mr. Speaker, you will know that that was the reason, and not that which was given by the Minister of Finance today.

Ms. Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): I'm pleased to rise to make some comments to this bill. I too heard the Minister of Finance and listened to the member from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge, who went into quite a bit of detail concerning the various provisions that are impacted by this bill. As you know, basically, this bill is to implement a number of the commitments that were made in the 2005 budget act. This is about implementing those things. It's about making sure that we can deal with legislative requirements so that you can then bring into action some of those, if you want, decisions that were made or some of the decisions that we wanted to make vis-à-vis the budget statement. That's basically what this does, and it impacts many, many acts. Again, that is absolutely true.

Again, it reflects the commitments to build a strong economy in the province. It really does. It does it through changes in some of the taxation aspects. It's delivering on the budget commitments to build a strong economy, and building and creating a different culture, a culture of transparency and accountability.

There is also the whole issue of securities and investor confidence, and therefore we are again implementing a number of those requirements that we need to put into legislation to make changes in that respect. This bill is just implementation.

The Acting Speaker: We have time for one last question or comment. I turn to the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I'm pleased to add some comments to the opening speech from the Minister of Finance on Bill 18, a government budget bill. He was complaining about the official opposition voting against the government's budget bills. Well, we're voting against deficit financing. We're voting against increasing the debt of this province. We're voting against the broken promises that are being implemented by this government, such as the broken promise about increasing taxes when we see corporations in this province realizing a 27% increase in taxes since this government came into power two years ago. Families have seen an increase in taxes of some \$900 in terms of the new health tax for the typical family.

We've seen more bad news today on the economic front. We received terrible news at noon today from Thunder Bay that the Cascades paper mill will be closing. That's some 550 employees of Cascades in Thunder Bay who will be losing their jobs sometime around Christmas. This mill is closing because of another broken Liberal promise, and that was the promise to maintain energy prices. High energy prices are a big part of why that mill is moving to Quebec, as far as I understand.

I ask the government, does the government value the forestry sector in Ontario and, if so, then why don't you implement some of the 26 recommendations made by the Minister's Council on Forest Sector Competitiveness to address things like the high wood costs that we have here in Ontario? We now have the highest wood costs in the world, some US\$55 per cubic meter. If you're serious about addressing the problems that are facing the forestry sector, then implement some of those 26 recommendations put forward by the minister's own Council on Forest Sector Competitiveness.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Arthurs: I'm pleased to take a moment or so in response to some of the comments by the members from Halton, Beaches-East York, Sarnia-Lambton and Parry Sound-Muskoka, and we thank them for their comments.

The member from Halton certainly spoke to the need to reinvest and the need for new investments. Let's not forget that in our time in office, there has been the creation of some 214,000 net new jobs in the province of Ontario. That record, as it continues, will see substantial growth and opportunities for young Ontarians, new Ontarians and for those Ontarians who are displaced from jobs because of changing economies.

We are focused on the primary issues, as the minister said. We're focused on education; that's why we have the \$6.2 billion commitment over five years to post-secondary education. We're committed to health transformation and investing in that, not only in dollars, but also in transforming the systems. We're committed to the economy, and thus we've committed \$500 million to an auto investment strategy. To date we've made provisions for funding, as the money flows, as the projects come on stream for Ford, General Motors and Chrysler. It's a good news story that we've done that, particularly as it relates to GM, in light of what happened yesterday. There's a very strong commitment on their part to the Beacon project, and that will see not only the retention of jobs, but it will also see opportunities for growth in the future through educational opportunities and research opportunities to ensure that the automotive sector in Ontario stays strong in the long term.

Clearly, there will be individual companies, individual points in time—this is a sad one that we've seen in the past day or so at GM, but there's a lot of strength in the economy that way: Toyota and its commitment to a new plant in Ontario and the exploration by Honda of the potential for yet another plant. I think there will be yet more opportunities in the future.

This budget bill does some administrative changes. As part of the overall budget strategy, it also stays focused on our key commitments in health, education and the economy.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate on Bill 18? The member Erie–Lincoln.

Applause.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): Thank you, Mr. Speaker and two colleagues, for their great anticipation. I'm happy that one of my favourite members is here, the member from Peterborough, who always seems to listen to my speeches, which I do appreciate, and I enjoy his interjections from time to time—and Middlesex as well.

It's a pleasure to rise and offer up some comments as the official finance critic for the opposition. Bill 18, of course, is now the second budget bill, so to speak, coming from this spring's past budget, then delivered by Minister of Finance Sorbora, and now is legislation introduced by the new Minister of Finance Duncan.

As I always say, whenever we talk about budget bills, be it Bill 18 or Bill 197, it's predecessor, which we voted on today, I think it's always important to put these bills into a larger context in two important areas.

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First, how does it fit in overall with the government's fiscal plan or lack thereof? What is their plan for creating jobs in Ontario? What is their plan for bringing tax relief to hard-pressed and middle-class families, seniors or young people? What is their plan to ensure any kind of fiscal responsibility with the hard-earned tax dollars that come the way of the treasury?

Secondly, a growing concern—and you've seen it dominate question period here, as well as debate in the Legislature this fall session as we head into winter—is the overall state of the economy, particularly the significant decline in manufacturing jobs that has sadly occurred in the province, exacerbated by the devastating news in Oshawa and St. Catharines, and in fact for the province as a whole, with the 3,000-plus jobs being severed by General Motors in those two communities. We would have thought that today we would have heard a better response from the Premier. Maybe my colleagues in the Legislature, in debate on Bill 18, will bring forward a better response as to what the government's plan is to restore Ontario's strong manufacturing base, which traditionally has been the lead in Canada and the envy of the other nine provinces. But as our leader John Tory indicated, we seem to have a “Don't worry, be happy,” approach by Premier McGuinty that seems almost dismissive of the real and pressing concerns felt not only by those families who are facing job losses but those communities as a whole and other auto workers who are concerned about where the axe is going to fall next.

I'll get into those two items as I set the stage for the kind of environment that we greet Bill 18 with today, November 22.

I listened as well to my colleagues the finance minister and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance. This is more to the finance minister, who I think

unfairly, and probably intentionally so, characterized the opposition's approach to this legislation. My colleague from Beaches–East York, properly and in a very statesmanlike manner, admonished the finance minister for his very unfair characterization. I hope he wasn't intentionally creating mischief, but I think he was. Indeed, as my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka indicated, opposition parties are rejecting this bill because it is part of an overall Dalton McGuinty plan to dramatically increase taxes on working families.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize to the member for Erie–Lincoln, but I have to interrupt him to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Haliburton–Victoria–Brock has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Education concerning Carden and Dalton students. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m. Once again, I apologize to the member for Erie–Lincoln. I'm compelled to inform the House of this before 5 o'clock. I should have done it before you started your speech.

I return to the member for Erie–Lincoln.

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2005 (NO. 2)

(continued)

LOI DE 2005

SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES (N° 2)

(suite)

Mr. Hudak: Thank you, Speaker. Of course, that's no problem, and I bow to the Chair. I was pleased to hear that news because I too was dissatisfied by the answer from the Minister of Education.

Interjections.

Mr. Hudak: I can tell by the response in the Legislature that I may not be alone in that disappointment with the Minister of Education's response. I think my colleagues from Haliburton–Victoria–Brock and Simcoe North brought forward a very important issue with respect to the local school boards and bus transportation. We saw the galleries full today with students, parents, teachers and seniors in support of correcting this situation. I commend my colleagues for bringing it to the floor of the Legislature. I'm pleased that Ms. Scott, the member for Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, has registered her dissatisfaction. Maybe now that the Minister of Education has more time to consider the issue, he'll give a much better answer and indicate how he is going to solve this problem a, instead of simply passing the buck.

The Minister of Finance, as I return to my remarks on Bill 18, implied that our opposition to this bill is somehow a vote against seniors. It's a very sad characterization, one that does not, of course, meet with any facts.

Let me say this as well. We oppose the Dalton McGuinty budget bills and the budget plan for a number

of reasons. Among the most important is the devastating increase in taxes, and fees and other burdens that are loading up on the backs of working families; the devastating increases in taxes and new fees and in new burdens they're putting on the backs of seniors. We oppose their budget because of the increasing burden, taxes, fees, cost-of-living increases on young people who are trying to make ends meet. Sadly, even two years into this government, we see no end to their appetite for their tax-and-spend policies.

We also oppose, as my friend from Parry Sound–Muskoka indicated, the government's general approach in terms of their reckless runaway spending. I'll reiterate in the House once more: Some \$13 billion in increased revenue has come into the coffers of the province of Ontario, and despite that record influx of new money coming out of pockets of hard-working families, seniors and young people, this government continues to run a deficit. They have a major runaway spending problem. And, sadly, how can I support a budget bill—Bill 18, this one—when there is no initiative of substance in this bill, nor was there in 197, to correct that situation? In fact, it is hard to believe that the government even plans on running a deficit this year as well, despite this huge influx of new revenue coming into provincial coffers.

To comment back to the Minister of Finance on the seniors issue particularly, this is the government that, as one of its first acts, took away the seniors' property tax benefit. We had passed in the previous government a bill that would forgive the education portions of property taxes for seniors, a bill that would have put some money back into the pockets of seniors on fixed incomes who have already contributed, through decades of work, to their school systems. One of Dalton McGuinty's first acts as Premier was to mercilessly rake that money back from seniors. He added that to the provincial treasury on top of the record other revenues that came in.

Of course, we cannot forget that part of that massive tax hike bill that Dalton McGuinty introduced as one of his first acts in the Legislature was the elimination of the independent school tax credit, which benefited parents who sent their children to independent schools, who still paid taxes into the public system, just as we all do. And despite paying into that system, they make extensive sacrifices to send their children to great schools like Smithville District Christian School, or Heritage Christian School in Jordan Station. Smithville district, of course, was here in the gallery watching question period yesterday afternoon. It was great to see them here. Hard-working middle-class families had that tax benefit clawed away from them retroactively--11 months in reverse.

You know, it's hard to contemplate that they would bring forward such a cruel action. Maybe if they had said it was going to take place in the next year, that would have given families some time for preparation, but to claw that away 11 months into the calendar year was cruel. I think it was done as part of political payback as opposed to being motivated for the right reasons. That's regrettable, but that fight ain't over, and hopefully we'll

see some justice served for those parents who make sacrifices to send their kids to independent schools.

Seniors, as I said, were part of that massive tax grab by Dalton McGuinty and lost that education property tax benefit. I know that I have dealt with in my office, and I suspect some of my colleagues have as well—I know the member for Beaches–East York had dealt with this, and he brought it to the floor of the Legislature—seniors who had applied for assistance to adjust their automobiles when one of them was disabled. I forget the exact name of that tax credit, but it would help out my constituent, a gentleman from Beamsville whose wife had several debilitating physical challenges, and therefore they were adjusting their vehicle and making the changes so they could transport her, whether to medical appointments or for some recreation. It was something they had counted on, had applied for, and then they found out that Dalton McGuinty had taken that away as well as part of his massive tax grab that impacted seniors in at least these two ways.

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That's not all. If the finance minister were interested in defending seniors and helping them make ends meet, you'd think he'd do something about the massive assessment increases and the tax credit the province may receive from the education tax rate on the recent MPAC assessments. We're all getting them, whether it's in Waterloo–Wellington, York North, the Niagara Peninsula, Haldimand county or Erie–Lincoln. A significant new tax increase is possible if the education tax rate is not brought down: In my area—well, it varied in the Niagara Peninsula, but about 14% or 15%, on average, in increased assessments. Many seniors who have lived in the same home for years and years—decades—now find that with increased assessments, it's difficult, if not impossible, to pay the property tax bill. I think we've all encountered that in our constituency offices.

Mr. Leal: Tim, who brought in CVA? Let's be serious.

Mr. Hudak: My colleague says, "Who brought in CVA?" I remember the Liberals saying that they were going to fix the system. Maybe Peterborough knows something I don't, but I've seen no action on that in two years' time. You'd think after two years, they would move on from the blame game and actually start making some decisions, if they actually believed in it, but I think they just made all kinds of campaign promises with no intention of keeping them whatsoever. The member from Northumberland, for example, is considering going into real estate, I think, to help seniors sell their homes.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: No, it's not accurate, but there's a newspaper story that gave that impression. So I think maybe we've touched a bit of a nerve here, because surely, if they feel that strongly—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: A couple of the government members seem to have overlooked the fact that the member for Erie–Lincoln has the floor. I would return to the member for Erie–Lincoln.

Mr. Hudak: It appears that on a usually rather serene orders-of-the-day speech, I've touched a bit of a nerve here about the lack of response from the Liberal government to address the situation of seniors potentially losing their homes from rate increases. I hope they use the same passion that they're heckling me with in going after the Minister of Finance in caucus. We've asked on a couple of occasions for the Minister of Finance to commit to lowering the—

Mr. Bruce Crozier (Essex): You stir up more passion.

Mr. Hudak: You have gone after him in caucus.

Mr. Crozier: You stir up more passion.

Mr. Hudak: I stir up more passion than the Minister of Finance, who can be a passionate guy. I would hope that he would direct that passion to helping out seniors who are facing substantial increases in taxes and user fees.

One option that the minister has at hand is to reduce the education property tax rate, to ensure that there is not a stealth property tax increase by keeping that level constant. As assessments go up, the province could pocket a windfall, and I wouldn't put it past them. I wouldn't put it past the Liberal government, which seems to have an insatiable appetite for tax hikes, to try just such a tack. Of course, previous Conservative finance ministers always reduced the education property tax rate when the average assessment increased, to make sure that that was not the case. I know Minister Sorbara had done that as well when he was finance minister, and I hope Minister Duncan won't suddenly break with tradition in order to squeeze more money out of seniors. I'm a little concerned that he has not responded to my questions in that respect. Hopefully we'll have clarification soon that indeed the education property tax rate will be reduced at a pace with the assessment increases.

The last thing on the seniors' topic—I didn't mean to dwell on it to this extent, but the Minister of Finance had cloaked himself in the guise of the big defender of seniors. This is the same minister who, as energy minister, despite campaign promises to freeze hydro rates, imposed punishing new increases in hydro rates on working families, young people and seniors. If you're on a fixed income and you're facing what has been approximately a 20% hydro increase, with another potential 30% hydro increase in 2006, and you've seen approval of increases in the rates for natural gas and home heating fuel, you wonder if anybody on the government side is on the side of assisting our seniors, or is just cloaking themselves in that disguise.

I think all of us probably have seniors in our ridings who have electric heat. In fact, I think there was a policy in the old, big Ontario Hydro days that encouraged people to switch to electric heat. Many seniors did that, and now, as a result, they're facing skyrocketing hydro bills. Granted, if the government had campaigned on saying they were increasing hydro, there would have been a fair choice for consumers, and they would have known what they were getting, but sadly, Dalton

McGuinty instead promised that he would freeze hydro rates and then, once in office, tossed that campaign pledge right out the window and has increased hydro rates dramatically, again impacting seniors significantly.

I just wanted to address the issue of the Minister of Finance pretending to be a defender of seniors. There are some initiatives that he could take on, or perhaps the new energy minister will take on, to assist our seniors.

The other aspect when we are talking about Bill 18 that we can't forget to consider is the state of the economy. Of course, it's elementary that any changes in employment and any changes in growth have a dramatic impact on revenue that comes in to the provincial coffers.

Every day we get our major print media clippings. Let's look at some of the headlines here. Here's the Toronto Star: "Cuts at GM Threaten 15,000 Canadian Jobs." The National Post: "GM Plans 30,000 Job Cuts"—that's both in the States and Ontario. The Globe and Mail, page A1: "GM to Shut ... Oshawa Plant: Auto maker to slash 3,900 jobs in Canada," which I think are all in Ontario. "Layoffs a Bitter Pill for Oshawa's Auto Workers: One of North America's most efficient plants will lose almost 4,000 jobs"; that's in the Globe and Mail business section. Here's a disturbing headline in the Toronto Star: "Premier Downplays GM Cuts: 3,600 job losses are just a 'little bit of contraction.'" That's how the Premier described it.

Mr. Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): That's cold-hearted.

Mr. Hudak: My colleague from Whitby-Ajax says that's cold-hearted. It was a strange and puzzling reaction by Premier McGuinty to this news that is simply devastating for communities like St. Catharines, like Oshawa, and in fact, this level of job loss in an important industry, to the province as a whole. For the Premier to describe it as—

Mr. Leal: Tim, you missed the clipping that says DaimlerChrysler to invest \$768 million in Ontario.

Mr. Hudak: It's the unfortunate spin, I guess, of Premier McGuinty, and now some of his colleagues are trying the same game, this "Don't worry; be happy" that we're losing all these jobs at GM. I think there are articles in here about how Ford is going to be laying people off as well. They basically sing that old Bobby McFerrin tune and say "Don't worry; be happy," that it's really not a big deal, and if you just look at page 18, that means the first 17 don't matter. That's a regrettable approach. To say it's a little bit of a contraction is really a sad comment to hear from the Premier of the province of Ontario. First of all, it shows no compassion, but secondly, it just seems to be like water off a duck's back. He doesn't seem to understand the severity of this impact and what it means for our domestic economy. It's not like it was a flat tire; this is a car wreck.

I'll go on with some of the other articles that are included. Let's view some specifics. The Globe and Mail had an article called "The Fallout" in the business section. In Oshawa car plant 1, "Layoffs: The plant's third shift will be eliminated in late 2006, affecting 1,000 hourly employees." At car plant 2, "Layoffs: '2,750.

Both shifts will be eliminated at the end of 2008.” That’s over 1,000 cars a day that we can take pride in and that have come out of the Oshawa plant that will now go idle.

Of course, a very important plant for those of us who represent the Niagara region is the St. Catharines plant site. At the Ontario Street plant, 130 jobs: “A variety of components including connecting rods, clutch shafts, radiators and struts” are manufactured there, and we’ll be losing those 130 jobs. Those are people who work in St. Catharines and who live throughout the Niagara Peninsula, who invest in our economy. No doubt when you look at the St. Catharines Standard, the Welland Tribune, the Niagara Falls Review, and Niagara This Week when the weeklies come out, this will sadly feature prominently on the front pages. When you hear the Premier’s refrain of “Don’t worry; be happy,” people will find no consolation in that kind of attitude.

The Toronto Sun editorial in our clippings: “Job Cuts: Big Deal, says Dalton,” just to quote from the editorial. Premier, why don’t you ask the affected workers who received this devastating news a month before Christmas whether they will call it “a little bit of contraction”? Again, the Premier’s words, these devastating 3,000 to 4,000 layoffs: “a little bit of contraction.”

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They go on to say, “Bizarrely, both the feds and the province seized on GM’s prediction it will achieve most of the layoffs by early retirement and attrition as good news—as if that negates the net loss of 4,000 high-paying jobs and the devastating spinoff effects on the economy.” No doubt, their loss through attrition is preferable to having people laid off immediately, but you don’t want either of those scenarios. The loss of close to 4,000 high-paying jobs is indeed devastating for those communities and for the province as a whole.

The other interesting editorial comment on the same day, today, in Linda Leatherdale’s column in the Sun: “Don’t Forget About Us’: Sun Readers Point Out Layoffs at Carmaker are Devastating, but not Limited to GM.” Ms. Leatherdale goes through a litany of other manufacturing sites and people who work there or had worked there who write in about job closures across Ontario. One in Brantford is mentioned, and ABB in Guelph, which employed 280 people, is closing its doors. It was located, coincidentally, next to Imperial Tobacco, which is also closing and moving to Mexico—a loss of 500 jobs. AFG Glass: 200 jobs lost in Concord and another 50 in London. We also can’t forget about the rebound impacts, the multiplier impacts this will have on manufacturers in the province and parts manufacturers as well.

Mr. Miller: Forestry as well.

Mr. Hudak: My colleague from Parry Sound—Muskoka, who has always been a strong champion of northern Ontario, points out that the forest industry, which plays such a major role in Ontario, often, in many of the northern communities that I have had the pleasure to visit as an MPP or minister, is by far the single biggest employer and contributor to the tax base. The news of

GM layoffs in the northern Ontario newspapers pales in comparison to the devastating news that we’re hearing from the north.

I’ll give you a couple of those, Mr. Speaker.

In the Sudbury Star article, James Wallace’s column, actually: “Lumbering into Obscurity: Liberals Turn a Blind Eye to the Plight of Northern Lumber Towns.

“Then, this summer, Abitibi-Consolidated announced plans to permanently shut down one paper machine at its Kenora mill and indefinitely idle another.” What are the impacts?

“Home values have plummeted, nobody is spending money, businesses are closing and young people are flocking out of town.”

James goes on to summarize the at-risk communities: “Some 40 communities and thousands of jobs province-wide are at risk, as well as \$1 billion in revenues for the province and local municipalities.”

One of the spokespersons here, Cec Makowski, the Ontario region vice-president from the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, believes that “Ontario’s Liberal government is deliberately abandoning his industry and has turned a blind eye to the distant cuts and blood-letting going on in the north.” His exact quote: “The government’s response has been pathetically anemic to the challenges that face this industry.” There are certainly very strong comments by Cec Makowski. I don’t believe that the government has an intent to let this happen, but their response to this issue has been far, far from satisfactory, and quite the opposite.

Maybe “anemic” is actually a good word, because we heard today, for example, that Cascades, a major employer in the Thunder Bay area, has announced that it’s closing its doors. One of the issues that the forest industry brings forward and that Cascades brings forward today is the high cost of energy that is a primary reason for the shutdown. Sadly, I don’t see any end in sight to the Liberal energy rate increases. The previous Minister of Energy, now the Minister of Finance, and now the new Minister of Energy are signing long-term energy contracts to suppliers at extremely high prices, much higher than the market rate today. If you think energy prices are bad today, just you wait until these contracts dominate the market system.

Secondly, the loony policy that they have to eliminate 20% to 25% of our power supply, with no real plan to replace that supply, is going to drive rates up higher as well and drive businesses out of the province of Ontario.

But I’ll get to energy policy a bit later on. I did want to set up Bill 18 to talk a bit about the challenges faced by working families in the province and the challenges, sadly, faced by those who are laid off or are going to be laid off in auto manufacturing and the forest industry—the 550 families who will lose somebody who is working at Cascades in Thunder Bay. Unfortunately, in Bill 18 and Bill 197—in any of the finance bills—we’re not seeing any real plan to restore our manufacturing base. In fact, their plan pushes in the opposite direction through higher taxes, runaway deficits and higher hydro rates. I

worry that this is just the beginning of loss—a major exodus—of manufacturing jobs in the province of Ontario.

The other aspect that I wanted to get to is the economic statement that was recently released. Bill 18 was introduced in the Legislature after the economic statement, just a day after, but it was obviously in construction and was contemplated in the budget bill before the economic statement. They would have had time to change Bill 18 in light of some of the troublesome news in the economic statement. You'd have thought the Minister of Finance would have had time to add some measures to Bill 18 to help turn this around.

Let me give you some examples: Economic indicators in the province, according to the economic statement, are in decline, in large part, going into the new fiscal year, the rate of growth being slower than we had seen in the previous year in many circumstances. The budget numbers were much more optimistic than the economic statement would indicate. For example, GDP growth, the projected growth rate for the province of Ontario, has been modified downward. Exports and import growth have also been modified downward from the 2005 budget. Retail sales growth, housing starts, personal income growth, wages and salaries, corporate profits, job creation and employment growth have all been revised downward from the 2005 budget.

Here we are, approximately six, seven months later, and they've already had to revise their projections for the economy, indicating that they do worry that something is going on, as I've illustrated with some of the job cuts, unfortunately. The Liberal government's performance to date gives no reason to expect the opposite. We are seeing the performance in the province weaken. In fact, in many areas, we find ourselves down from being one of the leaders in Canada to being closer to the middle—not traditionally Ontario's position.

The finance minister did say, I think in question period, if I recall, "Everything that's up is up; everything that's down is down." Well, if he thinks a revision for—"Everything that should be up is up; everything that should be down is down" I think was the quote, to be accurate. If he thinks that revising downward things like personal income growth, job growth and GDP growth is a good thing, that's certainly disturbing to hear from the finance minister.

As we in the opposition have also pointed out, the deficit is forecast to grow by 50% this year, from \$1.6 billion to \$2.4 billion. The final deficit reported for 2004-05 was \$1.6 billion, and now the projected deficit for this fiscal year is to go up to \$2.4 billion. So despite a significant increase in revenue coming into provincial coffers, the province plans to continue to run a deficit and, in fact, a deficit that is going to increase by 50% this year, if their forecasts are accurate.

Let me give you an example: I have often said in this Legislature that one of the problems is that they've had about four or five different fiscal plans. There is not a target that they haven't missed unerringly. In the 2004 budget, which was for the fiscal year 2004-05, they

projected spending for this fiscal year, 2005-06, to be \$80.5 billion. The economic statement released earlier this month projected revenue for this fiscal year of 2005-06 to be \$82.1 billion. Originally they were planning to spend \$80.5 billion and their projected revenue is \$82.1 billion. The math is pretty elementary. That would mean a \$1.6-billion surplus if they had stuck to the plan. But just like their campaign promises, previous budgets have the shelf life of a pear. They tossed it out and started all over again. Instead of having a \$1.6-billion surplus, if they had stuck to their plan, they let spending get out of control and now have a forecast deficit of \$2.4 billion.

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In all my speeches on budget bills, I need to remind members of the assembly or those watching at home of some of the key campaign commitments Dalton McGuinty made around the budget, around fiscal policy, if you will. For example, Dalton McGuinty promised to balance the budget every year, from his first year in office to his last year in office. What do we find? Quite the opposite. He's planning on running a budget deficit; already has. This will be the third year he has done so, and he plans to run deficits into the future. Despite the fact that if they had stuck to a plan they would have a surplus, he continues to plan to run deficits into the future.

The one that people probably remember foremost: Dalton McGuinty promised that he wouldn't raise our taxes, but as we have seen in numerous budget bills that have come before this Legislature, or budget commitments, speeches by the minister, they did quite the opposite with the largest tax increase in the history of the province. We needn't remind members about the \$2.4-billion so-called health tax grab, which actually flows into general revenue, a devastating impact on working families and seniors, a 12% increase to the corporate income tax rate, and when you look at—was it Bill 2?—a bill that will live in infamy.

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant):

One of the first things they did.

Mr. Hudak: One of the first things they did, almost right out of the gate, just couldn't help themselves: the biggest tax increase in the history of the province of Ontario.

Mr. Barrett: Hang on to your wallet.

Mr. Hudak: As my friend from Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant says, hold on to your wallet, when we saw that baby coming down the line, the biggest tax increase in the history of Ontario.

Another famed Liberal promise, now discarded: no accounting trickery in the province's books. In fact, shortly thereafter, after assuming office, they got caught out by the Provincial Auditor not properly accounting for some \$4 billion in hydro liabilities. They used billions of dollars of revenue from past years to reduce their deficit, including tax receipts from as far back as 1995, in the previous fiscal year. So accounting trickery writ large here by the government, contrary to their campaign commitments.

I talked about this a little bit earlier—cap hydro rates at 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour. In fact, we've seen them go up to 5.5 cents. It's a graduated rate depending on usage. We'll see another massive increase in the spring of 2006. I expect that hydro users are still waiting for the refund from the Dalton McGuinty government, which overcharged them for their hydro usage this past year. I fear we won't see that returned to users any time soon.

The other of the magnificent five broken finance promises: will not add to the debt. Dalton McGuinty said the debt will only go one way, and that's down. I guess in this world down is up and up is down, because the debt has actually gone up. The current Liberal plan changes every few months, as I said, but the current Liberal plan will see debt rise by almost \$20 billion by 2008-09. If you divide that up among every man, woman and child in Ontario, it's approximately \$1,000 in debt for every individual living in Ontario as a future tax burden. Another calculation on that: The debt is rising at more than \$75 per second under the McGuinty Liberals.

I don't need to dwell too much longer on the economic statement. I think I've made my main points, but that's how we greet Bill 18, in an environment with massive revenue increases but even larger spending increases. We've seen the deficit go up from \$1.6 billion to \$2.4 billion. If only the Liberals had stuck to their 2004-05 budget plan, we would actually be in surplus today, but as a matter of fact we find ourselves in yet another deficit because they cannot control spending.

I'll move on a little bit to some particular aspects of the bill. I did mention earlier on too about Ontario falling behind other provinces to the point where we are moving more toward the middle, and following the pack or being part of the pack instead of leader of the pack. Consumer confidence, for example, slid seven points in August and a further six points in September in the province of Ontario, much of this decline attributed to significant cooling of interest in big-ticket purchases. Housing starts have shown a similar decline and are not reflective of the rest of the country.

Home sales: I brought this up under Bill 197, but I'll say it again because I think it's an important set of data. Across Canada, results show that home sales have increased in 13 census metropolitan areas, CMAs, and decreased in 12. This survey showed they're up in 13 CMAs and decreased in 12. What is distressing is that among those 13 CMAs, those regions across Canada, only one of those was in Ontario. Furthermore, of the 12 CMAs reporting lower sales levels this past year, nine of them are in Ontario. So we have more than a lion's share of those that are in the bad category, the reduced-gain category, and we have only one of those that are in the gainer category. Just to be specific, those areas that are showing the lower sales levels this past year are Windsor, Hamilton, Toronto, Greater Sudbury, London, Ottawa, St. Catharines, Niagara, Kingston and Thunder Bay.

We can't forget as well the vulnerability of Ontario consumers to interest rate increases. Obviously, all Canadian consumers will be subject to being vulnerable

to interest rate increases, but because of Ontario's loss of disposable income due to the Dalton McGuinty health tax and increases in user fees and in hydro rates, they are particularly vulnerable if interest rates go up, especially those who are on variable rate mortgages or have borrowing requirements, for example; they will find it awfully hard to make ends meet in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario and, believe it or not, even harder than they do today.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): It's absolutely tragic what's happening.

Mr. Hudak: My colleague from Durham says it's tragic. My colleague has great knowledge of the Ontario auto industry. It's no doubt both sad and tragic, the news that will impact on his area in Durham, considering the between 3,000 and 4,000 layoffs of people who live in that area.

With respect to Bill 18, there are a number of schedules that I wanted to comment on. Schedule 3, the Community Small Business Investment Funds Act: This section would eliminate labour-sponsored investment funds by 2010, and the tax credit for research-oriented investment funds will be eliminated in the same schedule as the LSIFs. I had some clippings here, Mr. Speaker. I did have some more. I know these are entertaining to you.

We can't forget the history on this, just to concentrate on the recent history on schedule 3. My colleagues from the government side are boasting about this initiative in their speeches, but it's a strange tale on how it reached this point. I think we'll remember that in mid- or late September, then-Minister of Finance Sorbara announced that the LSIFs would be eliminated on a very accelerated schedule. He basically threw that announcement out there, did a press release and, as far as I could tell, didn't do any real consultation with industry, with holders of the assets or those that sell them. There was a major backlash.

Here's the Ottawa Citizen article from September 22. Just the headline I think helps tell the story: "End of the Line: Ontario's Decision to Kill a Popular Tax Break has Shaken up the Venture Capital Industry. Tech Start-ups will have to Scramble to Find New Sources of Capital," James Bagnall. It's quite an extensive article in the Ottawa Citizen that day, and I'll just give you a couple of highlights. He says in the article: "Hundreds of thousands of Ontario taxpayers are familiar with LSIFs—a kind of poor man's tax shelter. Anyone who puts down \$5,000 is entitled to a 30% tax credit: \$750 from Ontario and a matching amount from the federal government." He goes on to explain how this works in a bit more detail.

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More importantly to my point, until Minister Sorbara's announcement, "LSIFs had seemed entrenched—the Ontario version of the program has been around" in its main form "since 1991." It was expected—"Government and industry reps debated important but largely technical issues, including whether to alter requirements that spell out how funds should pace their investing activity." So if there were any consultations at all, this article would

seem to indicate that they forecast a small tinkering with the LSIF management program, but then all of a sudden, as Mr. Bagnall says, "in late August the tone of talks changed markedly. The industry found out why on August 29, when Sorbara revealed he was planning to eliminate the provincial tax credit sometime after the current fiscal year ends on February 28."

This had a dramatic impact on the LSIF market and on those investors: "Sorbara's surprising move prompted the strange spectacle of venture capital firms and associations communicating with the government through a series of press releases. The Canadian Venture Capital Association urged Sorbara to consult with the industry, pointing out that labour-sponsored funds had accounted for one-third of all risk money invested in the country." Mary Macdonald, the vice-president of Thomson Macdonald, a consulting firm that tracks the venture capital industry, said, "Withdrawing the LSIF program is a dangerous move, unless we have alternate sources of capital in place."

So it was a very strange scene when the McGuinty government suddenly announced that this program was being deep-sixed, with no real replacement program, and you saw the response by the industry and those that invest in LSIFs. The government then had to scramble and try to backtrack from its decision. I think people are happy that they finally did, but it didn't reflect well on the government at all. In fact, it looked like incompetence to see this issue handled in this way. We're pleased to see the situation corrected to an extent, but we found it passing strange that they entered into this mess of their own making.

Mr. Bagnall wrote a follow-up article on Saturday, October 1, just over a week or so later, in the *Ottawa Citizen* again: "McGuinty Admits Moving Too Quickly on Labour Funds: Premier Decides to Phase Out 15% Tax Credit Over Six Years." The article goes on: It was an "unusual mea culpa. Yesterday morning, Premier Dalton McGuinty acknowledged he and his officials had moved 'too quickly' to kill a popular tax credit responsible for raising hundreds of millions of dollars worth of venture capital.... Mr. McGuinty said later"—I'll go down the article—"that he had put too much pressure on his finance ministry officials to produce deficit-cutting measures." If he has put a lot of pressure on his finance officials for deficit-cutting measures, it must be a feather touch, because we've yet to see any significant deficit reduction measures.

I'll say it one more time. If they had stuck to their original plan—not their original plan, their plan in the 2004-05 budget—they'd be in a surplus position this fiscal year. But nonetheless, it's a very strange development, with a lot of backtracking by the government on the LSIFs. While my colleagues boast about schedule 3 in the legislation, we can't forget about that strange chapter in August, September and October, when the government made a bizarre decision and then quickly backtracked.

Schedule 4: Some colleagues have talked about that a little bit, the Compulsory Automobile Insurance Act,

changing the definition of "lessee" in the act for clarification purposes, in compliance with the Insurance Act. I won't, in my comments, dwell on that particular aspect of the bill.

I don't know, in the interests of time, if I'll have a chance to get into schedule 6, the Electricity Act, 1998, and my overall concerns with hydro policy. I'll try to get back to it, because I had promised that, Mr. Speaker, and I know that you want to hear my comments on the loony hydro policy of the McGuinty government.

Mr. O'Toole: That's being polite.

Mr. Hudak: "Being polite"; this is my colleague from Durham.

Let me hit a couple of things. I want to say some positive things about my colleague from Waterloo–Wellington. There are many positive things we could say about that member. I'm sure you would agree, Mr. Speaker. One thing he had championed on the floor of this assembly that we need to note in the debate on Bill 18 is that he had called upon the McGuinty government to extend the retail sales tax credit to booster seats.

The government had brought forward a bill that mandated booster seats for children of a certain size and age, and my colleague from Waterloo–Wellington said that if you're going to do that, the least you can do is extend the sales tax credit to cover those booster seats to help relieve some of the cost of this initiative, because as we all know, it's not only parents, but grandparents or coaches or anybody who transports these children around who is now required by law to have these booster seats. I know my colleague from Waterloo–Wellington had championed this, and I think we need to recognize that in the bill. We're pleased to see the government had added that aspect, schedule 19, to the bill, and I wanted to pause to recognize one of my colleagues, in case the government forgot to do so.

Laughter.

Mr. Hudak: It's not often that I can make the Speaker laugh.

I wanted to talk a little bit about schedule 12, and that's changes to the Insurance Act. In summary, these provisions limit the liability of rental car companies and the like when accidents occur while a vehicle is under control of the lessee. In cases where an insurance claim is to be made, the lessee's insurance would be paramount to the lessor's.

I think my colleague from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge talked about this a little bit in his remarks, the vicarious liability issue, where somebody could have leased or rented a vehicle and been in a car accident and, unfortunately, in the situation described, caused devastating injuries to another, by way of example. They then faced a lawsuit, and the leasing company that owned the car or the rental company would find themselves as well under threat of a lawsuit. These were cases, to make the example clear, where there was not negligence on the part of the leasing or rental company. They had done due diligence, and despite that, there was still a tragic accident.

What the government is doing in the case of vicarious liability is to limit it, to cap it at \$1 million in liability. Many other jurisdictions have eliminated vicarious liability altogether. This government is limiting that initiative, but it is not eliminating vicarious liability. One of the concerns would be that in the pipeline there was, I think, approximately \$1 billion in outstanding liability claims filed in the Canadian courts on vicarious liability charges. This is a major issue in the United States of America, which of course has a slightly different tort system from ours that saw rates—you, Mr. Speaker, if you're renting or leasing a car, in particular in the states that had some major cases decided against the rental companies, would find a car difficult to find or its costs exorbitant.

What happened in the United States is that a new law was brought in—let me check my timing here. On August 10, 2005—so relatively recently—President Bush signed legislation that eliminated the vehicle lessor and renter vicarious liability across the US and overrode any contrary state legislation. States have some limited ability to do so on minimum insurance levels, but overall, the vicarious liability issue was eliminated in the United States. If I understand correctly, the reason it continues to exist in Ontario is the vagaries of the Highway Traffic Act that define what an “owner” of a vehicle is. There have been a number of other statutes that have been altered to clear that up. This one is just the latest one.

I look forward to debate on the vicarious liability issue, which is interesting. As I've said, it has provoked action in the States and now has provoked action in the province of Ontario, I think in anticipation of the massive lawsuits that are in the pipeline and their impact on the businesses. Hopefully we'll get some better understanding of the government's motive to cap as opposed to eliminating, or why the cap is set at a certain level. Maybe some will take the opinion that the cap will be unfair. So I look forward to debate on schedule 12 of Bill 18. It's certainly an important issue for the Legislature to address, and I look forward to colleagues' debate on that aspect.

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There are a number of other aspects that I probably won't have time to address, but due to popular request, the Electricity Act changes under schedule 6: They're technical in nature. They are retroactive in nature, which gets to a general concern that we in the opposition have of the retroactive tendencies of the Dalton McGuinty government. There are laws of a given day, and people act upon those laws; then if the laws change, their behaviour will change accordingly. But to retroactively change the laws with the presumption that somebody should have acted differently based on the original set of laws is a concept that I think most Ontario residents would have a great deal of trouble with.

But over and over again we have seen bills brought into this Legislature, and a number of initiatives in Bill 18, that continue that pattern of retroactivity, of changing the rules in the past, whether it's to claw more revenue

in, to increase taxes or other initiatives. There may be occasionally a case where retroactivity is warranted, but we need to be very careful and cautious.

Mr. Barrett: I'm thinking of independent schools.

Mr. Hudak: Independent schools, as my colleague from Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant points out, as I talked about a bit earlier on. That was eliminated retroactively, which was cruel—and cruelly done—and unjust.

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): And expensive.

Mr. Hudak: And expensive to those families, and probably some cost to administer.

There are aspects of the municipal legislation as well, with the greenbelt—Bill 26, among others—that similarly play a little fast and loose with retroactivity, changing the rules of the game in the past, instead of changing them from that point forward. We in this assembly certainly had a great deal of opportunity to bring forward our concerns, but sadly, not very much was listened to or implemented by the current provincial government to improve the greenbelt legislation.

Schedule 6 does have some retroactive aspects, and I want to register that general concern about retroactivity or, as my colleague from York North points out, the reverse onus provisions in a number of pieces of legislation that this government has brought forward. The infamous pit bull legislation is one that comes to mind, where individuals have to prove that their dog is not a pit bull as opposed to the state proving that their dog is a pit bull. It's a puzzling and disturbing trend toward retroactivity and reverse onus. It certainly is contrary to the way we usually approach things in the province of Ontario and in our country of Canada.

I do want to note, though, my overriding concern on hydro policy in the province. This notion that closing off 20% or 25% of our power supply by 2007—they've broken that promise and now say it's 2009 in the case of Nanticoke. There's no real plan to replace that power. The projects, whether in Mississauga or Brampton or projects in Lambton county, as well as St. Clair township, are dramatically behind schedule. The government is really taking a great gamble on depending on natural gas as the main producer of power in the province of Ontario. Certainly the volatility we've seen in gas prices, the rising cost of gas—the impact it'll have in the petrochemical industry, as well, which is their main feed for product, also should be contemplated. I register my concern about the impact on the petrochemical industry by their misguided policy and almost exclusive reliance, with the exception of a couple of windmills here or there, on gas to solve all their problems.

Mrs. Munro: That would be hot air.

Mr. Hudak: My colleague from York North says it's a lot of hot air from the government backing up their claims. I think it's a dangerous hydro policy that is impacting on rates consumers pay today and will pay into the future, it's impacting negatively on business decisions to expand in Ontario, and I suspect it's impacting dramatically on business decisions to invest in the province of Ontario in the first place. I worry about what

direct investment—foreign direct domestic investment or domestic direct investment—in the province is and the trend we may see when you analyze the impact of the loony hydro policy on business placement.

You wonder too, if they had actually decided to put scrubbers in the existing coal plants, as opposed to carrying on this facade that they have a hydro policy—if, right away, Dalton McGuinty had invested instead in scrubber technology to clean up the coal plants, whether it would have had a dramatic impact immediately, today, on emissions. But instead, they followed a different policy and it has delayed the closure of the coal plants, as opposed to investing in clean technology today.

The Sarnia Construction Association recently sent a letter to the Premier, which they copied to all of us. I just want to read this for the record. It was co-signed by Jim Bradshaw, chairman of the Sarnia Building Trades Council; Ross Tius, business manager of UA local union 663; Ray Curran, chairman of labour relations, Sarnia Construction Association; and Andrew Pilat, general manager, Sarnia Construction Association. I'll just read some highlights:

“We are writing this letter jointly to ask you,” the Premier, “and your government to reconsider your position on coal-fired generation facilities and, in particular, the decision to close Lambton generating station....”

“The limited supply of natural gas and the fact that gas prices are expected to remain high and volatile eliminate it as long-term solution to Ontario’s energy problems.” This is the submission by the Sarnia Construction Association in a joint letter. “Further, additional demand on natural gas will not only impact directly on the consumer but also the manufacturing sectors of the economy, such as the petrochemical industry, that are dependent on natural gas for feedstock.”

Down a couple of paragraphs, they go on to say, “Current scrubber technology is highly effective in removing pollutants. The scrubbers at Lambton generating station are, for example, effective in reducing 96% of all emissions produced from burning coal. This compares favourably to gas-fired plants, which also have the same efficiency rate for emissions.

“To add further, it is a well-known fact that Lambton generating station is one of the cleanest and most economical producing power plants in North America.”

They conclude by saying, “It is clear from these facts that a shift from coal to gas generation facilities would result in a significant increase in electrical cost to consumers and business in Ontario.”

That’s just one. There are letters like that from construction associations, from unions, from businesses, from chambers of commerce that address this issue head on. Certainly, the plants in Thunder Bay that are closing—due to high hydro rates, the notion of closing down the generator in Atikokan will be simply devastating to that community and to northwestern Ontario as a whole.

Interjection: That’s where Yak is.

Mr. Hudak: Our colleague the critic for energy is there now to address this issue and to espouse the poorly

thought through policy of the McGuinty government in closing that station. It will devastate the community. The notion that pollutants from Atikokan somehow are impacting on us here in the capital is inaccurate; it doesn’t happen, but the government spin would tell you the opposite. So I’m pleased that my colleague Mr. Yakabuski is there in Atikokan. I’ve enjoyed my time there in the past.

Certainly with the news coming from northwestern Ontario, from Atikokan or the layoffs at Cascades Thunder Bay and other plants that have said that, because of hydro policy and the expected high prices, they can no longer compete in our province, the devastation happening to our forest sector in northern Ontario, what remains to be seen is what hydro prices will be in 2006-07.

While the government has some technical aspects in Bill 18 relating to the Electricity Act, 1998, I think it’s important for members of the assembly to register their rejection as a whole of the government’s loopy hydro policy that is closing plants, that is punishing seniors and that has failed to produce improvements to the environment that could have happened if they had invested immediately in scrubber technology to help have clean coal plants today. I would say, too, as did the member who represents the Dunnville area, that the concerns about the devastation caused by closing down the Nanticoke plant are inconceivable, and I call upon the government to reject that initiative as well on behalf of my constituents who work there and care about that investment in the community.

I’ve had the pleasure of addressing Bill 18. I look forward to the comments of my colleagues. Thank you for your rapt attention.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Prue: I listened intently for the whole hour to the member for Erie–Lincoln. He started out by describing quite well that in order to understand this bill you had to first understand Bill 197 and the other economic plans of this government. He went on to describe the \$13 billion in extra revenues that the Liberals have found since coming to power. But I think his most telling statements in that hour’s speech were around the whole plight of many senior citizens. I read this bill and there is a little tiny provision—I’m going to deal with it in my own speech—for a maximum \$625 that seniors may be eligible for as a result primarily of federal largesse and the changes to the Income Tax Act which this province—along with every other province, I’m sure—is implementing.

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But at the same time, one has to look at what is happening to seniors across this province. I know in my own riding and in travels across Ontario I talk to a great many seniors. Seniors are justifiably concerned about the property tax increases that they are seeing in many, many municipalities. This government is not doing anything about it. In questions that I have posed to the Minister of Finance, all I get back is gobbledygook. Quite frankly, I

don't understand why this government is not taking action on a policy which you, prior to coming into government, said was wrong. You said that CVA wouldn't work and yet you know that many, many seniors today are at risk of losing their homes. The \$625 from this act is simply not going to get anywhere near. We know the problem that they're having with hydro rates. We know the problem this year that they're having to pay the full year of the health tax. If you really want to help seniors, you've got to do a lot more than what is contained in this bill.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): I find it quite interesting that particularly the Progressive Conservative Party seems to have a certain selective amnesia. It strikes me that at all times they seem to remember everything that happened in 2003 except the promises that they were making to the good people of Ontario on the campaign trail, the biggest one being, of course, that they were not running a deficit.

I know that our three independent economists who looked at our platform said, "They've got to be running at least a \$2-billion deficit," and we factored that in. I know that, toward the end of the campaign, I believe it was the Canadian Taxpayers Foundation that said, "Oh, my God. We think it could be \$4 billion." And what do we discover? Five point six billion dollars worth of deficit from the party of Mike Harris, who swore up and down that everything was absolutely fine.

That all seems to be forgotten when we look at the context of what has happened since. What has happened is that the deficit that we've inherited continues to go down, and—despite some selective accounting trickery, I say, from the member opposite—we continue to have that deficit go down while we're making record investments in the things that people elected us to do.

The nabobs of negativity over there, who sit around praying for a recession, hoping that a recession will somehow retrieve them from where they are now to get them over on to this side—and I say to the members of the new depression party, whom nothing would make happier than that somehow there would be floods of all this money: There has to be a balance. What we have is this government making investments in the future so that, as the economy sheds old jobs, new, great jobs in the new economy are being created. That's what this budget is all about, and I'm proud to support it.

Mr. Flaherty: I want to compliment my colleague from Erie–Lincoln on his remarks. The length of his remarks was outdone only by the cogency of the analysis and the thought that was put into those extended remarks.

On the infrastructure front, what we've seen from this Liberal government is nothing east of Toronto, and it's a great shame because it results in things like General Motors struggling in Oshawa. When we were the government, we brought Highway 407 to Durham region. Has it moved one foot, one inch, in the more than two years that these Liberals have been in power? Not one inch. Lots of process, lots of talk, lots of expensive consultants, but has the highway moved one inch? No.

That's the highway that General Motors needs to go over to Courtice Road and then go down Courtice Road because their trucks and on-time delivery are caught in traffic all the time. This is what they've done: They haven't moved the road one inch.

Do we have one more GO train going east? No; not one more GO train. Do we have the GO trains running from Union Station on the line that's there to Peterborough? The member for Peterborough is here. Do we see a train there? Do we see anything being done there? All the population growing in north Durham region and north Oshawa, around the new university that we started there—to Peterborough, not one train. We're going nowhere fast with the Liberals east of Toronto. This is a terrible waste of potential resources. Highway 401: one new interchange? No. We built three. We see no new interchanges, no widening of Highway 401. Do we see a bus route for GO buses? No. We see the GO buses stuck in traffic with everybody else. The Liberals have done nothing east of Toronto, and it's hurting General Motors. That's not good for Durham region, it's not good for Ontario and ultimately it's not good for our country, Canada.

Mr. O'Toole: I also want to be on the record as supporting the member from Whitby–Ajax and the member from Oshawa.

It's been said that the impacts of this government were evidenced yesterday with the almost 4,000 jobs—these are families being alarmed just before Christmas. I spent 30 years at General Motors and I know what this blow means, not just to the immediate and direct employees of General Motors but to the employees on the supplier side, at the dealerships and in the parts business. It's a devastating comment.

I think it's part of the energy policy and part of their tax policy, the health tax being one part of it. It's just costing more, and we're getting less in Ontario.

I listened very carefully to the member from Erie–Lincoln. I'm quite impressed with his grasp of the issues in this file. John Tory has made the right decision there.

One of the things he mentioned that I paid particular attention to was schedule 3, which is the community small business investment fund. Now this is wrapping up a fund that was allowing small investors and what I'd call new issues of stock, new capital investment opportunities for small business. What they're doing here is wrapping up this opportunity for small business investment. This is a shame in a climate where we know small business does create most of the economy.

The labour-sponsored investment funds provided an opportunity to invest, as the member said, \$5,000 to get the federal-provincial tax credit out of that, so that your net investment was quite small, actually, out of the \$5,000. In fact, I would say it helped to incubate many new small businesses and jobs in this province. I think it's a very sad day that they're now going to be changing the rules. It says in section 14.1, "a labour-sponsored investment fund corporation must pay a tax calculated under that section if the shares are redeemed, acquired or

cancelled by the corporation less than eight years....” They’re giving them no time, and this means they’re going to pay more tax.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes the time available for questions and comments. I’ll return to the member for Erie–Lincoln. You have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Hudak: Thanks, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleagues. An hour is not enough for my comments and my colleagues’ comments.

Perth–Middlesex: I think their only response is to talk about this deficit that they manufactured for the fiscal year 2003-04. But no matter what debate you lead on that, it still doesn’t explain why in the 2004 budget you said that spending for this year would be \$80.5 billion and that revenue for this year would be \$82.1 billion. Those are your own books from the last budget and the economic statement. If you do some simple math, that should be a \$1.6-billion surplus. I can’t understand this continuing inability of the Liberals to hit their targets. If they had actually stuck with any of their financial plans, to use this one as an example, they would have had a surplus this year. Nonetheless, you continue to run a deficit. In fact, this finance minister is increasing the deficit by 50% from what was given to him by previous Finance Minister Sorbara.

The other part I wanted to re-emphasize—and I thank my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka—is about the devastation across Ontario, particularly in northern Ontario, caused by the Liberals’ wayward hydro policy and lack of support for the forest industry. Tembec in Kapuskasing—some 65 indefinite job losses; Bowater in Thunder Bay—100 indefinite losses; Smurfit-Stone in Thunder Bay—100 permanent losses; Weyerhaeuser, Sturgeon Falls; Neenah Paper, Terrace Bay. I mentioned Cascades in Thunder Bay, Norampac in Red Rock and Abitibi-Consolidated in Kenora—some 250 jobs lost there; and also in the south, Domtar in Cornwall. It’s simply bad news across northern Ontario, rural Ontario and the province as a whole. I’d love to see a response on how they’re going to turn that around.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

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Mr. Prue: I suppose I should be very thankful to only have 19 minutes of my hour today. I don’t know whether my voice would have lasted for the full hour. I can do it; I’m going to try my best for the 19 minutes.

On November 5, this bill was introduced to this House. That was some three weeks ago. I looked at the size of the bill and I thought, “Whoa, maybe there’s something in this bill. Maybe there’s something in this bill that’s going to deal with all of the problems that are existing in this province.” I was thinking that maybe there’s something in this bill to deal with poverty and the plight of poor people that the budget bill didn’t address, or maybe there is something in here that some housing is actually going to be built; not the announcement that the minister made today, his brave announcement that 839 units of housing have been built in this province in the two-plus years of the McGuinty government. I thought

that maybe there’s going to be something in this bill that finds money for rent supplements, or maybe there’s something in this bill about the aboriginal communities, 51 of which have boil-water advisories; that maybe there will be something in here about special education or hospital care or agriculture or the environment, maybe about municipalities or even hydro rates—some of the big issues that people out there are talking about every day.

Of all the days to start this debate, what was the topic here in the Legislature? What were people talking about? They were talking about the thousands of people, potentially, who are going to be unemployed through the GM restructuring and what is happening at Cascades in Thunder Bay. That’s the topic. It’s the economy.

What do we have in this bill? I want to tell you, if there ever was a bill that’s a cure for insomnia, it’s this bill—23 sections—just to go through some of them, to talk about the arcane, to talk about the strangeness of the bill, the grammar, the incomprehensibility of some of the sections. In the part about seniors—everybody wants to talk about how good this bill is to seniors—I want to know how many seniors can read the longest run-on sentence I have ever found in all of my many years. It is, “Subsection 8(3.1) of the act is repealed and the following substituted:” It then goes on for a whole half-page with one sentence. I’d just like to read some of that. I don’t think I can read the whole thing into the record because it is beyond arcane. Listen to what this says, if seniors think this is supposed to help them or if anyone is supposed to be able to understand it. It says, “Subject to subsection (7), every senior who, on December 31 in a taxation year ending after December 31, 2004, is resident in Ontario and resides with a cohabiting spouse or common-law partner may deduct from tax otherwise payable by the senior under this act in respect of the taxation year the amount, if any, not in excess of \$1,125, by which the aggregate of the tax credits described in clauses (a) and (b) to which the senior is entitled exceeds the amount, if any, by which 4 % of the senior’s adjusted income for the taxation year exceeds \$22,250, that is to say,” and then goes on to describe in, incredibly, more detail in the same sentence how that is calculated. This is not stuff that people want to read and can have really any hope. I’m not surprised that people are lost in reading government bills and government gobbledygook like this.

This bill purports to do a number of things, 23 in total. Just some of the highlights of the bill: the Community Small Business Investment Funds Act, amended retroactively. The first thing that grabbed my mind was, why would a government do anything retroactively? Then I remembered the very second bill that came before this House. The first one, of course, was to recognize the election, and the second one was an omnibus bill that this government put forward a few days after its election. It was an omnibus bill that did a great many things, including some of the seniors’ tax relief. I also remember the the heinous, or most horrid, part of that particular bill was that it was retroactive. The part that the New

Democrats opposed, and that we still oppose, and the reason that we voted against the bill, was that you retroactively took away tax provisions that people were counting on and had been counting on for some 11 months. You took it away from them within a month of their being able to realize the bill. They had educated their sons and daughters under a system which we do not agree with; that is, private schools. We totally agree that the money should go to public schools and for public school funding, but you did something retroactively, something that should not be done in legislation, something that should not be done in any act of this House.

I looked here again and I see that you're doing the same things. It says sections 4 and 5 of the Community Small Business Investment Funds Act are amended retroactively to provide that the deadline for applying for registration of new employee ownership labour-sponsored venture capital corporations was August 29, 2005. So anybody who is involved in this kind of venture capital already has had the rug pulled out from under them. They had no idea, I'm sure, that this was coming. They had no idea on November 5 that this provision was going to be in the act, and there you've done it again.

If you ask New Democrats why we think that sometimes these government bills are not supported, you should look first to the retroactive provision that you seem all too intent to do without notice and without telling people who are going to be affected. This quite literally, to some people, may cost them much money. Had they intended to file, they normally would have had, through any taxation year, an opportunity to do so. If they were too late, if they didn't realize this was coming, you have retroactively stopped them from doing it. I don't know what happens to people who, some time between August 29 and November 5 when this was introduced, went ahead and put forward the funds. I can't find anything in this bill that says what you are going to do or why you're going to do it or whether you're going to repay them for any monies they may have lost. I think that is not what a finance bill should do and it should not put at a disadvantage people who are trying to invest and properly use their money for the benefit of ordinary people.

I went on to look at that same section, section 3. Tax credits for investments in labour-sponsored investment funds are being phased out after 2008 with no tax credit available after 2010. Sections 16.1 and 25 of the act are amended to reflect the phasing out of the tax credits. I have no rationale, nor have I heard any rationale from the government, as to why these are being phased out. They are often, to many working people, the only opportunity they have to invest in something other than putting their money in the bank. I don't blame most of them for not putting their money or wanting to put their money in the banks these days. I look down the list of interest, as I do from time to time in the weekend paper, to see what the banks are paying for people who put their money in the bank for safekeeping. I have to tell you, I keep my money in three separate accounts. I have a small account in TD;

I have a very small account in what used to be the Province of Ontario Savings Office, which is now called Desjardins; and I have a small account in CIBC. I want to tell you what kind of interest banks are paying today if you put your money in there. CIBC was paying 0.1% on a year. If you invested your \$2,000 or \$3,000 and you got 0.1%, after a year you would literally be getting about two dollars. So I'm not surprised that working people don't want to invest their money there. I looked at TD; it wasn't much different. I looked at Desjardins, and it was slightly better, but not much different either. So people who have a little bit of money, working people who want their money to gain some interest, to do good work with it—this money that was labour-sponsored went into a great many things. The building of co-op housing was one of the things that labour-sponsored funds were used for. They paid a higher dividend than the bank and you knew that if you put your money there you were getting something more than simply value to yourself; you were getting value to your community. All of a sudden, this has been cut out with absolutely no rationale.

I listened to the minister and to the PA to the minister, and I didn't hear any rationale as to why this is being cut. I'd like to hear some in further debate, and I'm anxious for some Liberal member to stand up and tell me why this was important to be done in this bill because, quite frankly, it boggles my mind.

1750

I went on to read some other sections. If you're not suffering too much from insomnia, you can read a couple of pages at a time before you eventually fall asleep. I got to the next section, which was the Electricity Act, section 6. Section 6 says, "The enactment of subsection 92.1(2.1) of the Electricity Act, 1998, ensures that tax payable under section 92.1 of the act by the owner of a hydro-electric generating station located in unorganized territory without a school board is paid to the province and not to the financial corporation."

I started to think, what does this mean? What is the province trying to do? What electricity companies exist in unorganized areas? The probable ones that immediately sprung to my mind were those four or five small electrical generating stations along the Albany River leading into Hudson Bay. I started to think, what does this mean? They are probably unorganized. I don't think there are too many towns around there. Have they not in the past been paying monies to go to the education system? If so, how much is involved?

I haven't heard any rationale. I haven't heard anything from the minister today, nor did I hear anything from the PA, as to why this is being done. If it is to give money to the school boards, if the electrical companies can be taxed a little bit, it may not be a terribly onerous or bad thing, but there certainly is nothing contained in the bill itself, nor was there anything said today, to justify this action.

I went on and saw something there that really twigged my imagination and my hope. My hope soared for a few seconds when I got to schedule 8, the Gasoline Tax Act.

My goodness, have we gone through a couple of very bad months in this province and in this country with gasoline prices. I remember all the Liberals, when they were in opposition, and the five wonderful bills people put forward talking about how to reduce gasoline prices. I remember all the statements and what was being said, and then I remember, during these last couple of horrible months, with gasoline prices at \$1.20 and \$1.30 a litre and lineups at the pump, people fighting and angry, consumers wanting something to be done, that of all those five bills, not one of them was resurrected by a government that I'm quite sure could easily have passed what you said in opposition.

You have not only the legislative might, but I'm sure you would have had the full support at least of the New Democratic Party if you were to have done it. I can't speak for the Conservatives, but I think probably them too. But what did I find here in the schedule for the Gasoline Tax Act? This is what it says. What does this mean? Was this some great policy? Is this some new direction? It says, "Currently, under subsection 7(3) of the Gasoline Tax Act, the minister may suspend or cancel a designation or registration under the act relating to a person if the person contravenes or permits the contravention of the act or of a limitation attached to the designation or registration."

I don't know what that means. I didn't hear anyone speak about that. If it's some great big policy, how is it going to help consumers? I don't think it's going to help consumers at all. I think it's a little tiny arcane change to an act for some inconsequential action that is being taken out there, that the minister may not have been able to take someone on when he wanted to.

I went on and I looked at schedule 20, the Securities Act. You will remember that there was a committee that was struck to listen and talk about the Securities Act. I was on that committee and I think the committee did some good work. In fact, it was the first committee I was ever on since my election to this House where there was all-party and all-member approval. There was no minority report. There was no one saying they weren't going to vote for it. There was all-party agreement, approval, and a unanimous report and a unanimous vote recommending what to do under the Securities Act.

I looked here to see what the schedule to the Securities Act did. I have to tell you that I was somewhat disappointed, because what this act is doing I think runs contrary to the spirit and intent of the members who sat on that committee, and who recommended unanimously to the then minister of the treasury board. In fact, instead of making changes directly to the Securities Act to better protect investors, which was the recommendation that we made, the government appears under this section to be handing over the responsibility to the OSC to write their own rules. Investors in mutual funds need to have a vehicle to hold fund managers accountable, and this should be done through changes to the Securities Act, which we ourselves in this Legislature should mandate and should pass, not leaving it up to an unelected body like the OSC to make their own rules that they can

follow. I have to tell you that when I read this, I was somewhat disappointed. I thought, "Why is this contained in this act? What is in this act that would make people want to support it?" I went on and I looked.

Here's the Tobacco Act. I supported the government in their tobacco initiative. I was a little bit upset about how Legions were not given the kind of consideration that I thought Legion members should be given, especially in this Year of the Veteran, especially when so many of our Legion members who are actual members, not associate members or people who may get to join a Legion, but who are actual members who fought in the Second World War—I don't think there are too many left from the First World War—and had done great service to our country were not, I think, adequately consulted or grandfathered around this particular act.

I looked to see what was contained within this provision and, again, it was a lesson in the arcane. It "permits the Minister of Finance to assess or reassess a person under the act after the expiry of the time limit for issuing an assessment if, before the expiry of the time limit, the person has filed a waiver in a form approved by the minister." The enactment of subsection 19(3.2.4) of the act permits the minister to assess or reassess a person after the time limit if, before December 16, 2004, the "person provided the minister with a written waiver of the time limit." Again, I don't know what this means. I don't think anybody in this room, if you've read it, knows what this means. There has been no discussion of this.

Then, Mr. Speaker, if I've got time, I went on to the last section, section 23, which was the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation Act. In a nutshell, what it said was that it now allows two elected people to be on that board, one from the city and one from the province. That may or may not be a good thing, but the real problem with the Toronto waterfront revitalization scheme in toto is that basically nothing has been done on the Toronto waterfront since that day how many years ago when the then mayor, the then Premier and the then Prime Minister, all of whom are no longer there, stood there and said there was going to be a magnificent waterfront in Toronto. It has not happened, and there's nothing in this bill that's going to allow that to happen.

If it's now close to 6 of the clock, I will continue on the next occasion.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much.

Pursuant to standing order 37, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Haliburton–Victoria–Brock has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Minister of Education. The member has up to five

minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or the minister's parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes. I recognize the member for Haliburton–Victoria–Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock):

This afternoon, I rose in the Legislature and asked the Minister of Education about a situation around a busing issue in the Carden-Dalton area of my riding. The member from Simcoe North, Garfield Dunlop, and I have been bringing this topic up to the minister over the past year and have asked for his intervention in the fact that the two school boards, those being Trillium Lakelands District School Board and Simcoe County District School Board, could not come to a resolution so that the children from the Carden-Dalton area in my riding could attend the schools in the Simcoe area, which they have done for generations.

Two busloads of parents and students came down today. They travelled three hours to bring this again to the attention of the Minister of Education. They have put tireless hours into trying to preserve where their children go to school in the Simcoe district. That is their community of interest; that is where they go to work. This has occurred, as I said, for generations in our area.

1800

Now, there are boundary issues, I'm sure, in every school board, but in the last two years the two school boards have not been able to work it out. So I genuinely asked the minister, the member from Simcoe North and I, to please contact the two school boards and work this out, for the children's sake. Put the parents first. Unfortunately, the answer came back very political and not what should have been addressed, which is where the children go to school.

The member from Simcoe North has said many times that new schools and additions were built in the township of Ramara—Breachin, Rama Central and Uptergrove—so that they could accommodate the children from Carden and Dalton. This happened in the past few years; this is not new. The intention was that the children were going to be able to attend those schools. Some of the parents of the children who go to the schools actually moved to the area. They built on additions. They did it intentionally, thinking that their children were going to go to the Simcoe district school board schools.

Heart-wrenching stories—a lot of them left today with tears in their eyes, extremely upset because there was not an answer from the minister. I'll read from one of them. One of the parents says, "I am a concerned parent fighting for the right of our children. On November the 11th, I sat thinking of all the brave men who died to give us our freedom, our rights to breathe, live, learn and speak whenever and wherever, and now you're telling us that our children have no right to learn at the schools that the children from our community for generations and generations have went and graduated and built lives from the roots of those schools.

"I myself, and many parents and grandparents, went to the following schools and now our children go to these

schools. They have put the trust of their futures in us, in you, in their teachers. They have made friends that they will carry with them forever, as long as you don't tear them away from these schools. If you do, no one else suffers but the children. They will lose trust in all of us. They say that children are the future. Well, if this is true, which it is, then let's help them towards that future. I hope that all of you consider the children. That's all I ask for. Thank you."

This is addressed to the Minister of Education from Jennifer Black in the riding.

Minister, the parents were actually leaving here today saying that they're going to keep their children home. They're not even going to send them to the schools. Now, this has gone too far. I hoped the school boards had worked it out too, but they didn't. Is the result that the children are going to stay at home? Some of the children share a bedroom, and yet they take two separate buses from their driveway. They can share their bedroom, but they can't share the bus to school. That's a tragedy in a community.

We've been asking for over a year for this government to act, and we want action. Today, when I rose in the Legislature with the parents present, we hoped that we would get an answer from the minister. They told the minister that they were coming. We told him that they were coming. It was a friendly question, so this could be resolved, to put the students and the parents first.

I stand today in the late show to say that there was no answer forthcoming. I'm going to talk to the directors of education from both school boards again, because the dust needs to be settled and this needs to be resolved. The Minister of Education has this power. He needs to talk to the school boards again. I'm having this late show to say that I want a better answer than the one I received today. I welcome the comments from the government.

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): I want to acknowledge the member for Haliburton–Victoria–Brock and her sincerity in trying to work with her constituents to resolve this issue, because I really believe that she sincerely wants this to work out. That's notwithstanding the political comments surrounding her. I want to acknowledge that. I think I would say to the member, "You could have a very important role to play here."

As a former school trustee, I think it's really important that we recognize that school boards play a very important role in local communities. That's why, as a former school trustee, I wouldn't like to see the ministry taking a role where, really, a local issue should be worked out by school boards.

As you said, this situation has been going on for decades. It's been a co-operative situation, and now, all of a sudden, it's not. There's been some breakdown in communication. I'm not close enough to the issue to know exactly what that's about, but I am close enough to the situation to know that it's probably something that the school boards, if there's enough good will, could work out between themselves.

The other thing I want to acknowledge is the frustration of the families. I know how frustrating it is when families are caught between the politics of different bodies of government—different school boards, in this case. I think that we have to acknowledge that—

Mr. Jim Flaherty (Whitby–Ajax): What are you going to do about it?

Ms. Wynne: Well, we have to acknowledge that those families need an answer from those school boards. So from our perspective, we would like the school boards to work it out. The minister said this afternoon that if they can't work it out, we'll send in a mediator and facilitate the communication. He said that.

But that's not the most desirable situation. The most desirable resolution is for those school boards to work it out and, quite frankly, I would hope that the local MPPs, before asking for a mediator to be sent in, would create a forum for the school boards. You've said you'll go back and talk to the directors. I think there's a role for MPPs to play in working this out.

I think the other thing that we have to bear in mind is that there's not just one voice coming from this community. There are letters that have been written to the minister on both sides of this issue. So there's a family that has said: "Keep in mind that these parents do not speak for all of us, even though they would like you to believe they do. I understand that some parents from this area will be attending the Legislature on November 22 to make their voices heard."

So we have to recognize at this level that there are competing interests in the community. That's why we have school boards. We have school boards to work out those local issues, and I think it will be a sad day in Ontario when we don't have school boards with the authority to work out those local issues.

Every time you draw a boundary—for example, as a school trustee, I would get calls from people where a boundary had been changed and they were upset because

they'd been on one side of the boundary and now they were on the other side of the boundary. There are always going to be boundary issues, and that is something that school boards need to take on as their responsibility.

Having said that, if these two school boards can't work it out, then we will send in a mediator, but I really hope that the members take it on as their responsibility to bring those directors together, bring those school boards together and find a solution, because, clearly, there's been a solution there for more than 40 years. So there really isn't much reason why there shouldn't continue to be a solution.

I hope that answer is what the member can work with, can go back to the community now and create a forum for the school boards to work with each other, and that the families will understand that the boards have the authority to work this problem out, that they really don't need to be petitioning the Minister of Education when they have duly elected trustees.

Remember, trustees in this province are elected by their constituencies. They have authority and responsibility that's aligned with that authority to work out these local issues. I don't think we, as a ministry, should be taking that authority away from them. In fact, I think we should be giving school trustees the responsibility and authority that will allow them to work out more of these local issues. So I would encourage the members to go back to the community, encourage the school boards to work it out. If they can't work it out, then there is obviously the option of a mediator, but I hope that the local community can come to a resolution before that needs to happen.

The Acting Speaker: There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 6:45 this evening.

The House adjourned at 1808.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. Brown
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Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffière: Deborah Deller
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Brampton West-Mississauga / Brampton-Ouest-Mississauga	Dhillon, Vic (L)	Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington	Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (L) Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
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Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Kenora-Rainy River	Hampton, Howard (ND) Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
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Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Mississauga West / Mississauga-Ouest	Delaney, Bob (L)
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Oakville	Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)	Thunder Bay–Superior	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Oshawa	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	North / Thunder Bay–Superior- Nord	
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Ottawa–Vanier	Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L) Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones	Trinity–Spadina	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
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Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Yakabuski, John (PC)	York North / York-Nord	Munro, Julia (PC)
Sarnia–Lambton	Di Cocco, Caroline (L)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	Cordiano, Hon. / L'hon. Joseph (L) Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
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Simcoe–Grey	Wilson, Jim (PC)		
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St. Paul's	Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L) Attorney General / procureur général		
Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

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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