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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 29 May 2006

Lundi 29 mai 2006

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

Monday 29 May 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 29 mai 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PHARMACISTS

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Bill 102 is going to guarantee that Ontarians pay more and get less.

I've just come from morning committee hearings on Bill 102, where I heard the concerns of community pharmacists about Bill 102 and what it means to their businesses and their consumers.

Last week, two local pharmacists met with the member for Scarborough–Rouge River, MPP Bas Balkissoon. The member wasted no time lowering the expectation of what he could do for the pharmacists. He said he has little input into Bill 102. He said he can't get a meeting himself with the Minister of Health. He said all decisions are made by the Minister of Health. But that hasn't stopped the member for Scarborough–Rouge River from staying on the government message.

He echoes the statements of staffers in the minister's very office, which we raised in the House just two weeks ago: "We can't afford all the services we have. We'll have to make sacrifices. Some pharmacies will close and the government is aware of that." He said that if people don't like Bill 102, then "we'll have government pharmacies and we'll employ the pharmacists."

The minister denied last week that the closure of pharmacies was official government policy, but he's clearly being contradicted by his staffers and by members of the Liberal backbench. It's time for the minister to come clean and admit that Bill 102 is going to be devastating to community pharmacies across the province.

Further comments, from the Coalition of Ontario Pharmacy, dated May 25 say, "Jeff Leal ignores pharmacists."

"This morning, a dozen local pharmacists gathered at Mr. Leal's constituency office before it opened. When staff arrived around 8 a.m., the pharmacists tried again.... They were rebuffed."

No one is listening to the pharmacists today.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): During constituency week, I had the opportunity to visit a number of

schools in my riding, including Queen Elizabeth Public School. While there, the school principal, Jeff Lovell, and the vice-principal, Neil Swayze, kindly provided me with a tour and introduced me to some of the new initiatives they have launched since the 2004-05 school year.

Under a program known as Imagine a School Without Bullying, Queen Elizabeth Public School has implemented creative anti-bullying strategies while helping to create a school climate that's both positive and inclusive. As part of the Imagine program, the school introduced ROAR. The letters of ROAR spell out the foundation for a welcoming school environment: respect, others, attitude and responsibility.

Jeff Lovell and Neil Swayze, along with the entire teaching staff at Queen Elizabeth, have also started school-wide initiatives that reward students who show a sense of leadership and who demonstrate kindness towards others. This approach has had a tremendous impact on the school atmosphere. Detentions have dropped significantly over the past year and a half, new friendships are being developed and students are learning the skills needed to resolve disputes through discussion.

The vision of the Imagine program does not end with the school day. The teachers and staff at the school encourage students to use these skills in their out-of-classroom activities.

Thank you to all the teachers, staff and students at Queen Elizabeth for welcoming me to their school and for making such a positive impact on our community.

PHARMACISTS

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): Given that the Minister of Health is refusing to meet with his Liberal caucus colleagues, it should come as no surprise that some of them are following his lead and refusing to meet with those affected by Bill 102.

On May 24 of last week, in the middle of constituency week, three local community pharmacists in Peterborough gathered at the local MPP's office to discuss their concerns about this onerous bill that's going to put them out of business, but they couldn't get near their MPP. They couldn't even talk to his staff, because in the middle of constituency week, his office was closed.

The next day, at 8 a.m., a dozen local pharmacists gathered at the member for Peterborough's constituency office. They were told that they couldn't meet with their MPP. They were told they couldn't meet with him during

constituency week. They were told they wouldn't be able to meet with the member until June 2 at the earliest, by which time this bill will just about be all wrapped up.

The pharmacists stuck around for an hour, hoping to appeal directly to the local member. He showed up at 9 a.m. Here's how the pharmacists describe their encounter:

"Other than to make a comment about the presence of a few local reporters, MPP Jeff Leal ignored the pharmacists and walked right by them. He said nothing to them and refused to acknowledge their presence. Taking the example of the MPP, the office staff members also ignored the pharmacists and did not speak to them. Disappointed, the pharmacists left."

Disappointed? Disappointed with Bill 102. Let me tell you, the people of Ontario are disappointed with this government, and they will be more disappointed on October 7—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Members' statements.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): The city of Cornwall in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh is one of the oldest in Ontario and has a long, proud history. Along with that age, unfortunately, comes some aged infrastructure. Due to the neglect of the last government, important facilities like our schools and hospitals were allowed to crumble.

To add insult to injury, during the last election campaign the then Minister of Health came to Cornwall promising that he had a cheque in his back pocket for a new hospital. This turned out to be just another empty Tory promise.

1340

Well, with the coming of the McGuinty government, those days of jiggery-pokery are over. The people of my riding know that this government will deliver on its promise to renew health care infrastructure in the riding. They know this because we are getting not one, not two, but three capital hospital projects in my riding, two right in the city of Cornwall. St. Joseph's complex continuing care centre has not just a shovel in the ground, but girders going up in the air, and the Cornwall Community Hospital and Winchester District Memorial Hospital are following suit.

Before constituency week, during opposition motion debate, the member from Dufferin–Peel–Wellington–Grey made reference to my riding not having hospitals. He commented that Jim Brownell should be, and I quote, "producing a hospital for the people in Cornwall." I'm pleased, Mr. Speaker, to ask a page to come here to deliver to his desk photos of the St. Joseph's hospital construction on—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Order. Members' statements.

PHARMACISTS

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): It will come as no surprise to the Coalition of Ontario Pharmacy that the Minister of Health is refusing to meet with them when he won't even, as we heard, meet with his colleagues in the Liberal caucus. The coalition is a grassroots organization that represents more than 80% of practising pharmacists and pharmacies in Ontario, and the Minister of Health refuses to meet with them.

Staffers in the minister's office have said there are too many pharmacies and some will have to close. That's a message now echoed by Liberal MPPs, as we heard earlier. Now they're refusing to let pharmacies anywhere near the minister, saying that they will only meet with the OPA.

As the coalition wrote to the minister on May 25, "We should not have to explain to you ... the difference between pharmacists and pharmacies." They go on: "Community pharmacies ... are where the business of pharmacy is conducted.... When the issues involve the closure of pharmacies, reduced service at pharmacies, fewer hours at pharmacies, and staff reductions in pharmacies, shouldn't the coalition that represents pharmacies be heard from?"

Minister, their requests are simple. I ask you, will you meet with them before the bill leaves committee? Will you let the pharmacies tell you first-hand about the negative impacts of Bill 102? Will you promise that pharmacies will not be the only constituency group shut out of your consultations?

SOUTH ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): One of the wonderful aspects of the month of May is the celebration of South Asian Heritage Month. As the month of May winds down, I'm pleased to report to this House that Hamilton is proud to be a part of South Asian Heritage Month as well. There were a number of tremendously successful events held to highlight the South Asian presence in our community, in keeping with the 2006 theme: "Acknowledge, Educate and Celebrate."

The Indo-Canadian Networking Council of Hamilton and area presented a gala dinner and musical concert on Saturday night in celebration of South Asian Heritage Month at the Hamilton Convention Centre, and a friend of mine, Neeraj Prem, a renowned classical musician, entertained people all evening long. Hamilton Place Studio Theatre presented an Indian classical music festival during the month. The Downtown Arts Centre held a day of celebration and exhibition earlier in the month. Plans have been put in place for our annual Sikh parade.

Last week, the Hamilton East NDP riding association and I hosted a great event to celebrate the South Asian community's contribution at Pulkhari's restaurant on Queenston Road and Highway 20. It was a wonderful time, wonderful food, and we welcomed community leaders like Ram Kamath, president of the Hamilton area

Hindu Samaj temple. I must remind the McGuinty government once again of the community's need for funding to rebuild their temple after fire destroyed it in a hate-motivated crime after September 11, 2001.

Today, Ontario is home to more than 500,000 people of South Asian origin, about 7% of our population. While the South Asian community has preserved and shared its traditions, it has at the same time contributed to virtually every facet of business and public service in our communities. I ask all members of this House to join me in paying tribute to the contribution—

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

OPPORTUNITIES FAIR

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): On Saturday, May 27, I had the privilege of hosting an opportunities fair at the Flemingdon Resource Centre with more than 50 community, government and business exhibitors. The opportunities fair was a chance for all residents, especially youth in my riding, to learn about government training initiatives, employment opportunities, adult learning courses, volunteerism, job search techniques and community-based programs and services.

This initiative was born in my community safety round table as a way to bring information on job training and job search skills directly to the residents. The community safety round table is very engaged in working on an action plan that will develop community-based initiatives, and information about employment opportunities is one of the key areas that the community leaders identified as a major issue.

I strongly believe that community safety depends on preventing violence from happening in the first place. We need to make sure that all residents have the information they need before any issues happen.

I want to thank all the exhibitors who attended the opportunities fair, including Alpha Labs, Costi, Don Mills Employment and Resource Centre, Early Years Centres, Flemingdon Neighbourhood Office, Common Ground Co-op, Woodgreen, Frontier College, McDonald's, Job Connect, George Brown College, Humber College, the Ontario March of Dimes, Canada World Youth, Overland Learning Centre, Enterprise Toronto, Seneca College, our own Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, the Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, Boys and Girls Clubs, Maytree Foundation, the Toronto Youth Cabinet, Youth Assisting Youth, and there were many more.

Thank you to everyone who took part. I know the residents of Don Valley West who attended appreciated all your efforts.

POSTER CONTEST

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): In my riding of Niagara Falls, the regional public health unit recently was proud to honour the winners of the fifth annual tobacco-

free-living poster contest. This year's theme was "My smoke-free Ontario means...."

Eighteen area elementary students received awards, with the winning entries to be used for today's promotion of World No-Tobacco Day, which also is the day the Smoke-Free Ontario Act comes into force, banning smoking in all indoor areas across the province.

A total of 4,247 entries were received as part of the contest, representing 78 elementary schools in all 12 municipalities across the Niagara region. Awards were presented in three categories, both French and English: primary, junior and intermediate. Award winners represented schools from Welland, St. Catharines, Niagara Falls and Port Colborne.

From my riding of Niagara Falls, Jesse LeBrasseur of Niagara-on-the-Lake finished third. Recipients from the City of Niagara Falls included Julia Lambourne, third in the primary division; Priscilla Pangan and Carly Milani, second and third in the junior division; and Cindy Nguyen and Elizabeth Kim, second and third in the intermediate division. These students and the Niagara region public health unit, led by Dr. Robin Williams, chief medical officer of health, deserve our appreciation for a job well done. I had the opportunity to meet each of the students and personally congratulate them.

CANADIAN PARAPLEGIC ASSOCIATION

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): I'd like to draw to the attention of all the members of the House some very special guests that we have in the Speaker's gallery today. We have representatives from the Canadian Paraplegic Association Ontario: Michael O'Brien, chair; Lynda Staples, vice-chair; Joe Dowdall, secretary; Harley Nott, past chair; and Barbara Turnbull, honorary board member. Joining them are Bill Adair, the Ontario executive director; Linda Kenny, director of provincial services; Barb Sampson, CPA Ontario patron; and Radka Poliakova, CPA Ontario. We welcome you into our House today.

More than 60 years ago, John Counsell saw a need for an organization to assist our veterans who suffered a spinal cord injury while serving overseas. Sixty years later, the Canadian Paraplegic Association still thrives. There is still a need, but much progress has been made. As we go about our lives, sometimes complaining, often taking for granted, these people are here to remind us just how fragile life can be and how we must make the most out of the worst that we have received. They surely have done that. Most of them have made a life under those most severe adversities.

Tonight you have an opportunity to meet with our special guests by joining them in the dining room. You will learn first-hand from their challenges and their victories. Perhaps those of us who have not heard their life's experience will stop and think, and finally realize that for those with spinal cord injuries and other physical

disabilities, there are no limits. Can the same be said of ourselves? We welcome them and we support them.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I would like to bring the members' attention to the Speaker's gallery, where we have, being hosted by the Windsor-Roseland Rotary Club, a group exchange team from northern Brazil: Fernando Prado, Manoel Coraci Dias, Dr. Pietro Pinheiro, Ana Cristina Candido, and from the US, Marta Richardson. Please welcome our guests.

RESIGNATION OF MEMBER FOR PARKDALE-HIGH PARK

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that a vacancy has occurred in the membership of the House by reason of the resignation of Gerard Kennedy as the member for the electoral district of Parkdale-High Park.

Accordingly, I have issued my warrant to the Chief Election Officer for the issue of a writ for a by-election.

ROYAL ASSENT SANCTION ROYALE

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that on May 18, 2006, in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor was pleased to assent to certain bills in his office.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): The following are the titles of the bills to which His Honour did assent:

Bill 41, An Act to create a comprehensive system of rules for the transfer of securities that is consistent with such rules across North America and to make consequential amendments to various Acts / *Projet de loi 41, Loi instituant un régime global de règles régissant le transfert des valeurs mobilières qui cadre avec celui qui s'applique dans ce domaine en Amérique du Nord et apportant des modifications corrélatives à diverses lois.*

Bill 81, An Act to implement 2006 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts / *Projet de loi 81, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2006 et édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois.*

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

Monday, May 29, 2006, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Shall the motion carry?

All in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1351 to 1356.

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

Ayes

| | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Arnott, Ted | Elliott, Christine | Peters, Steve |
| Arthurs, Wayne | Flynn, Kevin Daniel | Peterson, Tim |
| Balkissoon, Bas | Fonseca, Peter | Phillips, Gerry |
| Barrett, Toby | Hoy, Pat | Pupatello, Sandra |
| Bartolucci, Rick | Hudak, Tim | Ramal, Khalil |
| Bentley, Christopher | Jackson, Cameron | Ramsay, David |
| Berardinetti, Lorenzo | Jeffrey, Linda | Runciman, Robert W. |
| Bradley, James J. | Kular, Kuldip | Ruprecht, Tony |
| Brotten, Laurel C. | Kwinter, Monte | Sandals, Liz |
| Brownell, Jim | Leal, Jeff | Smitherman, George |
| Cansfield, Donna H. | Levac, Dave | Takhar, Harinder S. |
| Chudleigh, Ted | Marsales, Judy | Tory, John |
| Colle, Mike | McMeekin, Ted | Van Bommel, Maria |
| Craitor, Kim | McNeely, Phil | Witmer, Elizabeth |
| Delaney, Bob | Miller, Norm | Wong, Tony C. |
| Dhillon, Vic | Milloy, John | Wynne, Kathleen O. |
| Dombrowsky, Leona | Mitchell, Carol | Zimmer, David |
| Duguid, Brad | O'Toole, John | |
| Duncan, Dwight | Parsons, Ernie | |

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

Nays

| | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Horwath, Andrea | Marchese, Rosario | Prue, Michael |
| Kormos, Peter | Martel, Shelley | Tabuns, Peter |

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 55; the nays are 6.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

MEMBER FOR YORK CENTRE

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Today marks a momentous occasion, an event that happened 50 years ago in this province. It was the day that Wilma Kwinter consented to marry one Monte Kwinter. I have it on very good authority that her days of doubt have been very few and far between.

Congratulations, Monte and Wilma.

VISITORS

Hon. Laurel C. Brotten (Minister of the Environment): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to let my colleagues in the Legislature know that today I've been joined by the grade 5 classes from John English school in Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS ÉTUDIANTS AYANT UN HANDICAP

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): The McGuinty government is committed to the right of every person to find opportunity, achieve their life's goals and fully participate in every aspect of life in our province, including post-secondary education. We know that we will only achieve our potential as a province when every Ontarian achieves their potential.

We recognize the challenges that persons with disabilities face in obtaining access to and finding success in post-secondary education. Overcoming these challenges requires, in part, additional resources to help universities and colleges provide services for students with disabilities, services which will help them succeed in their studies.

Nous reconnaissons les défis auxquels font face les personnes handicapées en accédant et en essayant de réussir à l'éducation postsecondaire. Surmonter ces défis exige, en partie, des ressources supplémentaires pour permettre aux universités et collèges de fournir des services aux étudiantes et étudiants handicapés, c'est-à-dire des services qui les aideront à réussir dans leurs études.

I am pleased, therefore, to tell the honourable members that the McGuinty government invested more than \$28 million in 2005-06 to support services for students with disabilities. This represents a 10% increase over the previous year, and special financial aid supports are in addition to this total.

The increase of \$2.6 million has been used to support pilot projects, increase funding for interpreter services, enhance print alternate services for visually impaired students, and to provide additional funding to the offices for students with disabilities at each college and university in Ontario.

Services provided to post-secondary students with disabilities include: accommodations such as note-taking support for visually impaired students and interpreter services for hearing-impaired students; learning assessments to determine the nature of a student's learning disability; access to computers and appropriate technological learning aids; and extra time to write tests and exams for students with learning disabilities.

This new funding is part of our Reaching Higher investment to support increased participation in post-secondary education by persons with disabilities.

Under the Reaching Higher plan, the government invested \$10.2 million last year to increase opportunities for aboriginal peoples, francophones, persons with disabilities and people who are the first in their family to attend post-secondary education. This funding will grow to \$55 million by 2009-10.

Last summer, we established a new post-secondary advisory committee on disability issues to help provide advice on how to improve access to post-secondary education for students with disabilities and to enhance their success when in post-secondary education.

The investment we made reflects some of the advice we received very early in the committee's discussions. Future investments will benefit from this committee's continual and expanded input.

Our goal is to increase support to the more than 30,000 students enrolled in Ontario's colleges and universities who identify themselves as having disabilities. Our goal is to increase their opportunity for success.

This morning, Mr. Speaker, I visited the University of Toronto and the office that provides accessibility services to their students. I was impressed to see the special equipment and the services provided to ensure students with disabilities have the supports they need to succeed.

The people in that office, and in similar offices at universities and colleges throughout the province, are doing an admirable job of helping students with disabilities adjust to the challenges of their new environment.

We are achieving real results through our investment. We know that providing support and service to students with disabilities increases their chance of success at post-secondary education and in preparing for their future. The McGuinty government will continue to encourage and support them as they achieve their goals.

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): It's a pleasure for me to rise in the House today to provide members with an update on the Caledonia situation.

Late last week, I spoke with Confederacy Chief Allen McNaughton and Chief David General. We had a frank and positive discussion about the situation, and I shared my appreciation for the progress made to date by Six Nations and Haldimand county.

In a letter I sent on Friday to the federal Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Jim Prentice, I sought clarification of remarks by Prime Minister Stephen Harper with regard to the federal role in the situation in Caledonia. It is important to note that this situation arose as a result of Six Nations' longstanding frustrations with their federal claims process—a process that has failed to address claims on the Haldimand tract.

I am sure that all Ontarians were pleased, but in particular local residents, when the blockades came down on Argyle Street on Tuesday, May 23. I commend the communities of Caledonia and Six Nations for coming together on this matter.

As the members may know, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, Joe Cordiano, was in Brantford last Thursday. He advised the community that the province is providing \$500,000 in emergency financial assistance for local businesses. The province will work with

Haldimand county to distribute the funds where they are most needed. In my letter to Mr. Prentice, I said that I anticipated Six Nations would be requesting similar support from the federal government.

The province continues to work closely with those in Caledonia, and has set up a community liaison group to provide support to the community to share information. Made up of senior Ontario government delegates from a range of ministries and Ontario Provincial Police officials, the group is holding regular meetings with municipal and other community representatives. Again, in my letter to Mr. Prentice, I encouraged the federal government to nominate a representative for this group.

There's still much to do. However, I am hopeful that all the parties will build on the momentum of the positive developments of recent days and the goodwill therefore generated.

The provincial government has been working tirelessly to find a peaceful resolution to the situation in Caledonia. Well before the land occupation, Ontario, Canada and Six Nations had placed outstanding litigation brought by Six Nations relating to the Haldimand tract in abeyance and begun exploratory discussions. In early April, an agreement was reached to accelerate two of those claims.

Since the occupation, the Premier, myself and other ministers, senior government representatives and staff members from a range of ministries have been working very hard to ensure a peaceful resolution to the situation. In addition to the Ontario Secretariat for Aboriginal Affairs, ministries working on this file have included municipal affairs and housing, economic development and trade, public infrastructure renewal and culture. As well, the Ontario Provincial Police have been fully engaged in efforts to maintain order in a very difficult situation.

We named former Premier David Peterson as the provincial lead to help find some solutions to the immediate problems in Caledonia. A highly qualified and experienced individual, he has been empowered to negotiate on the province's behalf to ensure the removal of all blockades on transportation corridors. I have been in constant contact with Mr. Peterson since his appointment on April 29. He has done tremendous work to help address the current situation, and has made a commitment to stay on until an agreement is reached to remove the remaining barricades.

To address the longer-term issues that led to the situation in Caledonia, we appointed former federal Minister of Indian Affairs Jane Stewart as our special representative. She has had several meetings in the area and is eager to move ahead.

I would also like to point out that the province helped bring Canada into the negotiations and was instrumental in getting the federal government to appoint a representative, Barbara McDougall, to lead discussions with Six Nations on those long-term issues. The province will fully support the discussions through Jane Stewart.

The members need to know that the province has been and continues to be front and centre in addressing the

issues related to Caledonia. Let me briefly tell you some of the things we have done.

As I have mentioned, the province has been fully engaged. We were involved in discussions even before the current situation, and we have worked unstintingly to ensure a peaceful resolution to the situation.

From the beginning of the occupation, we have worked with Six Nations leaders to address the occupation and to find ways to resolve it.

1410

We have also sought federal involvement right from the start. Negotiations between representatives from Ontario, Canada and Six Nations resulted in an agreement on April 21 to discuss the long-term issues that underlie the Caledonia situation. Provincial representatives have held three meetings with Haldimand council. Staff from across government have worked as hard as possible and have held countless meetings with the parties in the Caledonia, Six Nations and Brantford area to address the situations.

As I mentioned, the province named David Peterson as provincial lead to find solutions to the immediate, short-term issues. We have also appointed Jane Stewart as the provincial representative in talks to address the longer term underlying issues. Funding assistance of \$100,000 was provided to Haldimand county to help promote local business affected by the situation. Assistance was also provided to the developer and offered to the builders for the costs and expenses incurred as a result of the current situation.

As I have mentioned, Ontario made a commitment last Thursday to provide \$500,000 more in interim assistance to local businesses in Haldimand county that have been affected, and we are continuing to work with the town, other community leaders and the developer and builders to resolve ongoing issues and promote local business.

The Ontario Secretariat for Aboriginal Affairs has established a 1-800 number to provide information on significant developments to the public.

I believe it is clear that Ontario has been very active in working with the parties to bring this situation to a peaceful resolution. What is also clear is that federal participation and leadership are absolutely essential in these discussions. The federal government has the primary responsibility for aboriginal people—a responsibility that cannot be avoided. While Ontario will continue to work very hard to resolve the immediate matters that are of concern to both the Six Nations and the Caledonia communities, it is incumbent on the federal government to take the lead on the long-term issues. Of course, we'll work closely with Canada and provide full support. Ontario remains committed to working with the federal government, Six Nations, Haldimand county, residents of Caledonia and others affected by the events in the community to achieve the best solution for all parties.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): You know, when we take a look at how this crisis in Caledonia and the Six Nations area is being managed, or

should I say mismanaged, by the McGuinty government, there's one word that does come to mind, and it does come up a lot down in that area: boondoggle.

The minister just recently talked about all the meetings that are occurring, but we've seen no management, we have seen no communication, we have seen no leadership and there is obviously no plan.

If you walk down the streets of Caledonia or if you go behind the barricades at Six Nations, which I have done, probably on 14 or 16 different occasions—on Tuesday, our leader, John Tory, was behind the barricades speaking with people—everybody wants to know what the government is doing, if anything at all.

We see a number of major flaws in this government's approach. People in the area feel the government is doing nothing. They feel as if they have been abandoned by Premier McGuinty and his cabinet. They want to know why the provincial government's Minister of Transportation wouldn't answer any questions in this House—he has now been replaced, I may add—about signage, about detour routes, about the collisions, about the problems tourists are having heading south. They are very concerned when they finally do see a Ministry of Transportation sign—a very large, well-lit sign put up at the north end of town—and it spells “Caledonia” wrong. They want to know if the Premier is even taking this issue seriously. It has been three months now. Is he just hiding under his desk, hoping that if he throws a bit of money at it, it will go away, or if he spends three months hoping that Ottawa will look after it, he can continue to stand behind the curtains?

Even if this government had been working on this, nobody would know. There's been no effort at all by this government to communicate with those citizens on all sides who have been affected; no elected members of government have come down. Sure, we get a video clip, we get the odd media statement—after Argyle Street was opened up, after some of the tough sledding had been done, work that was done by the community itself, by organizations that came together. Call them alliances, call them vigilantes, call them what you may, there was no government presence at all; people had to take matters into their own hands.

When people showed up in a video studio in Toronto after one of the battles had been won—Roy Green, on 900 CHML, used the expression “buzzards.” We all know that the vultures show up after a battle. This is the characterization we now have of this provincial government, certainly in central Ontario, those who listen to either CH television or 900 CHML. I don't necessarily use the word “vulture.” I compare the Premier and his cabinet essentially to cowbirds. The cowbird is a bird that lays its eggs in another bird's nest.

People want to know what's being offered in the negotiations. Is this government being stampeded? Are you giving the farm away? Again, all we get is silence. We asked the Premier, we asked this government, is South Cayuga on the plate? What do people in Dunnville think about that? Is Townsend up for grabs? What do

people in Jarvis and the community of Townsend think about that? What about Burch? Is anyone communicating with people in Brant county? Again, will this get the railway open? Will this get Highway 6 open? Will it get the tourists down to Port Dover and Turkey Point? Will this get steel and gypsum and fly ash back up north from the industry that's along Highway 6 and down on Lake Erie?

True leadership requires leaders at a minimum to be present during a crisis. John Tory has been down there three times—as recently as last Tuesday. Not a single cabinet minister accepted my invitation to come down to Caledonia, to come to Six Nations during this last week-end when you were really needed. And we all know what happened on Victoria Day. We know what happened on bread and cheese day. That was a disaster.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I want to respond to the statement of the Minister responsible for native affairs. The minister seems to be trying to pat himself and the McGuinty government on the back, but I think a review of the facts would show that in fact the McGuinty government should be apologizing in some cases for its inactivity on this file, and in other cases for simply making the wrong move.

What I note in the minister's statement is that he says, “From the beginning of the occupation, we have worked with Six Nations leaders.” This was an issue long before an occupation began, and that's the real nub of the issue. For over 12 months, aboriginal people in the Caledonia area were saying to this government—and, yes, to the federal government—“There is a serious issue here.” What was the response of the McGuinty government? A failure to respond, a failure to take the issue seriously. So today the McGuinty government wants to pat itself on the back, but the reality is, for over a year, when there was room to avoid some of the conflict that happened, the McGuinty government once again was heavy on the rhetoric but missing in action.

I want to go on to immediately after the occupation began, because that was another interesting episode. When aboriginal people at Six Nations finally decided that the only way they were going to be heard and listened to by the McGuinty government was to put together a protest, a picket line, what was the response of the McGuinty government? Well, they say they were negotiating. They say they were discussing. But in the middle of the so-called discussions and negotiations, in go the OPP, and people not just across Ontario but across Canada got to wake up in the morning and witness that debacle, that failed strategy.

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But what became even more interesting than that were the two excuses the McGuinty government put out for the police raid. The first excuse was that the OPP had suddenly come in touch with some new intelligence and that the raid was going to head something off. That held water for about a day and a half. Then the McGuinty government's line was that the OPP had conducted a raid because of a private injunction. I want thoughtful people

across Ontario to think about that for a minute, because what it seems to indicate is that, under the McGuinty government, public policy will be dictated by private injunction. If you've got the money to get a private injunction, then you can dictate public policy and what the police will do in a public conflict.

Neither of those excuses offered by the McGuinty government holds any water. The truth is that the McGuinty government has not been on top of this file from the beginning. What is so sad is that the conflict here could have been avoided. The economic loss could have been avoided, the social dislocation could have been avoided, the hard feelings that have been created could have been avoided—all of that could have been avoided. But what we had was a McGuinty government that was asleep at the switch, not paying attention to what was happening, not taking it seriously, and today they want to come into the Ontario Legislature and pat themselves on the back.

I say to you, you shouldn't be patting yourself on the back; you should be apologizing to the people of Six Nations and you should be apologizing to the people of Caledonia, because you are very much responsible for how badly this got off track.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): I want to thank the minister for making yet another announcement of a pre-announcement of a re-announcement, and on and on. We used to make fun of the previous government for doing that, and Minister Bentley is replicating that model.

Any help we give to people with disabilities to break down barriers is a useful thing. This announcement is part of the government's plan to invest \$10 million in 2005-06, rising to \$55 million in 2009-10. God willing, if they get re-elected, maybe they'll spend the bulk of that money down the line in 2009, when we're going to have the next election. But in the meantime, thank you for this re-announcement.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TTC LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Acting Premier. This morning millions of people—Toronto transit commuters and GTA car drivers—awoke to find their subways and buses and streetcars parked, and their routes jammed for hours on end. Would you please update the House as to exactly when your Minister of Labour was informed of the possibility of this strike action and what action he took to alert the public about this pending matter?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): I thank the honourable leader for the question. I received a call yesterday afternoon from my executive assistant informing me that the mayor of Toronto was seeking to speak with me. At approximately 5:45 last evening, I spoke with Mayor Miller and offered the mayor our assurances that MOL mediators would be available to work with both sides in trying to bring them together. That's when I first became aware of it.

Mr. Tory: That's a start, but the truth is that GTA and Toronto commuters, whether they be transit users or drivers, awoke this morning to find the largest city in the country in disarray: People didn't have a ride to school or to work, taxis weren't available, the subways weren't running. Many commuters are complaining, really more so than anything else, about the fact that they had absolutely no notice of this whatsoever.

Media reports suggest, and you have confirmed, that you knew about this yesterday afternoon. We'd like to know, then, when did you appoint a mediator to sit down with these people, what other action did you take and why didn't you at that time or at any time subsequent to that, before the evening was out, make any attempt whatsoever to notify the public of what was possibly or likely going to occur this morning so that they would have had some opportunity to change their plans? Why did you do nothing during that period of time?

Hon. Mr. Peters: I thank the member again for his question. I will comment to him that during the course of my conversation with Mayor Miller yesterday afternoon, there was no indication at that time that there was going to be any sort of illegal action taken. At that point, Mayor Miller was certainly aware that an issue had the potential to arise, and I reassured Mayor Miller that senior mediators from the Ministry of Labour would be available. Those discussions were taking place with senior mediators and they were certainly prepared to act and work with both sides.

Mr. Tory: Again, just to get some clarification from the minister, the implication of the minister's answer is that at no time was there in fact a mediator appointed and actually working on this file, which certainly was the suggestion in the news media yesterday. It doesn't really deal with the question as well as to why no efforts were made by anybody, including your government, the McGuinty government, to notify the public as to this issue. That is a given, that you did nothing.

The city of Toronto has asked today that employers, of which the government of Ontario is one of the biggest in Toronto, take measures to allow employees to have more flexible work hours and to encourage car pooling to take place. Can you tell me, did you in fact have a mediator on the job? Why didn't you communicate? And what have you done today, as an employer, to actually make sure that the afternoon rush hour—because this is still not resolved—will be easier for people? What have you done today?

Hon. Mr. Peters: Perhaps the honourable leader spent too much time in boardrooms and not enough time in dealing with labour relations during his tenure in the

private sector. He should maybe lean over to his right and speak to a former Minister of Labour to understand the appropriateness of what the minister should or should not do.

I think the member will be aware as well that Mayor Miller was as surprised as anyone this morning by the illegal actions that were taken. Mr. Kevin Whitaker, the head of the Ontario Labour Relations Board, was notified at 4:30 this morning. At about 7:10 this morning a press release was issued announcing the decision of the cease-and-desist order from the Ontario Labour Relations Board, and it was about 7:10 or 7:12 this morning that that information was relayed to the public.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question again is to the Acting Premier. Ontario wants an electricity system that is reliable and affordable. It's been 170 days since your government received the Ontario Power Authority's report on a recommended supply mix for Ontario's electricity system. When can we expect your government's response to this report and what can we expect will be in that response? What are we going to hear from you, and when?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): To the very fine and experienced Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): To the Leader of the Opposition, we will be responding to that report shortly. You're right; it's an important document. It will map out the next 25 years of energy supply in Ontario. There will be an opportunity at three-year intervals to review that plan, to update it. I'm confident that our response will be full and complete, and when it's released I'm confident that the people of Ontario will acknowledge that what we're doing is in the best interests of ensuring not only reliability, but a cleaner, greener source of power. The people of Ontario will respond well to a number of the initiatives, like conservation, which is so important to this province. You know, a megawatt saved is as good as a new megawatt of generation. I believe the people will respond quite well to our response.

Mr. Tory: In the relatively short time I've been here, I've learned that the word "shortly" can mean a lot of things in the context of how long it is going to be before we have that response to the OPA report. It has been 170 days so far.

My question to the minister would be this: Given that as each day passes, it is one more day when we're not able to get on with doing anything about this, it's one more day when the risk increases, can we expect that you're going to bring that response to the OPA report here to this House before the summer recess? Can we expect as well that the members of this Legislature are going to have an opportunity in some suitable place, whether it's here or somewhere else, to debate and discuss the implications of that report? What is the delay? What does "shortly" mean? Will you bring it to this

House and give us all a chance to talk about it before the summer recess?

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Hon. Mr. Duncan: We will respond when our full response is ready, but just to respond specifically to what it is we've done: November 2003, Bruce A, unit 4—770 megawatts; March 2004, Bruce A, unit 3—770 megawatts; Imperial Oil gas, June 2004—978 megawatts; Brighton Beach gas, July 2004—581 megawatts; Northland Power gas, July 2004—32 megawatts; Eastview Landfill gas, June 2005—three megawatts; Pickering A, unit 1, November 2005—515 megawatts; GTAA cogen, December 2005—90 megawatts; Glenn Miller hydro, January 2006—eight megawatts; Melancton 1, March 2006—67 megawatts.

This government has taken the steps needed to keep the power on. I can assure the Leader of the Opposition that we will take the necessary steps in our response to ensure that that power stays on for another 25—

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

Mr. Tory: I'll avoid the temptation to ask the minister which of those he actually plans to turn on on the hot days when the power supply system of Ontario is under stress, because there's a good number of those that you won't be able to turn on, and you know that.

Having said that, while we're on the subject of an affordable electricity supply, it's been many days—weeks—since you undertook to meet with the representatives of the OPG and Hydro One to discuss compensation and bonus issues. As you know, at the stroke of a pen, in one minute, your government and emanations of your government could approve a \$500,000 bonus for the CEO of one of those companies, but no one could come to this place and explain what that bonus was paid for. You've had 55 days to have those meetings with those officials. When are you going to come here and explain why and on what basis that person was paid a \$500,000 bonus at the same time as you were driving hydro rates to new heights under your government? When are you going to come here with that explanation?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The Leader of the Opposition won't have benefit yet of what's going to be released at 3 o'clock by the Independent Electricity System Operator, but for the edification of the House, I'll share with you what they're saying about this summer and about reliability. This will be released, as I understand it, shortly:

More than 600 megawatts of new nuclear, gas and hydroelectric generation have come online in the last year. Not only are they online, but they're working. Not only that, but the nuclear we brought on, we brought in on time and on budget, something that member and his party did not know how to do. Between 1995 and 2003, you cut the supply of electricity by 8.5%. The former energy minister, who still sits in this House, had the audacity to suggest that conservation doesn't work. In that member's riding, we have the first giant windmills operating. This is not an easy undertaking. It's one the

people of Ontario have entrusted to us. I can assure you the power will stay on, not only this summer but over the next 25 years.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Acting Premier. The air people breathe shouldn't make them sick, yet today, in an airshed stretching from Windsor in the south to Huntsville in central Ontario, there is a smog advisory and people are choking on dirty, polluted air.

After breaking his promise to shut all coal-fired power plants by 2007, Dalton McGuinty promised to clean our air by shutting down the Lambton coal-fired plant by 2007 and the Nanticoke coal-fired plant by 2009. Lately, Premier McGuinty doesn't sound too sure of that.

My question is this: Can you clean the air? Is the McGuinty government going to close the Lambton coal-fired plant by 2007 and the Nanticoke coal-fired plant by 2009, or is this going to be, yet again, another McGuinty broken promise?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): The government of Ontario remains committed to getting out of coal-fired generation in this province. We remain committed, unlike the member opposite, who has opposed our moves. He likes to have it both ways. When he's asking a question about a community that doesn't want it closed, he wants to keep it open; when he wants to appeal to the environmentalists, he wants to close them all.

The key is reducing emissions from coal. The key is reducing not only the direct emissions but, most importantly, the CO₂ emissions. This government has set an aggressive timetable to meet emissions reductions that we believe are in the best interests of all Ontarians.

I invite the member opposite to join with us instead of voting against all of our initiatives to clean up the air, to join with us to help clean that airshed between Windsor and the Quebec border. At the end of the day, the less emissions we have, the more emissions we take out, the better off we'll all be. That's why we're fighting so hard to lower those emissions.

Mr. Hampton: Once again, I asked a very specific question: Is Lambton going to close by 2007, and is Nanticoke going to close by 2009? I heard a lot of words and no answer.

Here's the nub of the issue: The Independent Electricity System Operator says that because the McGuinty government has bungled the hydroelectricity file so badly, "The coal units [must be] available for a period of time beyond the announced shutdown dates."

So my question is, again, who's telling the truth about coal? Dalton McGuinty, who can't keep a promise, or the Independent Electricity System Operator, who says that the McGuinty government is going to break this promise again—that Lambton won't happen by 2007 and Nanti-

coke won't happen by 2009? Who's telling the truth, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: One thing we know for certain is that that member isn't. The IESO has never, ever said that—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I think we need you to at least rephrase that. Withdraw.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I withdraw that.

What we can say within the confines of parliamentary tradition is that the IESO never suggested, hinted or otherwise intimated what the member says they did. Show me the paper. Show me anywhere they said that.

What I will show you is a press release, that's going out as we speak, that talks about all the initiatives we have undertaken that are ensuring not only that the lights stay on this summer but that our air is cleaner, that we're moving off the old carbon-based economy to a green renewable economy.

We will move heaven and earth to continue to achieve those objectives. We've already achieved significant progress in the reduction of emissions. Those increases will continue. I'll remind the member opposite—

The Speaker: Thank you. Be seated, Minister. Sit down. Final supplementary?

Mr. Hampton: I think we heard it. The McGuinty government will move heaven and earth, but Lambton won't close in 2007 and Nanticoke won't close in 2009.

I realize that the minister has been away from the file for a while, but I quoted directly from the last IESO report. "The coal units [must be] available for a period of time beyond the announced shutdown dates." That is from the IESO.

I ask the question again, because here's sort of the litany of events: Dalton McGuinty promises that all coal will be shut down by 2007. Then he announces, "Oops, sorry, the big one, Nanticoke: We won't shut that down by 2007. The biggest polluter: We won't shut that down. The plant that is responsible for most air pollution in southern Ontario: no, not till 2009." Lately he's been saying, "We won't shut them down until there's more power." I'm simply asking the question: What is—

The Speaker: The question has been asked. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The real answer is that this government is cleaning up our airshed and we remain committed to cleaning up that airshed and we're going to do it. We're going to do it by moving off of coal. We're going to do it by reducing the NO_x, reducing the SO_x, reducing the mercury emissions. They're already down substantially. Our reliance on coal is down substantially from when we took office.

Yes, unlike the federal government, we remain committed to Kyoto, and we will ensure that the energy sector in this province—that we achieve those goals and continue to move on.

That member is trying to have it both ways. In his supplementary he didn't say what he said in his first question, just like one day he says, "Close the coal plants," and another day he says, "Keep them open." We have a clear, concise policy that's designed to clean up

our airshed by removing the greatest polluters in this province. That's a record that is second to none in the history of this province.

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ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): To the Acting Premier: I didn't hear an answer once again to whether or not you're going to close these coal plants by 2007 and 2009—no accident, because your real electricity policy, the one you don't want to talk about most of all, is your \$40-billion mega nuclear scheme. My question about that is this: You've had several months now to respond to the Ontario Power Authority electricity supply mix report. Can you tell the people of Ontario when the McGuinty government is going to respond to the OPA report? Is it going to be in here in the Legislature, where there can be public debate, or are you going to run and hide on that one too to avoid the public debate that ought to happen?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): As I indicated in the question of the Leader of the Opposition, we will respond when our final response to the report is completely prepared.

I believe the people of Ontario will respond well and that they will accept the fact that we need to increase the amount of renewable energy we need in this province. I believe that they will respond well to the need to maximize our hydroelectricity opportunities. I believe they will respond well to the increased conservation initiatives that we will undertake as a result of our response.

His government, when they were in power, used to announce electricity price increases on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve in order to avoid public scrutiny. The member opposite may think that he can run and hide from having to respond by this kind of bluster, but I'd like to know—

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

Mr. Hampton: What people want to know is when the McGuinty government is going to stop trying to run and hide on its \$40-billion mega nuclear scheme. Canadian Press says that your government is delaying this electricity supply announcement until mid-June, maybe July; in other words, after the Legislature recesses. That really does sound like a government that wants to avoid accountability, wants to avoid any public discussion and hopes to make the announcement in the middle of the summer, when they hope no one is looking.

Minister, will you commit to putting the public interest first? Will you commit that your response to the OPA electricity supply report will be made here in the Legislature, where there can be public debate, public discussion and accountability to the people of Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: There will be ample opportunity in the Legislature to discuss not only our response to the report but the response with specific projects that we're

undertaking. There's no question that public consultation has been and will continue to be a part of this, including dialogue with members of the Legislative Assembly. I can assure the member that this is a 25-year undertaking, and the House likely will sit at some time within the next 25 years. I fully expect that there will be a lot of opportunity not only to debate our response but to debate some of the things that will fall out from that response, which will require an enormous amount of public attention. I look forward to the member opposite and all members of this House participating amply in that debate, because it is a very important debate. We do agree on that point. Over time, there will be many opportunities to debate this in this House.

Mr. Hampton: Once again, earlier, no commitment to close Lambton by 2007 and no commitment to close Nanticoke by 2009.

Now I ask a simple question: Will you commit that your response to the Ontario Power Authority electricity supply mix report will be made here in the Legislature—not after a recess, not in the depths of the summer? You can't even commit to that. This is a serious debate. We need to have a discussion about conservation. We need to see some real commitments to energy efficiency. But it would seem that the McGuinty government, once again, wants to run and hide. A \$40-billion decision, which we know from our history can quickly grow to a \$60-billion boondoggle, needs to be debated in front of the people of Ontario. Are you going to have that debate here in the Legislature, or is the McGuinty government once again going to run and hide on your mega nuclear power scheme?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: There will be full debate, full consultation, there will be opportunities in question period in the House, there will be all kinds of opportunities over the coming months and years to debate that. We have been having this discussion, really, since December of last year. That discussion is ongoing. We've had over 5,000 submissions from the public on all these issues.

Those kinds of debates and discussions are appropriate to this Legislature; they're appropriate for the people of Ontario. And it will be good to have them, because I'd really like to know where he stands, other than to take two or three positions on the same issue. He's always against everything. He cancels hydroelectric, wants to open coal, then close coal. It's time for all of us to put our positions on the record and be clear and unequivocal. This government has done that, we'll continue to do it and we'll be subject to debate not only in this House but right across the province as his—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

PHARMACISTS

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): My question is for the Minister of Health. As the minister knows, public debate on Bill 102 started this morning, and I think the fact that more than 300 people applied to make representations to the committee demonstrates the high level of concern and anxiety.

We certainly have heard from pharmacists and pharmacy owners who are concerned about the potential negative financial impact of this bill. We heard from Mr. Patel, who says he will have to close his pharmacy in Stouffville if the bill is not amended.

We have now also heard from Helen Stevenson, the executive lead of the DSS, who has said, "We've done a very, very detailed analysis of the impact. We certainly do not believe that, as a result of the recommendations, pharmacies will go out of business."

I ask, Minister, have you done a detailed impact analysis and, if so, will you make it public?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): First off, I think it's customary for the honourable member to talk about committees and not acknowledge that it was the tradition of her party while in government not to actually have the darned things work. This is a fundamental element of our process, and that's why we're proud to do it.

We should also note that the honourable member took away the voice of those 300 individuals and prejudged that all of them were looking to come to committee and to speak about concerns with the bill, when in fact we know already through today that many of the people who have made their presentations in front of the committee have supported the important principles that are contained in that legislation.

Here in Ontario, we seek to achieve the best possible price so as to use that advantage to purchase greater product in the province of Ontario. Incorporated in those reforms related to pharmacy—of course, we're working hard through our relationship with the Ontario Pharmacists' Association to address concerns. I can confirm for the honourable member that detailed analysis was done. But in the absence of a clear picture with respect to rebates, which we hope this committee work will encourage, we will be able to continue to work with—

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

Mrs. Witmer: It's unbelievable that the minister would stand in his place and talk about consultation. There was never any public consultation on the recommendations that were contained within the bill. In fact, he has attempted to do a real snow job, because the public is totally confused about what's in the bill and what your intentions may or may not be. There is no transparency and as far as support for the bill, I'm afraid that if you listened this morning you would have seen it's certainly quite lacking.

There are people in this province—there are pharmacists, there are pharmacy owners—who are concerned about the financial impact, who are concerned that in rural and northern Ontario pharmacies may have to close and it's going to hurt patients. In some instances, there's no doctor, there's no nurse. Can you confirm that there was an analysis done and, if so, would you share this finally and be transparent?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Another lecture from the honourable member, who brought bills into this place and brought motions into this place that didn't even have

third reading debate—mimicking from staff members on the sidelines, I'm sure, is out of order in this place, but the Tory tots are at it again. What they are doing is distancing themselves from reality, and the reality is clear. We have worked vigorously with respect to the analysis. The challenge that is there, clear and apparent for everybody, is that there are rebates being paid out for which there is at best a murky picture.

We're working with pharmacy. One of the reasons that I indicated this morning on the issue of the \$25 cap was that we're going to maintain the current status, so as to address those concerns that have been expressed, particularly by rural pharmacy. This is a \$13-million transfer back to pharmacy, in keeping with our fundamental commitment, which is that pharmacies, particularly those in rural Ontario, will not just stay, but they will be more vibrant because they will be accomplished at the work of providing direct patient care to our—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

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TTC LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is to the Acting Premier. This morning nearly one million people were shocked to discover that the public transit service they rely on, the largest public transit system in Canada, was simply not there: no buses, no streetcars, no subways. The McGuinty government was told yesterday afternoon that there was the real possibility of an imminent work stoppage at the TTC. Why didn't the McGuinty government take action—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. Stop the clock. I'm having great difficulty hearing the leader of the third party place his question. Perhaps the Minister of Health would recognize that, I need to warn the Minister of Health. The leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: The McGuinty government was told yesterday afternoon that there was the real possibility of an imminent work stoppage at the Toronto Transit Commission. Why didn't the McGuinty government act yesterday afternoon? Why were almost a million people put to an inconvenience on one of the worst smog days in the province?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): The honourable leader should know of the role that the Ministry of Labour plays. The role of the Ministry of Labour is to provide, offer up mediation services to both sides, and that was the offer that was presented to the city of Toronto yesterday afternoon, that a senior mediator would be there to provide assistance for both sides.

The province of Ontario does not operate the Toronto transit system. But in a situation of a labour dispute the ministry has skilled individuals who are available. That's what we provided; we provided senior mediation services and made them available so that both sides could sit at the table to resolve their differences.

Mr. Hampton: You'd think that when it's the largest transit system in Canada and one which almost a million people rely on, the minister would have called the workers' representative and the city's representative and would have said, "I have a mediator. I want you to meet with the mediator now." That didn't happen, and as a result the system that so many people rely on wasn't there for them today. In fact, what seemed to happen is, you decided to act tomorrow. Can you explain once again why there was this failure of leadership, why this failure to act appropriately when you knew yesterday afternoon there was the real possibility of an imminent work stoppage that would inconvenience literally almost a million people? Where were you when you needed to be there acting?

Hon. Mr. Peters: I reiterate the comments that Mayor Miller made, that he was as surprised as anyone. The Premier and myself have advised both sides to abide by the labour relations board ruling that ordered this illegal stoppage to end, that it cease and desist. That is the message that has been delivered. I would hope that the honourable leader would be standing up and saying the same thing, that the decision of the labour relations board should be honoured.

I think it's very important to notify the House that both sides are saying that they're going to be going back to work.

SMOKING CESSATION

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): My question is to the Minister of Health Promotion. Tobacco is a terrible addiction that has negative impacts on its consumers and everyone near them as well. The late Heather Crowe, who tirelessly advocated on the dangers of tobacco use, brought to the attention of all Ontarians the risk of smoking. Thanks to her work, we all know that smoking is our province's number one cause of premature death and disease.

With the passing of the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, this government has shown its commitment to the well-being of Ontarians, all the while looking to health care savings down the road that will result from less frequent smoking-related hospital visits. While this is an important initiative, it will take some time for smokers to be able to adjust to a smoke-free Ontario. As equal citizens in our province, they deserve to be able to frequent public venues like restaurants and enjoy patios in the summer. Some of my constituents from Stormont, Dundas and Charlottenburgh are concerned that this new legislation will keep them from being able to use patios. Could you clarify this aspect of the legislation for them?

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): I want to thank the honourable member for his reference to the late Heather Crowe. I had the real honour of having known Heather and attending her funeral on Saturday in the city of Ottawa, along with my colleague the member from Ottawa-Orléans, Mr. McNeely.

Sadly, in this province we will lose 16,000 people as a result of tobacco-related diseases, and one of those in-

dividuals was Heather Crowe, who put a human face on the struggles that people in the hospitality, restaurant and food service industry have suffered for many, many years. That's why I'm very pleased that within 48 hours, on May 31, the Smoke-Free Ontario Act comes into effect, which will give protection to individuals in the hospitality industry and customers. We've also expanded it, for those enjoying a meal or beverage outside, to ensure that if there's a canopy or any kind of roof fixture, individuals will not be allowed to smoke, endangering the health of hospitality workers or others enjoying a meal there.

Mr. Brownell: With these changes coming, there are some bar and restaurant owners who still feel that they will be forced to close their establishments due to decreased patronage when they are required to go smoke-free. However, just this morning in my local paper, the Standard-Freeholder, I read this headline, and I quote, "Former Smoking Ban Opponent Now Onboard: Restaurant proprietor says butting out good for business."

The article quotes Len Little, former chairperson of the Ontario Restaurant Hotel and Motel Association and himself a bar owner, who notes that although there was some initial impact experience to his business, staff and patrons alike have embraced the smoke-free environment.

Minister, what is your response to those who still believe that going smoke-free will harm their business?

Hon. Mr. Watson: There have been 115 studies examining the economic impact of smoke-free legislation to restaurants around the world. Jurisdictions like California, New York City and my hometown, the city of Ottawa, have all brought in progressive legislation that has protected not only hospitality workers but also individuals who frequent restaurants and bars.

The Westin hotel chain, one of the great premier hotel chains in the world, has gone 100% smoke-free in their rooms. Let me just quote one colleague from Ottawa, Phil Wasserman, who was a board member of the Ottawa region of the Ontario restaurant association when Ottawa went smoke-free four years ago. He said, "Some bars did have an adjustment period, but the more progressive ones renovated, brought in new entertainment and have done extremely well."

In Ottawa there are 181 more eateries in the city today than there were before the bylaw. I don't subscribe to the doom and gloom that some people have suggested. I have great faith in the entrepreneurial spirit of the businessmen and women in Ontario, and that in their heart of hearts, even those who oppose this understand that this is, after all, a health issue and that we want to offer the most protection possible to our patrons, our visitors and the hospitality workers.

1500

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): To the Acting Premier: On May 9, in this Legislature I warned your Premier about the breach of security with

respect to the power system at Caledonia. While your caucus heckled, I warned that the lights could go out. Acting Premier, on May 22, just two weeks later, the lights did go out. Vandalism shut down the Caledonia transformer station, wiped out Caledonia, parts of Haldimand and also Norfolk. On May 9, your government ignored my warning, although your government did replace the Minister of Energy after the power went out. Will the Premier of Ontario agree that on May 9 he did nothing, despite my warning, to prevent the vandalism, resulting in the massive blackout on May 22?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): To the minister of aboriginal affairs.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I appreciate the question from the member. He did give us that warning. Actually, other people in the community had made similar warnings about the power system, and the government did listen. Those warnings were discussed and passed on to the appropriate officials. I have to say to the member that this has been a very complex situation. We obviously regret the use of violence or any unlawful activity, and we are working very hard to resolve this in a peaceful manner.

Mr. Barrett: The fact is the lights did go out. There was no OPP presence, no surveillance. Mr. Tory and I were up there the next morning. On May 9, I did warn the Premier of Ontario, and we've heard today that there were other warnings as well about threats to the integrity of the electrical system. There were Mohawk warriors on those towers. There was a Mohawk flag 130 feet up on a tower, right above the transformer station. As we know, on May 22, the Caledonia transformer station went up in flames.

But two miles north of Six Nations is the massive Middleport transformer station. This has a capacity of approximately 2,000 megawatts, and it's just up the line from the Caledonia transformer station. Can the Premier of Ontario assure this House that when warned by me on May 9, this government beefed up security at that massive Middleport transformer station, or is there still no OPP presence at the Middleport station? I was up there last night.

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: The member is asking about operational issues that are the responsibility of the OPP. The OPP are obviously very aware of the risks in the area and plan their surveillance and operations accordingly. As the member knows, that is a very separate function from government. The OPP are basically in charge in the area of security and protection. Again, I would just thank the member for his bringing that information forward, and it will be passed on.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is to the Acting Premier, and it concerns the \$1,200 child care benefit that families with children under six are slated to receive from the federal government. The fed-

eral government has said quite clearly that the \$1,200 will not affect federal income-tested benefits; for example, GST tax credits. Will you therefore likewise commit that the new federal \$1,200 child care benefit will not affect eligibility for provincial income-tested benefits such as child care subsidies, rent-gear-to-income housing subsidies, Trillium drug program, property tax credits and sales tax credits?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): To the Minister of Finance.

Applause.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I really appreciate this. I did not plant that question, I want to assure my friend the Minister of Government Services, and there are notes coming in from all over the place.

Being that this was just a couple of days back, I personally have not had an opportunity to go through all of the details of the federal Minister of Finance's budget. I am advised that the benefit will not be clawed back. I am hopeful that the federal legislation permits that, but if there is any more to add to that, I will certainly get back to my friend from Hamilton East.

Ms. Horwath: We're looking forward to a commitment from the government not to have those funds affected by income cut-off levels.

On another note in the same area, the new federal policy is also going to result in higher tax revenues for the province of Ontario. We believe it's incumbent upon the McGuinty government to commit those funds to child care.

You promised to invest \$300 million to create 25,000 new child care spaces. We know that that promise has been broken and that has never been done. So it's even more important than ever that you keep any promise you make in this regard. I'm going to ask you very clearly, will you commit that any new provincial tax revenue that is earned as a result of the new federal child care dollars will be dedicated in Ontario, to Ontario's non-profit, regulated child care system?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: The national child care agreement that our government negotiated with the former federal minister, Ken Dryden, I think was a model for all of Canada, a great agreement. It would have resulted in some 25,000 new child care spaces in the province of Ontario. We are deeply committed to maintaining a strong and vibrant program. Already, some 14,000 new spaces have been committed. I will take her suggestion as information, as we consider both our fall economic statement and next year's budget. But just to repeat, we are very, very proud of what we've achieved so far. And with additional co-operation from the federal government, we think we can do even more.

CHILD SAFETY

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. I can't hear the member for Guelph-Wellington.

Mrs. Sandals: First, Minister, I would like to add my personal congratulations to you and Wilma on the occasion of your 50th wedding anniversary.

Minister, since the Amber Alert program was introduced in 2003, there have been 11 alerts issued in Ontario. Fortunately, seven of those children for whom the alerts were issued were found alive and returned safely to their families. Unfortunately, my constituents are less likely to see Amber Alerts, since there are no electronic highway signs in my riding. How might last Friday's expansion announcement assist in more missing children being found alive?

Hon. Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I thank the member for the question. The Amber Alert program is predicated on getting timely information out to as many people as possible about an abduction of a child. We have partners with the Ontario broadcasting association; we have partners with the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.—they run it on their 9,000 terminals; we also have the MTO signs. What happened is that on Friday we expanded the partnership to include Bell Canada and Bell Mobility. What this means is that now, if you register for free on the system, you will be able to receive an Amber Alert on your website or on your cellphone in a timely manner. We are convinced that the effectiveness of the Amber Alert program will be enhanced dramatically. Bell Canada alone has 25,000 of their employees on this network. By expanding it to include people virtually all over Ontario, we will in fact provide a more efficient service.

Mrs. Sandals: Minister, while the expansion of the program through the Bell network is great news, and I'm sure will make a great deal of difference, why aren't some of the other services—mine says “Rogers” here—included in the announcement?

Hon. Mr. Kwinter: What happened was that this was an initiative of Bell Canada, which approached the partners—the OACP, the OPP, the Ontario broadcasting association—and they have initiated this. They're absorbing all of the costs of the administration, but they are open to other carriers, whether it be Telus or Rogers or anyone else who wants to participate. They'd be delighted to have them participate. Right now, you can participate even if you're not a Bell subscriber, but there is a fee that will be charged by the other carriers. Hopefully, the other carriers will see that this is a worthwhile endeavour, will come on board, agree to absorb the costs of it and then all carriers in Ontario will have this incredibly effective tool.

1510

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): A question for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade concerning the plight of small business pharmacies in the province of Ontario: As the minister knows, 700 pharma-

cies are small businesses—mom and pop operations. A large number of others are small business franchises. These small businesses are under attack in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. Not only is the health minister taking \$500 million out of their pockets in the back office, but in the front office, higher taxes, higher hydro rates and higher labour costs are having a dramatic and increasingly negative impact on Ontario's small business pharmacies. What is the minister responsible for these small businesses going to do to help small business pharmacies that are having trouble making ends meet in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario?

Hon. Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): To the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I want to say very clearly that we have a lot of respect for the committee process. We've used it to very good effect in all past bills that I have had the privilege of bringing forward. At the conclusion of public elements of that, the government has an opportunity to bring forward amendments, as do the opposition parties. I would say that I think it's important to recognize that this is an important part of the process and we're listening very carefully.

We've already addressed one of the key concerns of a pharmacy this morning. I rather suspect that as we learn more about their revenue stream through the murky issue of rebates, we'll be in a much better position to make responses. I remain very open to doing that. We're working in close partnership with the Ontario Pharmacists' Association, and we believe fundamentally that the initiatives we're bringing forward will not impact the operation of pharmacy in Ontario. In fact, on the longer term basis with respect to recognition of the cognitive service they play, we will be able to enhance their roles as key front-line health care providers. We know this is essential, and we will get it done.

Mr. Hudak: I would have thought that if the Minister of Economic Development was going to refer the question, he would have referred it to the so-called minister responsible for small businesses in Ontario. It's a sad situation indeed for mom and pop small businesses that they now have to rely on a minister who has been found in violation of the Members' Integrity Act and didn't have the class to step down at the time. But I understand the minister wouldn't reflect it that way, because they're shrinking your ministry every time there is a cabinet shuffle.

I'll ask the minister one more time. The CFIB recently said about your budget, “This government takes the small- and medium-sized business sector—the group responsible for the bulk of new job creation and about half of total employment and economic growth—for granted ... the government is choosing to turn its back on the very people who could help.”

Minister, surely you're going to stand up, or maybe your colleague is going to stand up, and fight for small businesses in the province of Ontario.

Hon. George Smitherman: In keeping with the tone set by the honourable member, let me read a quote by

Bill Murdoch: "I hear a few catcalls and that: 'Well, you guys had it for a year. Why wasn't it done?' I want to tell you why it wasn't done: because we had an incapable, incompetent minister ... in Minister Hudak. He shouldn't have been the minister. He was the minister, and that's unfortunate. He had his own agenda. He didn't want to do what the House wanted to do. That was passed in this House by all three parties, and he wouldn't do the job he had to do as minister. He had a year to do it and he didn't do it."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Stop the clock.

New question. The leader of the third party.

MINERAL EXPLORATION AND PRODUCTION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the minister responsible for native affairs. Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation has told your government that they are opposed to mining exploration and mining development within their traditional territory. But the McGuinty government has encouraged Platinex Inc. to pursue mining exploration and mining development, even though the first nation has said no. Now the First Nation has been forced to sue the McGuinty government because of your failure to honestly and openly consult with it.

The Mikisew Supreme Court decision says that you must honestly, honourably and openly consult with First Nations before you attempt to approve mining development in First Nations traditional territory. My question: When will the McGuinty government live up to its legal and constitutional responsibility with respect to this First Nation, instead of forcing them to go to court to get you to observe—

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

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): The member opposite is right; there has been an action launched. So obviously, as a former Attorney General, he would know that it is inappropriate for us to comment on the particular case before the courts.

Let me tell you that this ministry and this government recognize the crown's obligation to respect and honour the aboriginal and treaty rights of communities, and that communities have a right to be appropriately consulted. There's absolutely no question that the Ontario Secretariat for Aboriginal Affairs has drawn up those guidelines, and each ministry will certainly draw up protocols. We're very, very proud of what our government is doing with regard to our duty to consult, and we will live by those Supreme Court decisions.

Mr. Hampton: I just want to read part of the decision to you. It says the crown's duty to consult says that you have to, "ensure that the representations of First Nations are seriously considered and, wherever possible, demonstrably integrated into the proposed plan of action."

Imagine the surprise of this First Nation and other First Nations when they heard you on the radio saying, on May 10, "As we speak, those guidelines are being developed, and as we speak, those protocols are being put in place." But the First Nations have hand-delivered to you and to your deputy their part, their views. You have not only ignored them, you have failed to respond.

Is that what the McGuinty government calls honest and open consultation according to constitutional law, when you ignore the very First Nations, and then go on radio and say, "Oh, it's all happening"?

Hon. Mr. Bartolucci: The member across has a very, very creative interpretation of reality. I want to tell you that the Ontario Secretariat for Aboriginal Affairs is drawing up these guidelines. Each ministry will be responsible for protocols. I am very, very confident that our ministry will have and will continue to live up to the decision of the Supreme Court. If the member had read the Ontario mineral development strategy, he would know that we are committed to that type of consultation, and we will continue to be committed to that type of consultation.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward–Hastings): My question is for the Minister of Labour. On May 19, our government announced enhanced protection for those who work in potentially dangerous confined spaces. This is in keeping with your commitment to improving health and safety conditions for all Ontario workers. Your announcement detailed changes that both strengthen regulations for workers who enter or work around confined spaces, while expanding the number of workers in workplaces covered by specific confined-space requirements.

For those who don't know, a confined space is defined as, "a fully or partially enclosed space that is not designed for continuous human occupation." Examples include holding tanks, vats or sewers. As one who is claustrophobic, I get the chills just thinking about that. As a result, working within or near a confined space can be particularly dangerous, since atmospheric hazards can cause suffocation, fire or explosion.

Minister, this is certainly good news. However, talk of regulation often meets with reflexive criticism. Some have asked if this will create more work and expense for employers. Will this be the case?

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): I thank the member for the important question. This government is committed to supporting and protecting Ontario workers and Ontario families. That's why we're ensuring that workers who enter or work around confined spaces are properly protected. We've enhanced existing requirements and expanded coverage to include workers not

previously covered, for example transportation and municipal workers. These new requirements are effective September 30, 2006.

As we know, employers are already required to provide protection to all workers who must work in confined spaces. These changes, though, are going to help to clarify those procedures. They'll make it easier for employers to understand their responsibilities and for workers to know their rights and what they must do to protect themselves and their co-workers. We spoke extensively with employer and labour groups about these regulations, and we've received support from all sectors.

1520

Mr. Parsons: Minister, I spent my first three years of full-time employment working on construction sites and have a fair awareness of the hazards that exist. I am very proud of the positive steps that our government has taken toward strengthening workplace safety for the betterment of all concerned. Improvements to the Occupational Health and Safety Act benefit everyone, not just the workers involved but also their families, friends and co-workers. Workplace tragedies devastate entire families and can overwhelm entire communities. They can be financially devastating as well. Businesses know that a healthy workplace is a productive workplace. Regulatory improvements are all about injury prevention and protecting our working families. Minister, can you highlight some of the other regulatory successes this government has achieved?

Hon. Mr. Peters: Our government takes workplace health and safety very seriously. We've taken action to promote a culture of prevention out there right now. Here are some of the examples, and perhaps the member from Niagara Centre will be listening: Effective June 30, 2006, agricultural workers will be coming under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. We'll be providing these workers with the same health and safety protection that exists in other sectors, including the important right to refuse unsafe work.

We've also updated our asbestos regulations, enhancing protective requirements. For the first time, this provides for compulsory training for workers involved in asbestos. This is the most significant update in the past 20 years. We've amended construction regulations to bring them up to date with new construction safety requirements. Along with last year's 18 amended occupational exposure limits, we will shortly be releasing our 2006 consultation for review. Health and safety—

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

TEACHERS' LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a question for the Minister of Education. As you are no doubt aware, the Near North District School Board is the only board in the province that has not reached an agreement with their occasional teachers. Some schools have been reopened, but many others remain closed. For

instance, the William Beatty Public School, the largest school in west Parry Sound, is not scheduled to reopen. Many parents are frustrated.

Pam Stoneman wrote me, “My kids are so disappointed that they are not in school, especially my 13-year-old in grade 7. Why are my three public-school-aged children being punished? My husband and I work full-time. Child care is a nightmare.”

Karen Hobson told me “that it is time for the Minister of Education to step in and reopen the schools and get the negotiations back on track.”

The McKowens said, “We pay a large portion of our taxes towards education. It is time for someone to take responsibility for this lack of education for our elementary students.”

These children want to be in school, learning. Minister, what are you doing to further the end of the strike in the Near North District School Board?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Education, minister responsible for women's issues): Thank you so much for this question. As you know, we have spent an inordinate amount of time talking to both sides in the Near North. The member near the area will likely know that our local MPP, Monique Smith, has been very involved with us as well. We have had ongoing conversations, both with the Near North board as well as with ETFO. Our priority has been from the beginning that children need to be in the classroom.

I was very happy to note, in discussions throughout this weekend, that more schools are open today. We anticipate that more schools will continue to open, and that in fact is the parents' priority as well as the teachers' and the board's: getting kids back into the classroom.

I will tell you that there has been a significant amount of discussion as well around the negotiation process. I am very hopeful that in very short order we would have good news for all of the people in the boundary of Near North.

PETITIONS

SEED GRAINS

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I have a petition to the Parliament of Ontario.

“Whereas farmers throughout Canada are suffering from the effects of low sale prices of their products, competition from subsidized crops grown in other countries, high prices of seed grains and forage seeds purchased from multinational seed companies, high prices of fertilizer (due partly to high oil prices), and high prices of necessary fuels for cultivating and planting their crops; and

“Whereas many farmers have traditionally kept seeds from their own crops to use as seed for the following year, or have purchased their seeds from neighbours; and

“Whereas multinational seed companies are proposing to sell to farmers genetically engineered seeds that will

not reproduce, i.e., sterile seeds called terminator seeds; and

“Whereas these terminator seeds would leave production of seed grains completely in control of the multinationals, since the use of these seeds would compel farmers to buy new seed grains every year; and

“Whereas these terminator seeds could possibly cross-pollinate with the traditionally open-pollinated plants nearby, causing crop failures, and eventually would cause starvation—there is no proof that it could not happen;

“Therefore be it resolved that, for the good of Canada and the world, Canada ban completely genetically engineered terminator seeds.

“We, the undersigned members of the Dromore branch of the Federated Women’s Institutes of Ontario, petition the Parliament of Ontario to support and urge the Canadian government to completely ban the use of terminator seeds in Canada and our province of Ontario.”

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

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

“To the Parliament of Ontario:

“Whereas amalgamation of the rural townships of Osgoode, Rideau, Goulbourn and West Carleton into the city of Ottawa, and are now known as wards;

“Whereas, as of 2001, there were 1,318 farm operations and a total of 80,060 hectares of farmland in the city of Ottawa;

“Whereas city council has only four rural councillors out of a total of 21, and will decrease to three out of 23 in 2007;

“Whereas decisions made by council are more applicable to city dwellers than rural and farmers;

“Whereas taxes have increased and services in the rurals have decreased;

“Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario order a referendum be held in the above rural wards of the city of Ottawa asking the people of these wards whether they wish to separate from the city of Ottawa and form a separate county;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to order such a referendum.”

I am in agreement and will sign my name thereto.

LCBO OUTLET

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot): I have a petition signed by some 600 residents of my constituency.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Don and Susan Pedo, being residents and business owners in Rockton, are requesting consideration and approval for an LCBO agency store to be located on their premises to allow customers and community equal access to the purchase of wine and spirits; and

“Whereas our proposal, application and added demographic and marketing data meet and/or exceed all

required criteria, based on published agency LCBO standards; and

“Whereas this petition is fully endorsed by residents, employees, community members and customers alike;

“We, the undersigned, agree with this request, endorse the efforts for approval to locate the LCBO agency store on the Rockton Berry Farm Country Market property and respectfully petition the Ontario Legislative Assembly to do the same.”

I’m proud to affix my signature in support of this.

CHILD SAFETY

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): “Whereas eight-year-old Jared Osidacz of Brantford was brutally murdered by his father on March 18, 2006, during a court-ordered unsupervised access visit; and

“Whereas two-year-old Kevin Latimer died on February 2, 2004, after falling from his father’s third-floor apartment window during a court-ordered unsupervised access visit; and

“Whereas Burlington MPP Cam Jackson has introduced Bill 89, Kevin and Jared’s Law, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and the Coroners Act to better protect the children of Ontario and mandate an automatic coroner’s inquest when a child dies while in the care of a parent who is or has been the subject of a court access order; and

“Whereas Kevin and Jared’s law will designate family members as having standing during such inquests and be eligible for financial payment of legal costs through the victims’ justice fund; and

“Whereas the province of Ontario has unclear guidelines and inconsistent policies for court-ordered supervised access programs that fail to prioritize the safety and welfare of children above all else; and

“Whereas section 22 of the Coroners Act allows the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services to direct that a coroner’s inquest be held into a death whose circumstances merit public scrutiny so as to prevent other deaths and injuries;

“Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, call upon the McGuinty government to call an immediate coroner’s inquest and to pass into law Bill 89 as soon as possible to give Kevin and Jared the voice they were denied in life before any more children’s lives are lost.”

That has my signature of support.

1530

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SERVICES

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I have a petition here on the subject of Better Speech, Language and Hearing Month.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas over one million Ontarians of all ages suffer from communication disorders relating to speech, language and/or hearing; and

“Whereas there is a growing need for awareness of the profound developmental, economic and social conse-

quences that communication disorders have on people and their families; and

“Whereas persons with communication problems require access to the professional services of audiologists and speech-language pathologists who provide treatments to improve and enhance quality of life; and

“Whereas effective treatment of communication disorders benefits all of society by allowing otherwise disadvantaged persons to achieve their academic and vocational potentials; and

“Whereas investments in treatments for communication disorders pay economic dividends in reduced reliance on other social services,

“We, the undersigned, in conjunction with the Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to proclaim the month of May as Better Speech, Language and Hearing Month.”

This is a petition I support.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): “Whereas long-term-care funding levels are too low to enable homes to provide the care and services our aging seniors and parents who are residents of long-term-care homes need, with the respect and dignity that they deserve; and

“Whereas, even with recent funding increases and a dedicated staff who do more than their best, there is still not enough time available to provide the care residents need. For example, 10 minutes, and sometimes less, is simply not enough time to assist a resident to get up, dressed, to the bathroom and then to the dining room for breakfast; and

“Whereas those unacceptable care and service levels are now at risk of declining” further;

“We, the undersigned, who are members of family councils, residents’ councils and/or supporters of long-term care in Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase operating funding to long-term-care homes by \$306.6 million, which will allow the hiring of more staff to provide an additional 20 minutes of care per resident per day over the next two years (2006 and 2007).”

This has my signature of support as well.

PROSTATE CANCER

Mr. Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): It’s a pleasure to be recognized. I’m pleased to read the following petition on behalf of my riding of Niagara Falls, and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas mammogram tests for women are fully covered by the Ontario insurance plan for early detection

of breast cancer and PSA test for men is only covered once the physician suspects prostate cancer,

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

“We support Bill 4. We believe PSA testing should be covered as an insured service by the Ontario health insurance program. Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Canadian men. At least one in every eight Canadian men is expected to develop the disease in their lifetime. Some five million Canadian men are currently at risk in their prostate-cancer-risk years, which are between the ages of 45 and 70. For many seniors and low-income earners, the cost of the test would buy ... a week’s worth of groceries for some individuals.”

I’m pleased to sign my signature in support of this petition.

FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): I want to thank Dr. Robert Banting for sending me this petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

I’m happy to sign that petition.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): This petition focuses on the early learning and child care agreement with the government of Canada. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the people of Ontario expect the government of Canada to honour existing agreements with the government of Ontario;

“Whereas provinces and territories negotiated agreements with the federal government to ensure Canadians would have access to early learning and child care programs that are high-quality, affordable, universally inclusive and developmental;

“Whereas parents in Ontario have demonstrated a high demand for greater access to high-quality early learning and child care programs;

“Whereas Ontario’s early learning and child care agreement with the government of Canada would provide Ontario families with at least 25,000 new high-quality ... child care spaces in the first three years;

“Whereas Ontario’s early learning and child care agreement represents a \$1.9-billion investment over five years in high-quality early learning and child care;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the government of Ontario in calling on the government of Canada to honour Ontario’s early learning and child care agreement, for the sake of the thousands of Ontario families who would benefit from it.”

Since I agree, I’m delighted to sign this petition.

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): “Whereas Ontario has an inconsistent policy for access to new cancer treatments while these drugs are under review for funding; and

“Whereas cancer patients taking oral chemotherapy may apply for a section 8 exception under the Ontario drug benefit plan, with no such exception policy in place for intravenous cancer drugs administered in hospital; and

“Whereas this is an inequitable, inconsistent and unfair policy, creating two classes of cancer patients in Ontario with further inequities on the basis of personal wealth and the willingness of hospitals to risk budgetary deficits to provide new intravenous chemotherapy treatments to these cancer patients; and

“Whereas cancer patients have the right to the most effective care recommended by their doctors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to provide immediate access to Velcade and other intravenous chemotherapy while these new cancer drugs are under review and provide a consistent policy for access to new cancer treatments that enables oncologists to apply for exceptions to meet the needs of patients.”

This has my signature of support.

GO TRANSIT TUNNEL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have another petition that is focused on the Old Weston Road dilapidated bridged. It reads as follows:

“Whereas GO Transit is presently planning to tunnel an area just south of St. Clair Avenue West ... making it easier for GO trains to pass a major rail crossing;

“Whereas TTC is presently planning a TTC right-of-way along all of St. Clair Avenue West, including the bottleneck caused by the dilapidated St. Clair Avenue-Old Weston Road bridge;

“Whereas this bridge (underpass) will be: (1) too narrow for the planned TTC right-of-way, since it will leave only one lane for traffic; (2) it is not safe for pedestrians (it’s about 50 metres long). It’s dark and slopes on both east and west sides, creating high banks for 300 metres; and (3) it creates a divide, a no man’s land, between Old Weston Road and Keele Street. (This was acceptable when the area consisted entirely of slaughterhouses, but now the area has 900 new homes);

“Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that GO Transit extend the tunnel beyond St. Clair Avenue West so that trains will pass under St. Clair Avenue West, thus eliminating this eyesore of a bridge with its high banks and blank walls. Instead it will create a dynamic, revitalized community enhanced by a beautiful continuous cityscape with easy traffic flow.”

Since I agree, I’m delighted to sign this petition.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I want to thank the good people at Sara Vista Nursing Home in Elmvale for sending me this petition.

“We, the undersigned, who are members of family councils, residents’ councils and/or supporters of long-term care in Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase operating funding to long-term-care homes by \$306.6 million, which will allow the hiring of more staff to provide an additional 20 minutes of care per resident per day over the next two years (2006 and 2007).”

I’m happy to sign that.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): That concludes the time allocated for petitions.

1540

CONSIDERATION OF BILLS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting the meeting time this afternoon and consideration of Bill Pr24.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Bradley has asked for unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting the meeting time this afternoon and consideration of Bill Pr24. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that, notwithstanding any standing order, at 6 p.m. today the Speaker shall adjourn the debate on Bill 117, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act to provide for an Ontario home electricity payment, and call orders of the day; and

That the debate on Bill 117 shall be considered to be one full sessional day; and

That the House be authorized to meet beyond 6 p.m. for the purpose of considering Bill Pr24, An Act respecting the City of London, for which the orders for second and third reading may be called consecutively and

on which the Speaker shall immediately put the questions without debate; and

That upon completion of consideration of third reading of Bill Pr24, the Speaker shall adjourn the House until 6:45 p.m. this evening.

The Speaker: Mr. Bradley has moved that, notwithstanding any standing order, at 6 p.m. today the Speaker shall adjourn the debate on Bill 117, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act to provide for an Ontario home electricity payment, and call orders of the day; and

That the debate on Bill 117 shall be considered to be one full sessional day; and

That the House be authorized to meet beyond 6 p.m. for the purpose of considering Bill Pr24, An Act respecting the City of London, for which the orders for second and third reading may be called consecutively and on which the Speaker shall immediately put the questions without debate; and

That upon completion of consideration of third reading of Bill Pr24, the Speaker shall adjourn the House until 6:45 p.m. this evening.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

INCOME TAX AMENDMENT ACT (ONTARIO HOME ELECTRICITY RELIEF), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI DE L'IMPÔT SUR LE REVENU (AIDE AU TITRE DES FACTURES D'ÉLECTRICITÉ RÉSIDENTIELLE DE L'ONTARIO)

Mr. Sorbara moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 117, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act to provide for an Ontario home electricity payment / Projet de loi 117, Loi modifiant la Loi de l'impôt sur le revenu pour prévoir un paiement au titre des factures d'électricité résidentielle de l'Ontario.

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

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): If I might just begin my remarks with a word to my colleagues in the Legislature, it's been a rather interesting seven months for me, sometimes difficult, but I would tell you that the support not just from members of my own caucus but of the two caucuses across the aisle has made it quite a bit easier. I'm delighted at being back in this chair and these responsibilities, that I am beginning my new role as Minister of Finance by speaking to Bill 117.

I want to make the point that I'm going to be providing just a few preliminary remarks on Bill 117 and sharing the remainder of my time with my parliamentary assistant, whom I haven't even had a chance to say hello

to yet since last week, the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge.

I want to start by thanking my predecessor, Dwight Duncan. He did an enormous job, a huge job, a great job as Minister of Finance, and it will take some doing to fill his shoes. He brought forward a remarkably comprehensive budget, a responsible budget, which he delivered at the end of March, and in that budget he made a decision to bring forward the legislation that we're debating today. I know that in his new responsibilities, which are like his old responsibilities, as Minister of Energy, he will follow closely the development of this bill which, simply stated, is a provision to amend the Income Tax Act to provide a benefit to assist those of most modest means in the province with rising electricity costs. In his new capacity, I want to wish him well. As he resumes the responsibilities of that portfolio, I know he will be following the progress of this bill.

Bill 117 is all about supporting our goal of providing assistance to the most vulnerable people in Ontario. We are responding to rising electricity costs with a program that delivers some support to those with the fewest options available to them and, proportionately speaking, some of the highest costs. Through the programs created by Bill 117, we will provide a total of some \$100 million to almost 1.5 million low-income families. As you'll hear in a few moments from the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge, these measures are part of a larger whole, a package of measures that our government is pleased to be putting in place.

I think it's important in our role as legislators and as compassionate human beings that we pause and consider the importance of this particular initiative. It's about more than just putting a few extra dollars in people's pockets, although it's certainly intended to do that; it's about recognizing that people with low incomes face difficult choices all of the time. If we can do anything to help lighten that load, so to speak, then I believe it is incumbent on us to do so. But we must pay more than just lip service to their needs, and we will do more. We must act in a concerted, responsible and prudent manner, and that's what this bill does. Our 2006 budget reflected that same dedication.

We welcome the opportunity to provide this assistance to the most vulnerable people in society, and I welcome the chance once again to address my colleagues and offer my support for our government's program. I do look forward to hearing the thoughts of my colleagues in this Legislature on this important piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Milloy): Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): I am particularly pleased to be able to join in the debate today following the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Greg Sorbara. It has been my pleasure to work with him in his capacity as finance minister, and I look forward to continuing that relationship on a go-forward basis, until such time as the Premier sees fit to move me somewhere else to some other role with some other minister. But in

the interim, I very much look forward to continuing our working relationship.

I want to thank Minister Sorbara for his opening remarks in regard to Bill 117. I also want to congratulate and thank Minister Dwight Duncan. I know that during his time as the Minister of Finance, the job that he did, it was my honour to be able to support him in the development and presentation of his budget during this year. I want to wish him well in his portfolio, returning to the Ministry of Energy, obviously a key portfolio in our government as well.

You'll recall that in the 2006 budget, we made some historic investments in health care, education and post-secondary education in an effort to build a stronger economy. These included a \$218-million investment to support at-risk youth and vulnerable adults and families, bringing the total investment to those at risk in our province to some \$10.3 billion, second only to our investment in education and in health care. We recognize that in order for every Ontarian to participate in the province's prosperity, we must ensure that all effective supports and opportunities are available for all citizens.

Bill 117 builds on this commitment to help the most vulnerable in our community. In this case, low-income Ontarians who will need assistance with their electricity costs are those that will be the benefactors of this legislation.

1550

In my view, this is an opportunity for us to address what I refer to as the social and human deficit in Ontario. We propose to provide this assistance by means of a one-time payment of up to \$120 for families with a net income of less than \$35,000 and up to \$60 for individuals whose net income is less than \$20,000.

Research has shown that people with the lowest incomes spend more than three times as much of their income as the average Ontarian on energy costs and on electricity, and they rely twice as much on electrical heating equipment for their major heating systems. So we propose that the Ontario home electricity relief program to help mitigate these costs be enacted.

The mechanism by which we would deliver this assistance is really quite simple. Pretty much anyone who claims the Ontario property tax credit—in other words, anyone who owns or rents their own home and falls within the income parameters that I mentioned earlier—would be eligible. To qualify for relief under this legislation, people would have to file a 2005 personal income tax return on or before the end of 2006.

Discussions are currently under way with the Canada Revenue Agency for the delivery of this one-time payment. Delivery of the first cheques could begin as soon as the fall of 2006. The discussions with CRA to date have been very positive and encouraging about the capacity to implement this in a simple and easy fashion.

In addition to this particularly important new initiative, the Minister of Community and Social Services will soon be introducing legislation that would implement the second part of our April 12 announcement. Her legis-

lation would double the amount of funding for the emergency energy fund to some \$4.2 million. Of this new funding, \$500,000 will be specifically targeted for First Nations people living on-reserve. This fund helps social assistance recipients and other low-income households pay for utility arrears, security deposits and reconnection costs for electricity, hydro, natural gas, oils and other forms of energy when they find themselves in a crisis mode.

We're investing in the people of Ontario—and in their priorities, the things that matter most to them.

I'd like to spend just a few minutes showing how Bill 117 moves forward on our plan for Ontario, how it builds on our achievements over the previous years and positions us for a brighter tomorrow.

I'll start by focusing on our continued support for those who are the most vulnerable in our province. Initiatives that we introduced in the 2006 budget show the government's commitment to improve support for those who need it most. Our commitment includes:

- making permanent the flow-through of the July 2004, 2005 and 2006 increases to the national child benefit supplement;

- a 2% increase in social assistance rates for recipients of Ontario Works and the Ontario disability support program, in addition to the 3% increase in 2004-05;

- enrichment of the Ontario property and sales tax credits so that senior couples who receive the guaranteed minimum level of income from government would get the full benefit of those credits;

- additional support for at-risk youth by establishing the youth challenge fund, which will provide up to \$45 million in provincial and private sector funding to support community-led programs in Toronto that offer young people positive alternatives to guns and gangs;

- providing more than \$28 million in the first three years of a new youth opportunity strategy to expand employment and training programs and support the hiring of new outreach workers in at-risk communities across the province.

This is in part a response to the social and human deficit we inherited from the previous government. It's no less important than dealing with the health deficit, the education deficit, the infrastructure deficit or the more composite umbrella fiscal deficit.

In addition, we've made other key investments in developmental services, other supports for the vulnerable and affordable housing. A new Canada-Ontario affordable housing program agreement will result in an overall investment of \$734 million. The Ontario and federal governments will each provide \$301 million, with additional contributions from municipal governments.

Bill 117, proposing electricity relief for people with low incomes, is an important element of our overall plan for the province. It is coupled with one of the most ambitious building programs in North America for new electricity generation. Over the course of three years, this government has initiated dozens of projects to provide, together with other conservation efforts, about 11,000

megawatts of supply over the next five years. This is enough power for five million Ontario homes. Hydro One is investing more than \$3 billion over the next five years to sustain, expand and reinforce our transmission and distribution systems.

We've also announced a three-year extension of stable pricing for electricity provided by Ontario Power Generation. Our pricing policy has saved electricity consumers about \$740 million in 2005 alone.

The government is committed as well to creating a culture of conservation. Our goal is to achieve a 10% reduction in the government's electricity use by 2007, and we're encouraging consumers to reduce the use of electricity with the installation of 800,000 smart meters by 2007. I can tell you that we're well on our way to achieving those goals. Through new generation and conservation, the McGuinty government will keep the lights on.

The 2006 budget makes investments to support key sectors, including agriculture, forestry, culture, and research and innovation. These investments will strengthen Ontario's competitive advantage, boost economic growth and improve the quality of life for all Ontarians. Ensuring that all Ontarians can enjoy a high quality of life is important to our government. It's important to note that we're making these significant—groundbreaking, if you will—investments without introducing new taxes or any increases to the current ones.

But we have to continue planning for the medium and the longer terms. To that end, our government will continue to strengthen the economy through investments in post-secondary education, infrastructure, research and innovation, and key economic sectors, including a continued focus on education and training by government and business; better integration of new Canadians into the economy, including in high-skill, high-wage jobs; increasing research and innovation capacity; investing in the infrastructure of Ontario. A reliable, sustainable energy supply, a healthy business environment, ongoing fiscal discipline and managing health care costs are important parts of our overall plan and agenda.

I am very proud of our plan and the accomplishments we've achieved in the two and a half years that we've had the privilege to serve the people of Ontario as their government. We remain committed to Ontarians and we want every Ontarian to have the opportunity to succeed. That's why we're building opportunities for each and every one to reach their goals. I'm excited about our plan for the future, because ultimately it's a plan that will strengthen the province. It will strengthen its economy, its prosperity and the health of the people of Ontario, and the education and skills of the future generation.

In closing, Ontario will be at its best only when every Ontarian has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential. The measures contained in Bill 117 provide some assistance—modest, admittedly, but important nonetheless—to people with low incomes as they seek to do what they must do every day of their lives: make the most of the opportunities available to them.

I'm going to ask the honourable members for their support for this program so we can move forward with our budget commitment to support those most vulnerable in our community to ensure that their lights stay on.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

1600

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): It's my pleasure to add comments. I would like first of all to welcome the member for Vaughan–King–Aurora back to his old job as Minister of Finance. Congratulations.

I would like to comment on Bill 117, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act to provide for an Ontario home electricity payment. Today is the first day I've seen it. What strikes me as a little strange about this bill is that it's one-time relief and it's pretty meagre relief: \$60 for a single person; \$120, one time, for a family.

I'm a little surprised that it is just for one time. It's based on the 2005 taxation year. I would have thought it might be a more efficient use of the Legislature's time to build in for next year's big increases in electricity prices and for the year after, with this government's plan of having a short-supply, high-priced electricity policy, particularly with the moving target that they've set for shutting down coal-fired generation. It was 2007, it's been switched to 2009, and there are a lot of qualifiers in there now. Hopefully the government is going to come to its senses and just set environmental targets, work to make those coal-fired generating stations as clean as possible and provide electricity at the most reasonable price possible for the province of Ontario.

Certainly I worry about what's going to happen, not only for consumers but for industries like the forestry sector, the pulp and paper sector and manufacturing that are really being hard hit. Of course, it affects people's livelihoods when a company goes out of business because they can't afford to pay the high electricity prices: There are no longer jobs available for the people of Ontario. That's what worries me a great deal with this government's electricity policies.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I too would like to welcome the Minister of Finance back to his seat, in which I think he looks quite appropriate. You always looked a little bit out of place down at that end of the Legislature.

In any event, I listened to what he had to say about wanting to do more for "people with limited income." I think those were almost his exact words. I tried to write them down as he spoke. To use one of my favourite quotes from Socrates, "I would gladly be persuaded by you, sir, but not against my better judgment." I would be gladly persuaded that you were out to help people of limited income, even if it is only \$5 a month, which is the maximum that a single person is allowed under this bill, except that everything else that has happened in the whole issue of poverty in this province since the McGuinty government came to office has been a profound disappointment to me, because I honestly believed that things would be better than they were under the Harris Tories. I have to tell you I cannot say in all good conscience that you have delivered that to date.

We still have a clawback on those poor children who rely on funds from the federal government and who are not getting them. We still have, in your second budget, a freeze in payments to those on ODSP and Ontario Works, so that today, with 6% inflation, they're actually worse off than they were in the Harris times. We have an increase in energy costs. We have a health care premium that many of them have to pay. We have delisting of services. All of these have profoundly affected those of modest and low incomes. Anyone will thank you for \$5, and I'm sure there are people out there who will say that \$5 a month is going to help, but in the end it's very little and very late.

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph–Wellington): I'm pleased to be able to respond to the speeches by the Minister of Finance—welcome back—and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance on Bill 117, a bill to establish the Ontario home electricity relief program, which will provide some rebates for low-income Ontario families, because the McGuinty government recognizes that low-income families pay a higher percentage of their income to energy costs than some of us with higher incomes do. We realize that they're under the most pressure as hydro costs go up.

There were some comments here about the fact that while this really isn't very much—and I would like to put it into perspective—low-income families, which would be families up to a cut-off of \$35,000, depending on income could receive a maximum of a \$120 rebate. Individuals with a net income of less than \$20,000 a year would be entitled to some rebate, in this case up to \$60 in assistance. If you look at this, a family would be entitled to a maximum of \$10 per month. An individual living alone would be entitled to a maximum of up to \$5 a month.

I'd like to put that in perspective. When we looked at increasing hydro costs in Guelph, in my constituency, Guelph Hydro said that when you looked at the average family in Guelph, the average hydro bill in Guelph, it would increase by about \$6.80 a month. If that's reflective of an individual, the rebate is almost the entire cost; for a family, the whole cost.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): I'd just say that only the Liberals would do it this way. You're going to give individuals up to \$60 and families up to \$120. Why don't you just cut their taxes rather than spending \$100 million, and God knows what extra you'll spend on hiring bureaucrats and cheque-printing machines and everything that's going to be required to get \$60 back to an individual? Why don't you just take them off the tax rolls, as we took some 800,000 people off the tax rolls when Mike Harris cut taxes in this province? They don't pay Ontario income tax anymore. Why don't you just do that and cut out the middlemen and the bureaucrats for a mere \$60, a one-time rebate? You'll gear up this whole program and you'll waste all kinds of money on administration for a pittance of, a fraction of their electricity.

The average family in Ontario earning \$62,000 pays over \$28,000 in federal and provincial taxes and GST and PST. That \$28,000 is more than they spend, by the

way, on lodging, electricity and food combined. So why don't you take that huge chunk of money you're taking from low-income people every year and just give them a tax cut, and forget the bureaucracy?

Again, hydro rates have gone up 55% since the McGuinty government came into office. They broke their promise to keep the cap on electricity. They were very, very clear, just like breaking the promise on, "I won't raise your taxes."

It's noble that you want to help low-income people, but you also broke your promise in only giving ODSP recipients and welfare recipients a 2% increase this year. You were going to bring the rates back to where they were when you were last in office, when one in 10 Ontarians was on welfare or social assistance in this province, a complete disgrace during booming times in the mid—

The Acting Speaker: The member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Arthurs: On behalf of myself and Minister Sorbara, I'm pleased to just add a couple of further comments and thank the members from Parry Sound–Muskoka, Beaches–East York, as well as from Guelph and Simcoe–Grey.

I know the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka was referencing the one-time support being kind of meagre. We have to put it in the full context: This is a \$100-million investment that will help some 1.5 million Ontarians who are in the greatest degree of need, as well as provide for a doubling of the emergency relief fund, for those who find themselves in a crisis mode, to support those where the need is absolutely the greatest at any given point in time.

The member from Beaches–East York is consistent in the context of what he has his focus on: those in the community, in the province, who suffer from a high degree of poverty. He reminds us of that, holds the government's feet to the fire over that on an ongoing basis. I think it's important to do that.

I referenced in my comments a kind of human and social deficit, and I would like to look at this as one piece of a larger puzzle and say, how are we dealing with that human deficit, that social deficit? What are all of the parameters we're trying to package under that? This is one piece of that. It doesn't meet all of the needs by any stretch of the imagination, but certainly increases to ODSP and increases to Ontario Works, and the stopping of the escalation on the clawback, are all pieces of those needs. If this can help in that way the most vulnerable as part of the package, I think it's legislation that is necessary and desirable.

I must say that I can't agree with the member from Simcoe–Grey that the solution is to return to the Mike Harris tax cut days. We know where that got us. That's why we're on the government side of the House and they're on the opposition side. People don't want to go back to the Mike Harris slash-and-burn tax cut approach to managing the province of Ontario or managing those who have needs in the province of Ontario. This is targeted to those who have the need: 1.5 million

Ontarians, a \$100-million investment this year. Ideally, if this legislation is adopted, we'd be able to roll it out and have it in their hands by the fall of this year.

1610

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): It's a pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 117, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act to provide for an Ontario home electricity payment, on its second reading.

Let me first say to the minister that I look forward to working with him. On a personal level, I want to commend the minister for his stamina and perseverance under some very difficult personal circumstances for the last number of months. I think he commands a high respect among all three parties here in the Ontario Legislative Assembly for his ongoing dedication to public service. I think we all know that when our personal reputations come under attack in public life, there's not much else left in public life, and it goes on to impact you in private life outside of public office. So I commend the minister for his courage in taking on this issue. I think he understands that the official opposition does have a role to play in ensuring that the government is held to account—

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Like the Homestead Act.

Mr. Hudak: Well, we'll get to that.

I think all members of the assembly here this evening, on whatever side of the floor, were personally cheering for the minister and welcome him back to his position.

I have a number of comments on Bill 117. I think my colleagues from Parry Sound–Muskoka and Simcoe–Grey had some very important comments as well, which I'm going to reiterate as finance critic. I know my colleague the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is looking forward, as the energy critic, to bringing forward a very coherent critique of the McGuinty government's energy policy to date, which is really at the root of Bill 117 and the reason why there is a refund bill before the House, which, while I think individuals will be happy to receive any money back from the McGuinty government, truly does not make up for the massive increase in hydro costs, taxes and user fees taking place in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario.

We cannot lose sight, I'll say again, that Bill 117 is here before the Legislative Assembly because of a botched hydro policy by the McGuinty government that just serves to drive hydro prices higher and higher every single year. I do note for the record, as my colleagues did as well, that this is simply a one-year payment, a bit of a one-year, ad hoc strategy to help out some individuals and some families in the province of Ontario. But we expect, as I think outside observers say nearly unanimously, that hydro rates will increase yet again in the years ahead because of the McGuinty government's hydro policy. So we wonder if we'll be seeing the son of 117 and the daughter of 117 after that, with other rebates. As my colleague from Simcoe–Grey has indicated, we would rather see a comprehensive and thoughtful energy

policy to actually increase energy supply in the province of Ontario than reduce it and drive up the rates that consumers pay.

I do want to note that the bill does contain a formula for how the rebate will be calculated, based on last year's income, up to December 31, 2005:

“\$60 – (0.01 × A)

“in which,

“A’ is the amount, if any, by which the individual's income exceeds \$14,000.”

While my colleagues on the government side say that low-income individuals will receive \$60 in relief, what they are neglecting to acknowledge is the formula in the bill, which sees a relatively steep reduction in that rebate as income increases.

Let me give you the rest of the scale, if you follow through with that factor. Individuals who have an income of \$16,000 will see \$40; incomes of \$18,000 or above will see a \$20 proposed relief; \$19,000 will receive 10 bucks total in relief from the Dalton McGuinty government; and as soon as you hit that magic \$20,000 in income, you get zero.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Rich folks.

Mr. Hudak: My colleague from Niagara Centre says they must think these are rich folk if they feel it should be eliminated at \$20,000 annual income.

An individual making \$20,000 a year is having one heck of a time making ends meet in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. No doubt they aspire to higher wages and hopefully are trying to climb the ladder at the place in which they work. But if you see people with \$20,000 being described as having significant means, I think people who make \$20,000 a year would be shocked that the government considers them not worthy of a hydro rebate when they've seen hydro rates increase by some 55% under the Dalton McGuinty government. So let's be very careful: Those who are receiving \$60 maximum are those who make less than \$14,000 per year, and it's eliminated at the \$20,000 stage, which is certainly a very, very modest level of income for an individual, particularly in today's Ontario.

Reflecting on some of the articles that came out at the time of the latest rate increase by the McGuinty government, which was in mid-April down my way—I know my colleague the whip is here. Brantford, Niagara Falls, Midland and Welland will see increases, on average, of \$15 per month. Consumers of three other Ontario utilities—Grand Valley Energy near Orangeville; Haldimand County Hydro, which is part of my riding in the community of Dunnville; and Sioux Lookout Hydro in the northwest—could see bills rise by more than \$20 per month.

So if you get the maximum rebate living in one of those communities, the maximum you're going to benefit is up to three months, and if you are at a very modest income of \$18,000, you'll be lucky if you get one month's relief from the Dalton McGuinty hydro increases.

If I read these stories correctly, I believe the journalists are simply speaking about the increase in the price

of power; they're not reflecting the adjoining increases in transmission rates, distribution rates and the ongoing cost to retire hydro debt. Hopefully I'll get to that a bit later on. So the \$20-per-month increase my constituents in Dunnville are witnessing or my colleague from Kenora—Rainy River's constituents in Sioux Lookout are experiencing is probably far more than \$20 per month. That's just the latest increase, let alone the earlier increases by the Dalton McGuinty government.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I can tell by your rapt attention to my remarks that you are surprised that I have not yet—I almost got him to smile halfway. Oh, there we go. You're surprised that I have not yet mentioned Dalton McGuinty's ongoing broken promises. I know my friend the Minister of Health Promotion is wondering why it has taken me eight minutes to get to this point. He's right to remind me, and I should speak to that.

We remember in the campaign that Dalton McGuinty made a number of promises, many of which were targeted at these hard-working individuals and families who are really struggling to make ends meet at \$20,000 and find themselves getting no relief. Dalton McGuinty told those individuals, other working families and seniors in the province of Ontario that he would not raise their taxes. Shortly after taking office, the campaign promises were tossed out the window of the Premier's new limousine and he increased taxes substantially—in fact, to punishing levels—on working families and seniors in this province. Often overshadowed by that well-known broken promise was Dalton McGuinty's broken promise to hold hydro rates steady.

During the campaign, as Leader of the Opposition, Dalton McGuinty said he would maintain the freeze of 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour. Shortly after taking office, that promise too was kicked to the curb and he increased rates substantially and then did so again this past April. In fact, my colleague the energy critic for the Progressive Conservative caucus, John Yakabuski, has indicated it's a 55% cumulative increase to date in the price of power alone, let alone distribution, transmission etc. That's certainly an alarming increase, and far, far from Dalton McGuinty's campaign promise to freeze hydro rates.

So individuals will see a very, very modest amount of funding coming back to them, fully depleted as soon as they hit \$20,000 and up, which, whether you're living in Wellandport, you're living in Binbrook or you're living in the city of Toronto, doesn't get you very far.

1620

Working families—combined incomes of families, regardless of the number of children or users in the household—would see the proposed relief at \$120. But again, if you read the fine print of the bill, a similar formula exists. This formula is \$120 minus 0.01 times B, and B is the amount, if any, by which the individual's family income exceeds \$23,000. So again there's a sliding scale as family income increases, depleting the amount of funds that would flow through for this initiative. By way of example, if they made \$27,000, it would be \$80; at \$29,000, it's cut in half; and for

\$35,000 and up, it's gone entirely. Working families making \$35,000 per year, individuals making \$20,000 per year, senior citizens who are at that level of income, are not going to be impressed by this rebate.

Just think: We had our constituency week this past week. Members were in their ridings meeting with their constituents. I heard over and over again about the ongoing concern of individuals like these: hard-working Ontario residents, seniors counting on a decent, dignified retirement who can't make ends meet. On the way back to the city of Toronto for the resumption of the Legislature, gas prices this morning in the riding of Erie—Lincoln were 99 cents per litre. There has been concern in the media recently that it may go up as high as \$1.30 per litre this summer, depending on weather conditions. It's a strange world when people are celebrating gas at 96 cents per litre as a big break and go out of their way to fill up their tanks.

So not only have gas prices gone up, but hydro prices, as I've said, have increased some 55%, the price of power alone. Hydro bills are up substantially.

My colleague the member for Peterborough, who is a big fan of the Homestead Act, knows full well that skyrocketing property assessments across the province of Ontario under the McGuinty government are putting an even greater pressure on seniors and working families, in addition to gas prices, in addition to hydro prices.

We can't forget about the so-called health tax. And I say "so-called" because we all know that doesn't actually flow to health care; it flows to the consolidated revenue fund, the same place as money from the blackjack tables at Casino Niagara, or from the gas taxes that we're all getting rather tired of paying when we're seeing about \$1 a litre at the pumps.

Let me add to that list. At the same time that the so-called health tax was brought in, which some have called the mother of all broken promises, chiropractic care, physiotherapy and optician care were all delisted, effectively making two-tier care. If you have the wherewithal, the financial resources, you could continue to pay for those services, but I know that many of my constituents, and I expect many of yours, many of those of my colleagues across the way, can no longer afford to visit their chiropractor, their physiotherapist or their optician as they had in the past. So new user fees are similarly taking a chunk out of the pockets of working families and seniors in the province of Ontario.

We're even seeing in the health care sector pressure for hospitals to increase fees that they charge, whether it's for parking or ancillary services to health care. Of course, they can't charge, under the Public Health Act, for their health care services directly, but they find other ways of raising fees on patients. As a result, approximately \$2,000 more per year is coming out of the pockets of working families in the province of Ontario since Dalton McGuinty came to office in the fall of 2003, much of it because of Dalton McGuinty's broken promises.

So it's always interesting to see a rebate. I think any relief from Dalton McGuinty is a bit of a surprise,

because he seems to be dramatically out of touch with the plight of working families in the province of Ontario and that of seniors. But when you compare it to the \$2,000 increase in costs experienced by families in Ontario, and seniors getting \$20 back, if you make \$18,000 a year as a single individual, it's not going to impress them very much, as Shania Twain said. I always wanted to work her into one of my speeches, and I just did so: "That don't impress me much." What else can I say? "Come on over; come on in," would be a good one in terms of tourism, trying to get the Americans back. But I digress.

Nonetheless, the cut-offs at a relatively low rate of income will not impress seniors, will not impress taxpayers in Ontario. We wish this was something more than a political effort. We wish it was actually some sort of fervour, some commitment, some fever for helping out working families and seniors in the province by providing some real relief. But I suspect this is just a way for the government to try to ease the criticism for their ongoing broken promise surrounding hydro rates. In fact, I suspect there was a bit of a last-minute scramble in mid-April. It was April 11, April 12, when there was some publicity about the new rate increases. They made it a 55% increase in hydro rates. The government scrambled and said, "Goodness, what are we going to do? Another hit, another reminder of our broken promises," and I think they then cobbled together this rebate program.

The reason I say that is because this was shortly after the most recent provincial budget. If I read this correctly, this was not part of the budget. This is not a budgeted initiative; this is money the government will have to find somewhere else. If this had been planned, if this was a sincere commitment to assist seniors, low-income individuals and low-income families, then it would have been a budgeted item. We would have heard about it ahead of time, instead of some sort of last-minute scramble to try to change the direction of the negative press.

Secondly, it's not an ongoing real strategy. This will be, if I understand correctly, a one-off and the government would have to bring in subsequent bills in other years. I wouldn't be surprised if they did. I suspect they will increase hydro prices yet again before the next election, and I suspect they will cobble together some other way of trying to divert the negative publicity that they deserve, but I don't think taxpayers are going to be fooled by that.

The old finance minister is new again. Hopefully, we'll see a greater commitment from him to fiscal transparency and ensuring that initiatives like this are actually budgeted items. We all know about the extra \$3 billion, the so-called slush fund that the previous finance minister, now the Minister of Energy, got outdoors as quickly as he could in the last couple of weeks of the fiscal year. I think the only limit on the amount of money that Minister Duncan was spending was his physical capacity for signing cheques.

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): Jim Flaherty did that.

Mr. Hudak: My colleague says that Minister Flaherty did that. Minister Flaherty also made a significant down

payment on the debt of \$3 billion, increased transfers to the province and had a surplus budget as well. Seeing the minister go on a massive spending spree so he could run a deficit was a rather odd situation to behold. He had some good publicity in the Sun on the weekend—

Hon. Mr. Watson: The Star.

Mr. Hudak: Sorry, the Star on the weekend, and a nice picture as well. We should, on the record, wish the member a happy birthday, which was just last week, according to the article. Some of us feel bad that we missed it. So we will, on the record, wish him a very happy birthday, which I think is 37. He's done well for a young fellow; no doubt about it.

But the minister is trying to distract me from some very important points here, I suspect. The fact of the matter is that the previous Minister of Finance went on a massive end-of-year spending spree, spent some \$3 billion, decided not to balance the budget and intentionally ran a deficit. He created some trust fund accounts, more or less, for projects that did not have a municipal or federal commitment at the same time in order to run a deficit. I will say this again: I do think that this undermines our case with the federal government. We certainly would like to see this Premier be successful in achieving a better deal for Ontario from the federal government, but when you go on that kind of massive spending spree, which equated to a 9.2% increase in program spending, much of which was in the last couple weeks of the year, it really undermines Ontario's case with the federal government and I think hurts our case with the other provinces. You're probably more successful if you have allies in the other provinces. It's almost like the image of a man going out and buying a new suit, shiny new shoes and a new hat and going new-cap-in-hand to Ottawa begging for more money.

I hope we'll see a change in that tone from the new Minister of Finance, Minister Sorbara, for greater fiscal transparency, to make sure that if they do items like Bill 117, indeed they will be clearly budgeted items so we could have some glimpse that the government truly does have a plan on the hydro front. But I suspect they don't, and this was nothing but last-minute ad hockery.

As I said, my colleague Mr. Yakabuski will be speaking later on to this bill. He will bring a very effective and cogent critique of the government's hydro policy so I won't belabour those points.

1630

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): You're very optimistic here, assuming that.

Mr. Hudak: To my friend the Minister of Tourism, I've enjoyed Mr. Yakabuski's remarks. I think he has an outstanding handle on this file and I look forward to his withering critique of current government policy on the hydro file.

I'll just add a couple of points from my own personal view on hydro and defer to our critic for a much more comprehensive critique of the hydro policy. I do worry that the government is effectively recreating the old

Ontario Hydro. I don't think there were too many who were satisfied with the old Ontario Hydro—at the end of the day, a creaking monolithic structure that was not delivering quality service, that was putting pressure for rates to increase year after year. I think the predecessor government, the NDP, attempted to address that. We brought forward measures to address that. But I believe the current government, which is a bit over a barrel when it comes to hydro supply because of its misguided policy to close the coal generating plants by 2007, has effectively recreated Ontario Hydro because it is signing one-off, oft-times sweetheart deals with suppliers. Suppliers are very wise. They know how to play the game. They negotiate in many different jurisdictions and if they see a government that has said it's going to close off 28% of its supply by 2007—that promise has been broken for Nanticoke; it's now 2009, but these types of time frames—they know they have the government over a barrel and are therefore able to negotiate sweetheart contracts that are effectively locking in Ontario consumers to very high prices for a very long period of time.

In reality, market commentators are saying that the hydro market is effectively dead and we're moving more toward the McGuinty government's world of high-priced, single-sourced contracts that mean that this increase that we've seen to date, the 55% increase, is a mere walk in the park compared to what is going to be coming down the road.

I've expressed this before on committee and I've expressed it in the Legislature, that I, as the MPP for Erie–Lincoln, have great concern about the government's so-called plan to eliminate the coal-fired plants by 2007 and Nanticoke by 2009. I think that nobody on that side actually believes they're going to do that. There is much speculation that they'll be climbing away from that promise and breaking it in the very near future. I think hydro consumers and hydro suppliers would appreciate it if there was an honest admission by the government that their promise was unrealistic to begin with, that they really had no intention of keeping it and put us on a more solid footing for the supply of power.

I find it regrettable as well that this government refuses to investigate, even in the least, the concept of clean coal technology—clean coal technology that we're seeing embraced and utilized in other provinces, in the United States and in Europe. Often the government would say that Europe is far more advanced than we are on clean fuel initiatives. Clean coal technology is abundant in European countries, but this government, I think because they're worried about admitting another broken promise after so many, refuses to investigate clean coal technology's potential benefits to our supply system and to our ability to clean up the environment.

The other problem with dragging out this ill-conceived coal closure plan for so long, this last straw that the drowning credibility of the McGuinty government is grasping at, is that it has meant that the coal plants have continued to emit into our atmosphere with no improvements in the technology at the existing plants. In fact,

they're letting the infrastructure deteriorate there. So if initiatives had been taken much earlier to try to clean up those plants, we'd be in a much better situation today than we find ourselves in, again because of Dalton McGuinty's broken promises, which I don't think he intended to keep in the first place.

My last two points: the substitution of natural gas. The dependency the government seems hell-bent to achieve on natural gas supplies is going to have some impacts on consumers. Many homes will use natural gas for their home heating. We've already seen home heating costs go up in the province of Ontario and there's been significant concern expressed that if government intends to gobble up more and more of the natural gas supply, that means that those home heating costs will increase even more than they have to date under the McGuinty government.

Secondly, natural gas is an important feedstock for the chemical industry. I know my colleagues from Sarnia and Lambton will be very concerned about the ongoing viability of the petrochemical industry in that part of the province, among others. If natural gas is taken out of the feedstock line, the prices increase substantially. That's going to put in jeopardy even more jobs in that important sector.

The Power Workers' Union as well makes an important point. I hope that during debate we'll have some response on this to indicate that despite many years of having the debt retirement charge for the stranded assets in place, under the McGuinty government we've actually seen an increase in the debt. If my information is old or out of date, I would appreciate being updated on that, but I think not only the Power Workers' Union but consumers facing higher and higher bills under the McGuinty government must be very puzzled about the increase in hydro debt when they've been promised that it would be actually going down and heading in the opposite direction.

That will conclude my remarks on Bill 117 for the time being. I look forward to comments from my colleagues. I hope that I will be proved incorrect and that this is a sign that the McGuinty government is finally understanding the plight of working families and seniors in Ontario, but I suspect Bill 117 is all about a short-term, ad hoc political solution to negative publicity as opposed to any real commitment to helping working families, low-income individuals or seniors in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Kormos: I was pleased to listen carefully to the comments of the member for Erie–Lincoln. I regret that he ended his commentary, his participation, a few minutes earlier than he need have, but I do know that he's going down to Niagara. Tonight is the night that we honour volunteers with five-year, 10-year, 15-year pins, and I'm counting on him to bring my greetings to those folks down there.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: And mine.

Mr. Kormos: And Jim Bradley's. There are three of us here from Niagara—a Tory, a Liberal and a New Democrat—and at least two of us have to be here at any

given point in time just to keep the appropriate momentum and the homeostasis that is created by this tripartite arrangement.

Michael Prue is going to be speaking to the bill in just a few minutes' time and Michael Prue is going to expose this as the rather cheap taxpayer-funded publicity stunt that it is. It's all about sending out the cheques in the fall, and preferably late fall, as close to pre-Christmas as possible, and the fact is that there isn't much relief here at all. The relief, I say to you, is negligible for electricity consumers whacked—what, May 1, 2006, Mr. Prue?—with another 15% on electricity rates that are already skyrocketing with the Liberals' ill-conceived privatization agenda to take care of their Bay Street buddies, their profiteering friends—the profiteers, the privateers and the Bay Street pirates. Who pays for that? Consumers pay for that: hardworking folks like down where I come from, places like Welland, Thorold, Pelham, Thorold South, Port Colborne, Waynefleet and St. Catharines. Those folks pay, and they pay and pay and pay.

Mr. Arthurs: I listened carefully as well to the member from Erie–Lincoln. I always appreciate the comments from the official opposition. I always look for the right word, though, to describe my feeling as I'm hearing them speak. The best one I can think of is "rich." What I hear from the official opposition is really rich when they talk about low-income individuals, those who are vulnerable, and seniors. This is from the party that didn't allow for an increase in the minimum wage in eight years, the party that slashed social assistance to the most vulnerable. So I have a little difficulty sometimes with that take.

I just want to make a couple comments. You have to remember that this is building on something of a broader agenda, where we're doubling an emergency relief program we put in place for those in crisis mode. That's being doubled, and there's \$100 million for relief to some 1.5 million Ontarians. We're putting it together, and it means that it will allow the money to flow into their hands in a structured fashion, using a bureaucratic structure that is already in place, the Canadian revenue agency. We're not creating a new one for this purpose; we're effectively piggybacking on an opportunity for efficiencies in that regard.

1640

The member from Erie–Lincoln spoke to a fair extent about the capacity to fund some other activity at year-end. I'm always curious when I hear the opposition speak to that matter. What are the kinds of things that they would prefer we weren't doing? Would it be infrastructure in the province of Ontario? Should we not be trying to fund roads and bridges for the economy and prosperity? Maybe we shouldn't be, when we have some capacity, funding guns-and-gangs initiatives to bring those under control. Maybe we shouldn't send as much money in that direction. Or maybe youth-at-risk opportunities—maybe we shouldn't have used some the dollars available for that purpose. Those are choices. We're focused on those who are vulnerable and with need in our community, and this legislation is all part of that.

Mr. Wilson: I listened quite carefully to the remarks of my colleague from Erie–Lincoln. I think he hit the nail on the head on quite a few points—also the member for Niagara Centre, Mr. Kormos, in terms of what he said. This thing is just a sham. We took 800,000 people off the tax rolls when we did tax cuts under the Mike Harris government. That was 800,000 people who were paying provincial income tax and shouldn't have been paying, because they weren't making enough money.

Now you're going to build this huge bureaucracy to put forward this \$100-million program to give people back their own money that you shouldn't have taken in the first place. One of the rebates to individuals here goes from \$60 down to zero; if you start to make over \$20,000, you get zero. You're actually going to send people who make \$19,000 a cheque for \$10. Do you know how much money you're going to spend processing a cheque for \$10? It's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. Why don't you just cut people's taxes? You won't do it because you criticized us when we created 1.3 million net new jobs in the province of Ontario. We gave people a hand up. We took almost a million people off welfare and they got jobs in the province.

You believe your own rhetoric rather than the facts, and you refuse to acknowledge that people in Ontario are still overtaxed. If you want to give low-income people a break, take them off the tax rolls. Don't spend all this money on bureaucracy—Liberals love to build bureaucracy—just to give them back 10 bucks or less. It's absolutely ridiculous. And according to this bill, you have to fill out an income tax form in order to get it. You're not even going to get near the poor in this province. They don't pay taxes, folks. They don't fill out income tax forms. They won't get this rebate. So don't get give me any corner-on-compassion Liberal crap. This is a horrible sham. It's a horrible sham.

Mr. Prue: I listened intently to the first part of the speech of my friend from Erie–Lincoln and I got here in time for the last part. He did something which I have never seen him do before, and that is finish before his hour was up. I want to commend him for that.

But a couple of things he had to say—and I have to agree with the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge when he talked about low-income people. Quite frankly, the disparity of low-income people versus those with the highest income, the quintile at the top and the quintile at the bottom, grew very large during the time that the Conservatives were in government. That should be no surprise to anyone, when social welfare rates were cut, when ODSP was frozen, when all those things happened during that time. Although it was a time of some significant economic prosperity, it's not strange to see how those who made more money, those who were better off, tended to do well, and those who were at the bottom tended to do worse. The gap between the rich and poor actually was exacerbated; it was made worse.

So when I listened to this about the low-income and saying what isn't being done, I have to take that with a

little grain of salt. I do have to agree with him, though, on the tax rolls. This is a scheme that is going to be hard, it's going to be expensive, it's not going to deal with the very poor people we're trying to reach. It's not going to deal with those who do not get monies back on their housing. When you file income tax, if you're not getting money back either for rent or the cost of housing, you're not going to be included. In my own speech, I'm going to talk about some of those people, whether they be the old and infirm, the in-laws living in the house, the disabled children—those are all going to be missed under this scheme, and they ought not to be.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Erie–Lincoln has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Hudak: I appreciate the comments by my colleagues. I will, of course, bring regrets and congratulations to the hard-working volunteers in Niagara on behalf of my colleagues from Niagara Centre and St. Catharines. I suspect that my colleague from Niagara Falls is probably there tonight.

I'm now sensitive to my colleague from Beaches, that I cut—

Mr. Prue: I may do the same thing.

Mr. Hudak: Oh, that's why. Don't get used to it. Maybe I can make up time next time around.

The member from Simcoe–Grey put it quite well, I think: The best way to help out low-income individuals and working families is to improve their economic wherewithal. Under the Mike Harris government, we saw some 800,000 people off the tax rolls altogether by eliminating the provincial tax that they pay. I think there's some progress, finally, on the federal side in that respect, and I hope that they will continue.

Secondly, we saw the biggest increase in jobs in the history of the province of Ontario, where Ontario led all other North American jurisdictions in job creation and economic growth, which is a very, very positive comparison to what we see in the province today, where Ontario is regularly near the bottom in job creation relative to the other provinces, let alone the United States.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: No, it's true. Our job creation rate is among the lowest. In fact, the Bank of Nova Scotia has just projected that Ontario's economic growth will be the lowest in all of Canada, and Toronto-Dominion has said that we'll be the second-lowest in growth rates in all of Canada.

I hope this bill does go to committee. I'd like to better understand the mechanism. My colleagues have brought up some important points about how the cheques will be cut—the expenses of the program. I suspect that the government is moving away from rebates on the bills themselves because they feel they didn't get the political hit, and invented this new animal.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Prue: I had a look at the bill for the first time this morning. I had a look at the bill and tried to discover what was in it.

At first, there's this big promise that there's going to be a rebate for the poor. You think, "My goodness, I'm really going to support this bill. I really am looking forward to what's in there." That was my first reaction.

Interjections.

Mr. Prue: No, because I thought that finally, after three years of this government, they're starting to turn their attention where they promised to turn it in the first place. I remember those days. I remember, in the lead-up to the election, all the talk. I remember all of the promises, but the ones that were dearest to my heart, I have to tell you quite frankly, were the promises related to poor people in this province, in our community and our city and all of the places that we see them. I had hope for those children who are having their monies clawed back. I had hope for those people on ODSP who hadn't had an increase in eight years. I had hope for those on general welfare who are struggling and saw their monies cut, and quite frankly live in an abysmal poverty that no one in this room probably has ever experienced or would want to experience.

Some of us were invited, and some of us actually went out and stayed for a night or two nights in places like Jane-Finch, where I stayed with my former colleague the member from Toronto–Danforth, Marilyn Churley, and went around and viewed the situation of poverty—not so much just not having the money but the despair, the lack of any sort of hope that the young people had—and saw the food that was eaten and to see the conditions in which people lived.

My mind went back to that time three years ago when we were starting in on an election in the summertime. There were a lot of things being said, and I had hoped and hoped and hoped that this government would be doing something about it.

So when I opened up the bill and I saw the title, I thought, "Something's going to be done." But the reality is that this is a tiny bill of limited proportion. I don't know how else to describe it: a tiny bill of limited proportion. In the end, what it's going to do—if you are poor enough, if you are unfortunate enough in this society to earn \$14,000 a year or less, you get a maximum of \$60. Think about that. Think about what that involves: five dollars a month, or about 15 or 16 cents a day. That's what this government is going to give back to our poorest citizens who are in some considerable economic constraint: 16 cents. What can you buy with 16 cents every day? Even if you amass it for a whole year, what can you buy for \$60?

1650

I question the purport of the bill. What does it do? It gives somebody \$5 a month, if you're lucky, and less if you make more than \$14,000. But that's all it does. It does not regulate the prices of electricity; it does not regulate the prices of commodities that people use every day in order to get around, be it in a car or on public transportation; it does not regulate the price that they pay for food; it does not regulate any of the prices on which they are so very reliant. It does not cap the price of

electricity, which this government ran on in the last election. I remember being on television and arguing this very point in a couple of televised debates about where we were going with electricity rates. I have to tell you that a couple of people now sitting on this side tried to beat me up pretty badly because what I said then, and I think what you have come to realize now, is that it's a mug's game to promise to regulate the prices at lower than it costs to produce the electricity. But that was your position. My position was that you have to keep it as cheap as possible but you have to pay the actual cost, or in the end you are going to end up increasing and increasing the debt.

The Liberals were very good. They were going to freeze it at 4.3 cents; there was going to be no increase. I will tell you, more than a few people who might have voted for me or for our party voted for you based on the 4.3 cents. That's what you promised. I cannot go back, even for a moment, even though I knew that it was impossible for you to do it, without reminding you that you made a promise that I do not believe you ever intended or had the foresight to keep.

I am also looking at this bill about electricity in terms of the proliferation of the obscene wages that we are giving in this province to senior executives. I say "obscene wages" when I look at the \$200,000, \$300,000, \$400,000 a year that some of the people are making in the electricity industry. The former minister, the one who has now gone to transportation, stood up and said that, yes, she was going to discuss it with the boards of directors, but in the end was probably not going to do anything. I don't think she ever did anything and I don't think the new Minister of Energy is ever going to do anything about these obscene wages. That would mean a whole bunch to people if they could see that senior executives were not going to be treated in this kind of way, but this government lets those costs run rampant, so that people make hundreds of thousands of dollars with perks, and it's all added on to the little people who can scarcely afford to keep the lights on.

I looked in the bill too, because it had the word "electricity" in it, to see if it would stop the exponential growth of all the government agencies. Ontario Hydro used to run it all. Remember, we deregulated and now we have eight companies that each have their own executives, with huge salaries, running around doing what one agency used to do before, and I think at considerably more cost. You have to question why there is nothing in this bill that will rein in those costs, which would help the very poor people.

What have we got? We've got a tax credit based on income. This is not a credit based on usage. Stop and think about this for a few minutes. You earn \$14,000 or less per year; the government magnanimously gives you five bucks per month. You earn such a pittance of an amount, you take home such a pittance of an amount, and you get \$5. You don't even have to be an electricity user to get this money. So I question the bill, I question the title of the bill and the purport of the bill, and I question

what the minister and the parliamentary assistant had to say, because this has virtually nothing to do with electricity. This is a mere acknowledgment that people are suffering, that people who earn \$14,000 or less a year are suffering, and that the government wants to make sure that they get five extra dollars a month to ease that suffering. But it has nothing to do with electricity. You don't even have to have a light bulb in your house, you don't have to have electricity at all, you don't have to use electricity at all; you can still get this money.

On the converse, you can use too much electricity—not that I think there are many people at \$14,000 a year using too much, because it would be a mug's game, a fool's game to get into that, burning the lights and the electricity, using electric heat and all those things, if you only have \$14,000. But you could use huge amounts and you could be a waste hog—that's the converse—and you would still only get the same \$5 a month. It has nothing whatsoever to do with electricity. The reality is that it is a maximum \$60 per year credit if you earn less than \$14,000.

Who are those people who earn less than \$14,000? Unfortunately, there are all too many of them. It's every single person in this province who works 40 hours a week and is on minimum wage. It is every single one of them. It is every single person on Ontarians with disabilities. It is every single person on Ontario Works. It is every single person whose pension has not kept up with inflation and/or who only receives the old age pension and/or the supplement. Those are the people we are talking about—hundreds of thousands, potentially millions of Ontarians. These are the people who are going to earn this kind of money and to whom the \$5 a month is going to be given.

This magnanimous payout of \$5 a month declines by 1%, or \$1, with every \$100 you make above \$14,000. That's \$1 per year, and it goes down. If you make \$14,000, you get 60 bucks; if you make \$20,000, you get nothing. So for every \$100 you make above \$14,000, you lose \$1. It goes down to \$59 at \$14,100 and so on, because it's phased right out. What you're dealing with here is a whole range of people who earn maybe the huge sum of \$10 an hour. They will be phased out by the time they get to \$10. I want to tell you that even at \$10 an hour, you're living at the poverty level, and this bill will make sure that you stay there.

I went on to look at who is going to get the money. It's based on the property tax credit. If you do not get a property tax credit, you will not get any money whatsoever. I stopped to think about who is eligible for the property tax credit. Anyone who owns a property and anyone who rents a property is eligible for that tax credit. But what about—and let's start thinking about whether these people need the money too—the stay-at-home son or daughter who is on ODSP, who has special needs and may be an adult? Do these people qualify for any kind of rebate? They do not, not under this. They do not get a property tax rebate because they are not the owner and they are not the renter. What about the older adult who is staying at home with their son or daughter? One spouse

is deceased and you move into the in-law apartment and you live with your family. You don't pay them rent and therefore you're not eligible to claim this either. You would be continuing to live in poverty. You may even make less than \$14,000 a year. You will be a drain on the electricity coming into the house because you will be using your proportionate share as well, and you will not be eligible under this scheme of the government to get a cent.

That's what this government has done. You have left out hundreds of thousands of people, be they children, be they disabled people who live at home, special-needs children, elderly parents. You have left them all out in one fell swoop. I would think it would have been a whole lot better—and I would suggest that you look at it and that you should have looked at it earlier—to include it. If you intend to make sure that elderly people, disabled sons and daughters and kids at home who are not employed or employable are eligible as well, you should have done it through the income tax scheme and not just on the property tax credit, because in reality you're giving them nothing.

1700

I think this was done by the government because it's very simple to administer. You just pull all the people out on the computer who got a property tax credit in Ontario and those are the people who are eligible for a form of the rebate. You can do the calculation on the computer in a matter of minutes. You can send out the cheque at considerable cost some time in the fall or winter or, even better, some time next year, because it's election year. "Here's your money from the Ontario government. We're listening to you poor people and we understand. Here's your \$30 or \$40," or "You're really lucky, here's your \$60, and remember us at election time."

I don't want to be cynical, but I have to tell you, every time governments send out cheques like this, the calls come to my office—I'm sure they come to all your offices—"Is my cheque in the mail? I'm looking for my cheque." They're very poor. They want the money and they are beholden for it.

I will tell you, it's simple to administer, but again, it is extremely flawed because it leaves out too many people.

Had you really, truly, honestly believed that this was the best thing to do—thinking about this, knowing your own energy policy for a year—it would have been far better had this been done at the time of the last budget debate. It should have been included in there so that it could have been included in the income tax provisions, so that the monies could have been taken out better and rebated instantly to those who were going to be the subject of this government largesse.

If you had had the foresight, people would have already got their refunds, but because that hasn't happened, they are going to have to wait, in some cases I think for five or six months, if they're particularly lucky, and more likely until next year. But there is also the added costs. I have no idea what the costs are to the province of Ontario to issue a cheque. I do know that

when I was mayor of East York, it cost us a couple of dollars, \$2 or \$3, to issue a cheque. It just wasn't the cheque itself, but it was all of the administrative work. It was hiring the people to check and recheck before cheques were made out, and all of the accounting that had to be done. It was calculated at that time, some eight, 10 years ago now, that it cost us \$2 or \$3 for every cheque we wrote. Therefore, we were reluctant to write cheques that were less than \$2 or \$3, because it was costing more than the money was worth. The same thing is true of taking money in. When you took it in that way, it cost a lot to administer those cheques, especially if some of them ended up bouncing. This is a whole, huge enterprise for what is a minuscule tax reduction of some scant \$5 a month. Who needs this?

I want to talk a little bit about poverty for a moment because this past week was very disturbing to me. I've talked about poverty very often in this Legislature. You've heard some of my speeches. You've heard the speeches about kids and the clawback, about those on ODSP, about general welfare. You've heard the speeches about Jane-Finch and the people who live in our crumbling inner cities and the huge problems that are resulting from that, including the problems of violence. But this last week —

Mr. Kormos: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Is there a quorum present?

The Acting Speaker: Is there a quorum present?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: A quorum is not present. We'll call in the members for five minutes.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table: Quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: A quorum being present, I recognize the member to continue his remarks.

Mr. Prue: It was a little opportunity to rest there. I always think that my speeches might be a little more riveting and draw more attention and bring in a bigger crowd than perhaps what is here this afternoon.

In any event, I had an opportunity to go with my colleague Gilles Bisson into his riding. He invited me to go up the coast, James Bay and Hudson's Bay, to look at the poverty situation of our First Nations people. I have to tell you, what I saw there was extremely, extremely disturbing. If you want to know about this bill and how it's going to help them, I don't think it will either.

I just want to talk about three communities we had an opportunity to visit. The first one was Peawanuck, which is near Polar Bear park on Hudson's Bay. It's one of the furthest northern communities in Ontario, save and except, I believe, for Fort Severn. We had an opportunity to look at Attawapiskat, which is kind of in sad shape because the public high school, which administers the whole region of Hudson's Bay, has been closed now for, I think, six years and has not been opened, and the community is reeling. Last but not least, we had an opportunity to go to Kashechewan to see what is happening in that particular community. You will remember

them: They are the ones with the water troubles. You will remember the evacuation by the Ontario government, and you will remember that just a few weeks or months ago they were flooded out. The community is virtually a ghost town. We had an opportunity to go there.

I want to talk about one particular individual in Peawanuck—I sat with member Gilles Bisson from Timmins—James Bay at his kitchen table. The man was legally blind. He had worked, but had been on ODSP now for a number of years. He was a father with five children. One was in high school; four were in the home. His ODSP had been reduced by the Ontario government because, in that place that has no high school and has a public school up to grade 8, his son had not wanted to go away. There's no work to do, but he did not want to go away and leave his family and his blind father, so he was at home. His ODSP was reduced by this government. This government determined, because he wasn't in school and there's no school in the community, that the family was no longer in any way eligible to get the money.

As I said, the man was legally blind. He was unable to work. The band had helped him as much as they could, but the overwhelming difficulty that he had wasn't the house; it wasn't being blind; it was the sheer cost of energy. Even though this is the responsibility of the federal government, the energy is still important and is as necessary to him as it is to us here in southern Ontario. The energy costs to him were, I think, exorbitant. I don't know whether he's eligible under this bill, because if this bill is really to do with energy, Ontario doesn't provide energy to that community. The federal government pays somebody from Winnipeg to produce the energy through a diesel generator. The cost of the energy, when I asked him, made Ontario actually look kind of good, because the cost of the energy there is eight cents for the first couple of hundred kilowatts, and then it goes up to 16 cents for the next couple of hundred kilowatts, and then to 32 cents and finally to 64. So if you use a lot of energy—and this is a man with five kids. I didn't look around the house, but I'm sure he had a television. I would hope so. The other kinds of energy that you would need for your refrigerator, for your stove—he could be paying up to 64 cents per kilowatt hour, and I'm not sure that he would be eligible under this bill. I'd like someone to look into that, as to whether or not he could get a rebate of \$5 a month, or \$10 for his family.

The poverty there was mind-numbing. I think about everything that this province can do. I know, when questions get asked about First Nations communities, when they get asked about our aboriginal peoples, that there is a natural tendency on the side of government to say, "This is not our responsibility. This is a federal responsibility." I believe we have to get beyond that. We have to get beyond that and to ensure that this bill works for those people and that we do much more for them in terms of the poverty and the isolation in which they live.

1710

I invite the members to go up to those communities and take a look, if you've never seen them. Take a look

at the cost of living. Go into the Northern Stores, as I did in Attawapiskat. We had a few minutes, and I went in to look at a bag of potatoes. A bag of potatoes to feed your family was \$29.98. I'll repeat that, in case you think I made a mistake: \$29.98. That's in Attawapiskat, population of a couple of thousand, no school. If you want potatoes with your meal, you'll pay that, or else you'll do without. If you want anything else that you can see in there—there's a bag of milk for \$12 or ice cream for \$12, things that we in southern Ontario can pay a couple of dollars for, \$3 if it's not on sale. You will see that the cost of living is extraordinary up there, and you will know that those people get the same social welfare rates. When I asked him, he gets the same social welfare rates in Peawanuck or in Attawapiskat or in Kashechewan as we get in southern Ontario, yet the costs are hugely, hugely more, including, most importantly, the cost of electricity.

I don't believe this bill in any way looks after what was observed there. We promised to help the man, and I hope a little speech in the Legislature about his life and about ODSP and cutting it back so that his son could stay at home and wouldn't have to go to school in Timmins, some four hours away by plane—that's the option so that he could continue to get some money from ODSP for his son. I think the son was far more important to the blind father in Peawanuck than he was, sadly to say, missing school in Timmins. Certainly the son felt that was the importance and the duty and what he wanted to do. I can empathize with that, even though I know in the long term every child is better off getting a good education. In the short term, really he was doing what he thought was best for his family.

You know, this is a province with unlimited resources, with huge amounts of capital, with lots of potential. People are not able to look to that potential because, I would suggest, the energy policy has failed far too many of them. As we look across northern Ontario, we can see the energy policy has failed those who work in paper mills and in pulp mills and in the mining sector, but particularly in paper and pulp mills, where far too many of them have closed down. You see towns like Smooth Rock Falls reeling, and Kenora and Rainy River, and all of the places with the energy policy and the elevated costs driving them literally out of business. The OEB, the Ontario Energy Board, has just approved a 15% increase on general energy rates—

Mr. Kormos: That's incredible.

Mr. Prue: Incredible—on May 1. I don't know what kind of effect that is going to have on those mills, but I will tell you how much of an effect that is going to have on ordinary people. This bill purports to give \$5 to an individual, and it will almost cover, as the member from Guelph-Wellington said—will almost cover—the cost of the electricity increase from May 1, and it will just about cover, if you get the whole \$10 for a family, a family's electricity use for what happened on May 1. But what about the other costs? This is only the latest cost increase above 4.3 cents, which the Liberals campaigned would not be raised. This is only the newest. This is only the

last iteration. This is it. This is the newest one. You know, the regulated price as of May 1, 2006, will be 5.8 cents up to the threshold, and it will be 6.7 cents after that.

What is the threshold? The threshold is pretty minor. The threshold in the summer, when the usage is the highest—that is, from May to October—is a scant 600 kilowatt hours per month. I think people know that the use of 600 kilowatt hours per month is not a whole lot, and that's what this is all about. If you use more than 600, you're going up to 6.7 cents. If you think about that in real terms, 4.3 was what was promised; 6.7 is where you're going to be at as of May 1. So if you are a person who has a meagre, meagre income, you can look to see some of that back, but if you earn above \$20,000 a year, which is at the poverty line—that's where the poverty line is, around \$21,000 a year. If you live at or near the poverty line, you'll end up getting nothing, but you will see the cost of your energy going through the roof, from 4.3 to 6.7. If you do the math, that's about a 50% increase that is taking place, in spite of the many protestations from the government opposite during the time of the last election that they were going to cap the electricity rates at 4.3 cents.

Just to go back to that election, I've already talked about that for a moment, but this needs to be reinforced. Governments, in my view, need to have credibility. It is far better and would have been far better had this government said that it was impossible or would be near impossible to hold electricity rates at 4.3 cents because the costs were increasing, the costs of producing and transmitting the electricity would invariably increase, the deregulation of the electricity would mean that costs would increase, the taking of the coal-fired generation lines off would cause increases, the institution of natural gas would cause increases, the \$40 billion they want to spend on nuclear energy will cause increases in the costs. One ought not to be naive. All of those things are going to cost money, but I believe it is my policy, and I hope it should be every politician's policy, to be honest: to be honest with the taxpayers, the ratepayers, those who use electricity, those who use energy, and tell them that it cannot be produced and sold for less than what it costs to do it.

When I said that in public debates on television, I was, as I said earlier, derided for making that statement. People I think maybe were naive, but they listened to the Liberals and they listened to the promise. I know I got asked at more than one door, and I got asked and derided by the Liberals during those public debates that, "There he is. He's going to raise your rates. Don't vote for him; he's going to raise your rates." In fact, Mr. Speaker, that's what they did themselves. I am asking them, if you can't do anything about what you said before, then in the next election be brave, be forthright. Tell people that you're going to raise the rates if that's what you're going to do, because in the end you'll either stand or fall on it. But if you continue to do what you did in the past, if you promise them to flatline the rates, it's going to come back, I swear, to haunt you.

Even with this maximum of \$5 a month, people will be worse off; single people on welfare and ODSP will be worse off today than they were under the Mike Harris government. I've said that in here before. Of course, I get protestations from the other side, saying, "Oh, no. We've raised the rates. We've done this," and they play with numbers. But I had an opportunity in estimates two weeks ago to ask the same question of the Minister of Community and Social Services, the Honourable Madeleine Meilleur. I asked her about whether or not people who did not have children, people who could be married but did not have children, were actually better off or worse off than they were at the time that the Liberals took office. She admitted quite candidly and honestly, and I commend her for it, that because the inflation rate had been slightly above 6% since the Liberals took office, and in two particular budgets, the first one where a 3% increase was given, and then a budget where nothing was given, and then a budget where 2% was given, in fact people are approximately 1% worse off today than they were when the Liberals took office.

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If you have children, and because you've taken a little bit of the clawback increases and allowed those few dollars to be taken, you might be able to see that those with children are ever so slightly better off than they were under the Harrisites in the last year of that government. But everyone else—all of the disabled and all those who cannot work and all of those who are on general welfare and all those people in northern communities who have no option but to take welfare and ODSP rates because there is literally nothing else for them to do—all of them are worse off. This \$5 is not enough to make a difference. Even with the \$5, they're still going to be worse off than those same people were in the deepest, darkest days of Mike Harris.

Mr. Leal: They were hard days.

Mr. Prue: They were hard days, but these are harder days. You're not listening. These are harder days for your constituents who are on ODSP or welfare, if they don't have children, than when the Conservatives were in government. You ought not to be proud. You ought not to say that the Conservatives were somehow worse, because the reality is that you have enough money. You had \$3.2 billion of surplus that could have made a real difference to these people, but you chose not to do it.

This is going to be giving I guess a few bucks back to some people, but it's very little and it's far too late. The gap—I'm reading here from Toronto's Vital Signs 2005. It relates to Toronto but it's pretty much the same kind of thing that's taking place across the rest of the province. I'm going to read in part from it. "Longer-term trends show that the gap between high- and low-income households in the Toronto region is widening, while the middle class is shrinking." It goes on to talk about "185,290 children (35.1% of Toronto's children) lived in low-income families ... more ... than in 2002."

It went on to say, "The number of low-income households has grown most significantly in the outer areas of

the city,” although there are some pockets of higher income out here as well. It says, “Between 1980 and 2000 the average income of the richest 10% of families in the region rose by 23% while the average income for the poorest 10% of families fell by 4%.” That’s a 27% gap. It finally says, “Over 20 years ... low-income households increased from 18% to 22% of all households in the city and high-income households grew from 19% to 22% of households. Middle-income households fell from 63% to 56%....”

What’s happening is that the middle class, the much-vaunted middle class, in this city and I would say probably throughout all of Ontario is shrinking. Who are increasing are the rich and the poor. This is not something that Ontarians should be proud of, and it’s not something that this bill in any way deals with.

I ask members to think about the \$5 a month that you’re going to do. Can you do more? Will you do more? Will you listen to the opposition and say that \$5 is not enough? Will you listen to the opposition and say, “Make that \$20 a month, or \$30 a month, or \$40 a month?” They’re going to need that for energy costs. They’re going to need it. You have the money, or at least you had it, and you’ll likely have it again in the upcoming budget. If this is truly something to look after energy, if it’s truly something to look after poverty, be meaningful, because 16 cents a day is not going to cut it. That’s all you’re offering here and that’s all there is. This \$5 will still see those, the most vulnerable in our society, worse off.

I don’t think I’m going to use up my whole hour either.

Mr. Kormos: Yes, you are.

Mr. Prue: No, I don’t think so.

Mr. Kormos: Yes, you are.

Mr. Prue: I’ve been told that I should, and you want me to, too?

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): I’m listening.

Mr. Prue: Well, okay. I want to make the points I’ve been trying to make—reiterate them and make them as strongly as I can.

The first one is that you ran on a policy, on a platform, of freezing rates and capping them at 4.3%. You have not kept that promise. In not keeping that promise, you have done several things that have hurt the economy, particularly manufacturing, pulp and paper in the north, mines and the industrial and automotive sectors—all those manufacturers, all those industries that use high amounts of electricity. We have forced too many places to shut down; there have been too many jobs lost. Although there are some technological jobs and others that are slowly, in some part, taking the place of those industrial jobs, many of them tend to be lower wage, many of them tend to be in the service sector, many of them tend to be of short duration and, unfortunately, Ontario and Toronto, which were at one time the manufacturing hub of Ontario, are suffering.

You broke that promise, and what it meant to people—poor people and middle-class and middle-income people—is that the costs of simply living have gone up

more than some of them can afford. This bill will give 16 cents a day to the poorest of the poor, if they’re lucky. It will give nothing to those who live at or above the poverty line. This bill will provide nothing financially to those people. This government is not doing enough to help those who are in need, this government is not doing enough to help our poor and this government is not doing enough to help our middle class.

This government, I would suggest, has messed the energy file. That’s the second message I want to give. Without much of a plan, you have driven up the cost of energy. Without much of a plan, you have instituted privatization of some of the key energy portfolios. Without much of a plan, you are putting an unwanted development in my riding, or next to my riding, right at the border: a mega gas plant on the waterfront, which is going to destroy the dream of Toronto of being an international city and a harbour city, of having a waterfront that people will want to visit.

You’re going to put in gas-fired generation for a reason which I think is spurious at best. The reason given by this minister, by the previous minister and by the Premier is that you don’t want the lights to go out. With the greatest respect, this energy file has been mismanaged. The first thing that should have been done, and needs to be done, is not to give rebates. The first thing is to reduce energy consumption. To spend any kind of money at all on reducing energy consumption would be far better in terms of this province and its economy and the people we are attempting to help. That has not been done, and I see no evidence of it being done. I see absolutely no evidence at all. That’s what happened in places like California. That’s what happened in places where the energy crunch came earlier rather than later. It’s what happened in most of Europe. I know that the energy we can obtain from the wind, from solar power and from everything else is immeasurable, but we are not taking advantage of the technologies that are there. Instead, we’re going on some kind of mass development of energy, which is expensive.

I heard what was being said today, in terms of energy, about coal. I have some considerable sympathy with the idea that we should shut down all the coal-fired generating plants. I don’t think anyone who is an environmentalist will disagree with that. Every single person knows that coal-fired generating plants cause too much NO_x and too much SO_x and too much pollution, and cause people with respiratory problems to get worse. And we all know that they need to be phased out. We all know that. The question is, how do you replace them and how fast do you do it? That’s the question that was asked today, and I think I need to speak about it. I heard the question that was asked by the leader of the third party, and I heard the non-answer.

1730

Yes, we all know they need to be shut down. There are some who think that you can make clean coal. I think the only thing you can do—and I agree with the previous minister—is make cleaner coal. But in the end, the

province and the people here need to know about that energy solution, and there were no answers coming today, because I don't believe, in spite of what the Liberals promised in the last election, that it is conceivable or possible or in the best interest to do it by 2007. They have dilly-dallied and delayed far too long for that timetable to still be possible.

But I am more worried—I am more worried as we hand out 16 cents a day to the poorest of the poor—that we whack the entire province with \$40 billion on nuclear power, and I know that's coming. I know that's coming because I heard the non-answers again today. I heard the answers and I know it's coming.

Interjections.

Mr. Prue: You know it's coming too: \$40 billion on nuclear, and I think that's where we're headed. You know, the reason—

Mr. Kormos: That's minimum.

Mr. Prue: That's minimum; that's for starters. That's what's going to be planned.

We also, if you know any history at all about nuclear in this province—and I'm not one of those people who are afraid of it. I don't go to bed at night dreaming and worrying about Three Mile Island or Chernobyl. But I do worry about the cost, because the costs are what have caused Ontario Hydro—the costs and the cost overruns and the amount of money that they owe can all be traced absolutely and clearly to the nuclear energy of the 1960s and 1970s and 1980s. That's when the plants were built. The plants were all over budget. The plants were all expensive. The plants all needed to be maintained; they all needed to be mothballed; they all needed to be rebuilt. That's what I think is going to happen.

Most of the rest of the world has come to the correct conclusion that energy should be produced in other ways: exciting things you can find in Europe and in Japan of people harnessing the sun or the wind; exciting things on biomass; exciting things on digging down and using thermal energy from beneath the ground. Iceland—of course, they're kind of blessed with hot springs and things—expects to go completely thermal and wind power, and that will produce all of its energy within the next 10 years. Those are the kinds of things that we as Canadians should be looking at. We are not looking at that; we are looking at \$40 billion of nuclear. I wish I could say that the minister, in response to the questions he was asked about that today, had been more specific—that's the most parliamentary I can be. He was asked whether that report is coming, when it's coming, and it's not coming.

I've heard "shortly" too. I remember in here asking questions day after day, month after month, of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing about the change to the Tenant Protection Act, and it was always the same thing: "Shortly." "Shortly." "Shortly." "We're looking at it; it's coming soon." It was finally about two years late, but it arrived, and it arrived to much fanfare, I'm sure, from the Liberal benches, and unfortunately had several gaping holes in it that make it very unpalatable to the majority of tenants in this province.

But be that as it may, this is what I'm hearing too about the energy file, about the \$40 billion for nuclear, and I would expect that's where this province is headed.

If the province spends \$40 billion, I want everyone to just take a deep breath and figure out how much, when you divide that by 12.5 million people in this province, that's going to cost us. That is a huge range: \$3,000 or so each, if my math is right. It might be \$30,000 if it's wrong—better get the right number of zeroes—but \$3,000 or so each. That's what it's going to cost us to try to do that. When you put that amount of money in front and then you look at the \$5 a month or the \$60 a year that you're going to give to the poor, you'll know that will be eaten up in nothing flat, and in fact they'll be paying their portion of this too in very short order.

The last point I wanted to make is again about the \$5. The \$5 is not sufficient to make a real difference to those whose energy bills are costing too much. You've all had an opportunity, I'm sure, as politicians to knock on doors, to meet your constituents, to talk to them. I will tell you that probably the number one or number two issue of most of Ontario is not education or health anymore; it's energy. They are looking for some way in which to control those costs. Whether the costs be to drive their car, whether the costs be to turn on the lights or to heat their homes, they are looking at the energy costs as they outpace the ability of the middle class and the poor to pay.

This bill will offer a little, tiny bit of relief—not enough—to the very poor. I ask the members opposite to think about all of those who earn the minimum wage, all of those who struggle by at the poverty line of \$20,000 or \$21,000 per year. They are considered to be living in poverty. This bill is going to do nothing to help them whatsoever.

I ask the members opposite to look very carefully at how the bill is constructed, because if you have to make an application for either the rental of your property or home ownership, if it is on that particular narrow section of the Income Tax Act which is based on the property tax credit, it will leave out far too many people who do not rent and who do not own.

I go back to the man in Peawanuck: He neither rents nor owns. The property in which he lives belongs to the band. They recognize his circumstances, and I do not believe that he has paid rent for a number of years, because that is what happens in those communities. If you work and you have an income, you pay; if you don't, the band looks after you. I don't believe that he would get any kind of property tax credit from this.

I ask you to look at whether or not adult or disabled children who live at home are going to be able to apply for any kind of tax incentive. They are not. This bill does not allow them to. They do not gain a property tax credit since they neither rent nor own, but they live in the house and they consume electricity, and it costs money, even if you're poor. I ask you to look at the same thing for senior citizens, many of whom have gone to live with their children in their later years, many of whom no longer

maintain a house or an apartment but live comfortably and well with people who love them in their own home surroundings. They are not going to get any money from this property tax credit either because they cannot claim it. So many of the very people whom you purport to help will be left out.

I hope this bill goes to committee. I hope this bill is looked at very carefully and seriously, because, in spite of the fact that I want to give every one of those people 16 cents a day, for those who get the most, or 12 cents or 11 or nine for those who don't, I want to see in committee whether it's possible to raise that rate, and I want to see in committee if it's possible to include all of those people, those hundreds of thousands of Ontarians, who desperately need the money, who make use of the electricity and who are left out.

I know my House leader is not going to like it, but I think I've said all that I need to say.

Mr. Kormos: You're a free agent.

Mr. Prue: I know I'm a free agent. I think I've said all that I need to say. I'm going to leave nine minutes, enough time so that people might comment on this and we can hear from one additional speaker. Thank you very much for your attention.

The Acting Speaker: I thank the member. Questions and comments?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): I'm certainly pleased to rise today to speak to such an important program for our fellow Ontarians, the Ontario home electricity relief program. This \$100 million will assist 1.5 million low-income Ontarians with rising electricity costs.

We're very proud that this assistance program is being put in place. We also recognize that by adding another layer of bureaucracy, it makes it more difficult to receive the programs that we put in place. We've acknowledged that, and having the funds flow through the Canada Revenue Agency for the delivery of this payment allows the delivery of the payment to flow in the fall as well.

1740

One of the things I do want to do is thank the member from Beaches-East York for his comments. One of the things the member spoke to was issues at the door, and the two issues they're not talking about: health care and education. What they are talking about is electricity; they're talking about their hydro. The reason they're not talking about those is that, in their minds, they're perceived as fixed. What they're talking about now is electricity, and they're looking for solutions that go forward.

I have the privilege and honour of representing the riding of Huron-Bruce, and I can tell you that how we deliver our electricity has changed dramatically in my riding. When you drive, you see the turbines that are in place and the sense from the agricultural community of the opportunities that are available to them that were not available to them. When I look at Bruce Power as well, what I see is revitalization and moving forward for a safe, reliable, affordable energy policy in Ontario.

Mr. Wilson: I'll comment again and try to emphasize to the Liberal government: Why don't you just cut these people's taxes? We all agree that we should be helping low-income people, especially with electricity rates having risen some 55% since the Liberals came to office.

I agree with the member for Beaches-East York. In fact, I thought his comments were excellent. He had sort of different reasons why you're not going to be able to target the people you want to target with the assistance. Mine is that most poor people I know in my riding in particular—I'm familiar with their situations—including some of my own family, don't file income tax forms. So it doesn't matter whether you have the Canada Revenue Agency doling out this maximum \$5 a month to individuals.

As I commented before, you're going to have a huge bureaucracy—it's going to cost you more than \$5 to print the cheques—and the fact of the matter is, you won't actually hit the people you should be trying to help. We took 800,000 people off the tax rolls when Mike Harris and his government cut taxes. They're not filing income tax forms any more, so the fact of the matter is, you won't hit the people you're supposed to hit. This is a phony-baloney program. It's really sending the middle class cheques—up to \$120 to families. Their hydro bills just went up 15% on May 1. They're going to go up again and again. Every six months, the Ontario Energy Board is going to adjust prices.

I want to mention also, in the 20 seconds I have, the exception I take to the Minister of Energy's allusion today. Apparently he says that I said I'm not in favour of conservation programs. I'm 100% in favour of conservation programs. That particular debate was talking about the NDP's conservation program, where energy consumption actually went up as they mailed out light bulbs to every home in Ontario.

Mr. Kormos: This bill is the sort of thing that just drives voters and residents crazy—it does. This is pure, unadulterated bullspit by anybody's perception, and the people out there know better. They know when they're being bullspitted by their government. They know when they're being taken to the cleaners.

Look: May 1, a 15% increase in electricity rates; on a good day, 10 bucks a month. That doesn't come close to covering the extra 15% that the Liberals gouged you as of May Day. It doesn't even come close. This has nothing to do with electricity consumption. It ignores the reality of a family with a net income of \$35,000. When you've got four or five kids and you're living in Toronto, or anywhere else in the province of Ontario for that matter, \$35,000 is a pretty modest income, let me tell you. But that family gets zip. They know they've been bullspitted by Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals. They know bullspit when they see it. They've had it handed to them for far too long by far too many governments.

Mr. Prue, you laugh. But people have had it up to here. This is a pathetic, cynical exercise by a government that is in desperate trouble because it has broken every promise. Of course, it now wears that mantle; it's been

branded as the government of broken promises and the government that fails to deliver—failed to deliver for seniors, failed to deliver for students, failed to deliver for some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the province, failed to deliver for people with medical needs, failed to deliver for kids with autism, failed to deliver on its promise to maintain the cap on electricity rates. Those fit.

Mr. Arthurs: I'm pleased to enter into the debate just for a couple of minutes, following the member for Beaches–East York. I managed to hear just about all of his comments; I slipped out for a couple of minutes. I tried to pay attention closely to what he had to say, as I know he does when he's here listening to other speakers. If we all did a little more of that around the House, the kinds of things the member for Beaches–East York does in paying attention to what's happening, we'd probably have a better place here some days.

I want to just draw attention, though, to the composite quintile we're talking about. We can talk about 16 cents a day or \$5 a month. The reality is that this is an investment, albeit one time, in the 2006 year based on 2005 tax filings of \$100 million. It will go to the benefit of some 1.5 million Ontarians. That's a substantial amount of money in anybody's books and a lot of people in anyone's books. Certainly it doesn't reach all Ontarians and it certainly doesn't provide all of the dollars that one might like. But it's part of that composite package. I think the member for Beaches–East York takes something to wrap his arms around a bit: some of those broader social and human needs. This is a little piece of trying to address some of those broader human and social needs as they relate to energy costs.

There's no question that we have some long-term objectives that have to be met when it comes to the energy file. We have to get new sources in place; we have to drive an agenda of conservation to use less. Frankly, part of that overall agenda has to be increases in prices, as we've seen, both to encourage conservation and to bring new power on stream. Clearly we want to keep the lights on in the province for the purposes of the economy; and at the same time we want to provide some level of protection for those who are in great need in the province.

The Acting Speaker: The member has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Prue: I'd like to thank the members for Huron–Bruce, Simcoe–Grey, Niagara Centre and Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge for their comments.

In terms of what they said, the member for Huron–Bruce talked about wind turbines, and she's absolutely right: We need to embark on those wind turbines as quickly as possible. One need only to travel in Canada, to of all places Alberta, which has all of the oil, to see them out there, or to travel anywhere in Europe or Asia and see massive wind turbines providing much of the energy for the countries that are there, to know that that is a future we need in Ontario. The sad reality is, though, that there are only several spots in the province that are windy

enough to make them economically viable, but I hope in every one of those spots that they are used.

The member for Simcoe–Grey talked about the taxation system, and I would agree with him that the overall taxation system seems to be a better tool than relying on the property tax rebate. As I said in my speech, and what I hope the members opposite will take to heart, is that that leaves out too many vulnerable people: older people living with family, younger people who are disabled, with special needs, who live at home, or children who live with family who are unemployed. They don't have much of an income but they too need to be captured in this.

The member for Niagara Centre taught me a new word. I'm not going to use it. I wasn't laughing at his comments so much as his very, very eloquent use of a very strange word.

Last but not least, I thank the member for Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge for his comments. We all, in everything we do, need to look at the broader human and social needs that he so eloquently expressed there. That is what this bill needs to do, and needs to do better than it has on its second reading.

1750

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Levac: I appreciate the opportunity to engage in the discussion about Bill 117. I want to pick up on what the member for Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge was rightfully pointing out in this debate. We've heard from the opposition that they're dead set against this type of program for various reasons. My suggestion to them is that I'd like to have them re-evaluate that, because the parliamentary assistant was making it quite clear that this is a piece to a puzzle that needs to be worked on as an inclusive piece of legislation which hopefully and eventually will gain us the bigger picture at the end of the day.

If we don't do it that way, I fear that the member from Beaches–East York is going to be disappointed; that any single bill that comes out of this place is not going to address what he's passionate about, and that is those people who have been disenfranchised completely. I appreciate the position he takes, but I think he needs to taper it with a little bit of understanding of what the parliamentary assistant is talking about, and that is that with each piece of the puzzle that gets added to that picture, there is a profound hope that we begin to address those issues.

As far as the bill itself, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act to provide for an Ontario home electricity payment, that's exactly what it's trying to do and that's exactly what it says it's going to do. I think it's important for me to read from the section that says who's qualifying, because some people are being somewhat mischievous, saying it's not good enough for those who are getting it and we're not giving it to the people who deserve to get it etc. Let's break away the confusion that seems to be out there and, for the record, make it quite clear who does qualify.

“An individual is deemed to have made an overpayment on account of tax payable under this act for the 2005 taxation year if the following conditions are satisfied:

“1. The individual is resident in Ontario on December 31, 2005 and a return of income in respect of the individual's 2005 taxation year is filed for the purposes of this act before January 1, 2007”—those who apply.

“2. The individual has not died on or before October 1, 2006 and is resident in Ontario on that day.

“3. The individual is not confined to a prison or similar institution on December 31, 2005 or on October 1, 2006 and is not confined to a prison or similar institution during 2005 for one or more periods that in total exceed six months.” Obviously we're cutting back on those people who might be sitting in jail getting a cheque. We don't like that either. I think that's important to point out.

“4. The individual or his or her qualified relation reported an occupancy cost in his or her return of income for 2005 for the purpose of claiming a property tax credit under subsection 8 (3), (3.1) or (3.2) and was entitled to deduct from tax otherwise payable under this act for that year an amount calculated under subsection 8 (3), (3.1) or (3.2).

“5. The provincial minister has not made an Ontario home electricity payment to a person who was the individual's qualified relation at the end of the 2005 taxation year.” There's a lot of discussion on who doesn't qualify as much as who does qualify.

“6. The amount of the individual's Ontario home electricity payment as determined under subsection (4) is greater than zero.”

I think in terms of the specifics of the bill, it's that piece to the puzzle that the parliamentary assistant is talking about. Quite frankly, as has been portrayed by both opposition parties, there seems to be some impression out there that absolutely nobody needs or wants this money.

The old story about sending cheques out—it's almost bizarre to think of this, but we're hearing the same arguments back and forth about giving cheques out. That's a difficult situation to be entrenched in as to whether or not we do all of what was said by the previous speakers, which talks about the reliance totally on tax cuts.

What we saw happen in the tax cuts was a picture painted by the members opposite that perfection had come to Ontario because of tax cuts. We saw what happened with tax cuts. We're the recipient of the tax cuts. That's why we ended up having to put a health tax on. We ended up with a \$5.2-billion deficit, and some. What's happening here is the release of information solely to support one particular position and forgetting that there are other pieces of information that needed to get on: the low dollar, the American economy was extremely hot, the Canadian economy got hot.

I tell you, the influences of everything else included in that—for somebody to stand up and simply say that our

tax cut regime created this wonderful utopia of Ontario during that time frame and we created every single job is like the rooster standing up and saying, “I get credit for the sun rising. I crow, the sun comings up, therefore, I must take credit for it.” The natural forces that were involved in the economy during that time period were chugging along very nicely, thank you very much. To the NDP's position during the time period in which they were in government—there were other forces acting. For anyone to stand back and simply say, “It was all their fault that everything went down,” is absolutely false as well.

The other mitigating factors that were playing into this have to be considered when we start doing these programs. The “piece of the puzzle” theory is the one I would subscribe to, that the parliamentary assistant is trying to get us to understand. That piece of the puzzle is what we're talking about today, Bill 117. Bill 117 is going to be giving those people who are having difficulty some money to help them offset the cost of electricity. That's a simple point.

Simple point number two: Some 1.5 million people are going to be getting some help during this particular bill, should we decide to pass it, and pass it along quite quickly, because I don't think they should be made to wait that much longer. That piece of the puzzle is quite clear: \$100 million to the people of Ontario, the 1.5 million people who will be receiving that, is where this piece of the puzzle gets put into that big picture, and we now say, “Check, done, let's move on.” It doesn't allow the government the permission to stop, and stop working for the people who are disenfranchised, who need our assistance. I would suggest to you very respectfully that several people on all sides of this House said that a false hydro cap is what caused an awful lot of our municipalities to go into debt—my municipality, up to \$1.5 million annually, because we put this false 43-cent cap on there. Why did the previous government choose 43 cents? It matched Toronto's cap. Toronto decided to cap, and everybody said, “Well, it must be the number, so let's cap it.” They didn't want to tell you that the municipalities who had their own power sources were going to get whacked.

What we're talking about now is trying to eliminate all of that by going into the “piece of the puzzle” mentality that says each time we move forward we're going to be addressing those issues. The member from Niagara Centre tries to tell us that we've done nothing for seniors, we've done nothing for the disabled, we've done nothing for the jobless, we've done nothing for manufacturing, we've done nothing at all. He wants to tell the world that this Liberal government has done nothing. Guess what? You'll be absolutely shocked and surprised, I'm going to stand up and say to the member from Niagara Centre; you're wrong. You're wrong.

Have other successive governments tried to do something for the people of Ontario? Absolutely. And has the previous NDP government done things to help the people of Ontario? Yes, they have. To stand up and start making these proclamations from where you're standing, depend-

ing on where you're sitting each year, is silly; it's ridiculous. What the member from Niagara Centre wants to know is, are we looking for that leadership? They've had it up to here. "Bullspit," I think the word was.

Interjection.

Mr. Levac: Bull feathers and hockey pucks and all of the other adjectives you can throw together to talk about that. What we're talking about is asking us to go down a path that makes that big puzzle the best puzzle we can build. That's what Bill 117 is attempting to do. It's a small piece of legislation; it's not all that thick. I think it's a few pages thick—five or six pages long. And five or six pages, to make that small piece pop in there—

Mr. Kormos: That's how big it is.

Mr. Levac: I want the member to hold that up. If we could get the cameras over there, I'd love it, because what he's showing us is what some people would love to have. It's what some people would love to have to help them with their electricity bill. That's one of the pieces of the puzzle. Now I have a couple of people nagging over there saying, "That's peanuts; that's nothing. Don't spend \$100 million for 1.5 million people and assist them—assist them—with their difficult task of keeping up with hydro." The difficult task, I would suggest to you, is that nobody has it perfect. I would challenge anybody to stand up and tell me that they absolutely have all of the answers for hydro and energy. Nobody is standing. That's why. Because it's a complex issue. You cannot produce the electricity just like that and say, "We've got the answers to it all." Quite frankly, we get tired of hearing things from the opposition that they continually rail on, saying, "We did it perfectly. You're not doing it perfectly. So we're right, you're wrong." Welcome to the real world of what this place is all about. It's the art of trying to figure out how to put that puzzle together. The parliamentary assistant had it right when he said that this is one piece of that puzzle that's going to speak to 1.5 million people in the province of Ontario. It's going to speak to them in a way that says, "Yes, your government understands that something's going on." We continue to try to pull the pieces together and put them on that board so that the picture comes out that it's a better Ontario for it.

Have we done something for our senior citizens? You bet we have. Have we done something to make our place a healthier place? Yes, we have. Have we brought waiting times down, as we committed to? Yes, we have. Have we done those things that we said we were going to

do to bring them down? Yes, we have. Education is better than it has ever been before. Health care is headed in the path that says that we're going to be judged by our results. We're going to measure our results. Have we ever measured them before?

Interjections: No.

Mr. Levac: No. Are we measuring them now?

Interjections: Yes.

Mr. Levac: Yes, we are. I think that's going to give us those pieces of the puzzle that requires us to think about how we're going to make things better for the people of Ontario and, by God, we're getting there with Bill 117, and I thank the finance minister and the parliamentary assistant for giving us those.

Speaker, I will stop right now so that you can stand up.

The Acting Speaker: Pursuant to the earlier order of the House, I'm now required to adjourn this debate and call orders of the day.

Hon. Mr. Watson: Mr. Speaker, before I call the order, I just wanted to comment on what an excellent job you're doing in the chair. I think all members agree: The member from Kitchener Centre has done a wonderful job.

Mr. Kormos: What are you suggesting there, Jim? I think he's doing a great job.

Hon. Mr. Watson: I'm suggesting he's no Michael Prue.

CITY OF LONDON ACT, 2006

Mr. Ramal moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr24, An Act respecting the City of London.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Milloy): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Ramal moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr24, An Act respecting the City of London.

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

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

It being after 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until 6:45.

The House adjourned at 1802.

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