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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 31 October 2006

Mardi 31 octobre 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

Tuesday 31 October 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 31 octobre 2006

The House met at 1330.

Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GO TRANSIT

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I rise in this House today to remind the members of the scary record of this McGuinty government. Their more than 50 broken promises continue to haunt Ontario.

More seriously, tackling gridlock is just one of their many broken promises. It's clear that gridlock is growing and that this government still has no concrete plan, but they would say anything to get elected. For example, yesterday commuters had to cope with signal malfunctions at the Mimico GO station that caused cancellations and delays for most of the day. The minister should know that GO Transit is a vitally important part of solving the gridlock problem in the GTA. You should also know that on a typical day GO moves 190,000 passengers; that's 48 million passengers per year who rely on GO Transit rail and bus services.

The GO Transit board has a vision to revitalize Union Station, as well as their tracks, bridges and platforms, and to reorganize and modernize the signal system. They're all examples of the GO organization's leadership and initiative. But GO can't do it alone. The GO board and riders together want support from the McGuinty government. We haven't had much of a plan coming forward recently from this government with respect to GO Transit. We've seen gridlock increase and service levels decrease.

On Halloween, and every day, we need a government that—

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

LONDON TRAINING CENTRE

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): Today I'd like to recognize a terrific non-profit organization in my riding of London North Centre. Under the leadership of David Corke and Mary Whitaker, the London Training Centre is partnering with employers and other community agencies in London to help unemployed and at-risk youth, women, new Canadians and older unemployed workers to develop their skills so they can find jobs, independence and a brighter future.

The London Training Centre has formed a strong partnership with the Western Fair Association to train

people in food service and hospitality programs, fields with a high demand for new workers. Among other things, the Western Fair donates the use of their industrial kitchens to the program.

Last week I met three extraordinary and determined women who have graduated. Samina Malik is a new Canadian and a single mother of four children who is now working in a high school cafeteria. Laurel Helmuth dropped out of school, but thanks to this program is now working at a photography studio and is headed to college. Carol Kechege got a job at Kellogg's after a long absence from the workforce.

These are just three of the 1,000 people who have graduated from the London Training Centre in the last three years, 92% of whom have found employment. Recently, the Ontario Trillium Foundation awarded this organization a grant to expand this very successful program to 12 other communities across the province.

I congratulate Samina, Laurel, Carol and the great team at the London Training Centre and the Western Fair Association and thank them for helping make our community stronger.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): The McGuinty government has once again demonstrated that they don't deserve the trust of the people of Ontario. In the spring, the McGuinty government sent cheques out to municipalities with no strings attached but said that they trusted the municipalities would use the money on roads and bridges as intended. But in the same situation, when the federal government sent a cheque to Ontario for affordable housing, the McGuinty government demonstrated they do not deserve to be trusted. The McGuinty government had a chance to fix their broken promise on affordable housing, but they chose to lock \$392 million in the bank instead of keeping their promise.

Their high taxes and economic policies are costing Ontario jobs and increasing the need for affordable housing, but the McGuinty government is refusing to spend the money. They've tried to blame the delay on the federal government, but the facts are clear. The federal government paid their share. The hold-up isn't the federal government. The hold-up is the fact that the McGuinty cabinet is keeping the money locked in a trust fund while they debate whether to take some of the money and use it in other projects. Maybe they're saving the money to take another letter out of the OLGC or to give more pay increases to their friends.

The Liberals have no problem announcing the money and doing the photo ops. For once, the McGuinty government should follow through on a promise and spend the money, as announced, on affordable housing.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): I rise in the House today, in the spirit of Ontario's Salute to Small Business Month, to congratulate business owners and young entrepreneurs in Ottawa–Orléans who have turned their ideas into successful businesses.

On October 18, I was pleased to attend the fifth annual People's Choice Business Awards held by the Orléans Chamber of Commerce. I watched with pride as several businesses in my riding were honoured for their hard work. Among the many recipients that evening was a young man named Remi Paquette, who started his business as a student at the University of Ottawa. He took home the awards for technology business of the year and young business person of the year.

His success can be attributed in part to the McGuinty government's strong support for Ontario's young entrepreneurs. To date we have provided \$1.7 million to the Canadian Youth Business Foundation. As the Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship mentioned the other day, this financial support will help our youth to get their ideas off the ground and into the marketplace. It is estimated that this funding will create 2,500 new jobs and generate \$50 million in revenue over the next four years. By supporting our young entrepreneurs and future business leaders, this government is keeping Ontario's economy strong and prosperous.

I commend Mr. Paquette for his hard work and vision. I would also like to congratulate Judith Cane, who was voted business person of the year and professional adviser of the year, and all the other individuals and businesses that were honoured for their success at this awards ceremony.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): I'm pleased to rise today, on Halloween, to remind Ontarians of the McGuinty Liberal government's scary record in the province to date. After three years of being in power in Ontario, the Liberals are continuing to be haunted by their bevy of broken promises like, "I won't raise your taxes," "I won't raise your hydro rates," "We'll have a hard cap of 20 students for early grades and stop school closures." And remember that old goblin that continues to nibble at their heels, that they would balance the budget every year of the mandate? And let's not forget the Liberals' attempt to rule from the grave by extending their partisan Liberal appointments to years beyond their term, or the fact that Ontario is now becoming a graveyard for manufacturing jobs in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario.

The McGuinty Liberals have adopted a trick-or-treat approach to governing this province: If they can't trick people by saying anything to get elected, they will offer a

treat in the form of some timely announcement, only to be broken after the next election.

There's no doubt that there has been an eerie pattern of behaviour by the McGuinty Liberals. They don't act like a governing party. Instead, they blame everything on somebody else, namely, the federal government and ghosts of governments past—with one exception: Bob Rae no longer haunts the Liberal government. He has actually moved over to that side of the Legislature, which makes statements of Finance Minister Greg Sorbara condemning Bob Rae only a few years ago very ironic. Be afraid, be very afraid.

1340

TRANSPORT SCOLAIRE

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–Baie James): I want to start my comments by applauding that one. That was pretty good.

J'aimerais amener à l'attention de l'Assemblée une situation qui a commencé cette année avec le gouvernement provincial de M. McGuinty qui, encore, ne comprend pas les enjeux quand ça vient aux difficultés pour les jeunes du nord de l'Ontario.

On sait tous qu'il y a des écoles, telles que l'école Jules-Léger à Ottawa, qui offrent des services aux enfants en difficulté pour avancer leur apprentissage à travers le système scolaire. Dans le passé, la manière dont ça marchait, c'est que les conseils locaux organisaient le transport pour être capables de transporter leurs jeunes directement à l'école provinciale d'Ottawa. Pour nous, c'était une bonne affaire parce que notre conseil, le conseil scolaire catholique des Grandes Rivières de notre région, avait un très bon service pour assister ces jeunes-là et pour être capable de les transporter d'une manière qui faisait du bon sens pour eux et pour leurs familles.

Le gouvernement provincial de M. McGuinty, avec l'ancien ministre M. Gerard Kennedy, a décidé qu'ils vont centraliser le transport pour tous ces jeunes et ont donné l'autorité de centraliser ces services à travers le conseil scolaire catholique d'Ottawa. Je peux dire que c'est un problème pour nous, parce que le service à cette heure, qui est mené, c'est un système qui est moindre de ce à quoi on est habitués, et le conseil scolaire catholique des Grandes Rivières offrait un meilleur service.

Je dis à la ministre de l'Éducation, vous avez une chance d'être capable de renverser cette situation. On vous demande de le faire pour le bon de nos jeunes de notre région.

CORNWALL ECONOMY

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): It is well known in this House that my riding of Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh has faced a number of job losses in the last year. However, rather than taking this as a fatal blow, the people of communities like Chesterville, Iroquois and Cornwall have chosen to take this as a chance to reinvent themselves.

This government has been a willing partner in this time of transition. Initiatives like the forgiveness of the downtown loan, hospital capital projects and key investments that this government has undertaken in skills training are starting to pay off. There is much still to be done, but new businesses are starting to settle in Cornwall.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Pharmetics Inc., Cornwall's newest business. Pharmetics is a company that makes and distributes over-the-counter drug products as well as vitamins, minerals and herbal supplements for companies such as Costco, Loblaws and Shoppers Drug Mart.

The pharmaceutical sector is one in the process of expansion and will find that Cornwall and its people create a perfect environment to develop their interests. Businesses like Pharmetics Inc. will play an important role in the transitional economies of communities across Ontario like Cornwall. With the strategic support of this government, these businesses will find plenty of opportunity in this province.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome Pharmetics to Cornwall, and I look forward to a long and positive relationship with them in the future.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): Today I rise before the House to celebrate the October 16 announcement at the Ford assembly plant in my riding of Oakville.

With Wayne Gretzky on hand, Ford announced that the two new models, the Ford Edge and the Lincoln MKX, will begin production in Oakville. This is fantastic news for the almost 4,000 people employed at the plant. These hard-working men and women can breathe a much-deserved sigh of relief, thanks in part to the \$100-million investment made by the McGuinty government in support of that plant's \$1-billion conversion to a flexible manufacturing operation.

The plant has returned to a two-shift workday. Ford forecasts production of over 1,200 vehicles each and every day, with a total of 250,000 vehicles produced in 48 weeks. To add to this fantastic news is a forecasted addition of a third vehicle to the plant's production in 2008.

This is just the beginning of great things to come for Oakville and Ontario as a result of the Liberal initiatives that have already generated over \$7 billion in investments in the Ontario auto industry.

I'm proud to be part of a government committed to supporting the auto industry. We should all celebrate this fantastic news and the promise and hope it brings to the Ontario economy and its continued strength and prosperity.

ACADEMIC TESTING

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): Just last month our government, in concert with EQAO, released another round of testing results for our schools here in the great province of Ontario. These outcomes are a

testament to the continued commitment our government has shown since we took office back in 2003. The results are a far cry from the Conservative days where there were constant classroom disruptions and slashes to government funding. Instead, Ontario schools have shown an overall average increase of 10% in their test results.

A perfect example of these results is being seen in a school in my riding of Mississauga East. The third grade classes of Thornwood Public School have shown a dramatic overall average increase from 44% to a whopping 89% in tested areas of reading, writing and mathematics since we took office in 2003. Each member of this school's faculty, parents and especially the children should be applauded for their efforts and their ongoing commitment to better education.

I am reminded of a quote by the Greek philosopher Plato: "The direction in which education starts a man will determine his future life."

Mr. Kormos: What about women?

Mr. Fonseca: And women, as the member from Niagara says.

The Ministry of Education should be congratulated on the hard work they continue to do on a daily basis to provide the direction our children need to prepare themselves for a positive future.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): Speaker, I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on general government and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 148, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act respecting the use of seat belts / Projet de loi 148, Loi modifiant le Code de la route en ce qui concerne le port de la ceinture de sécurité.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I move that pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Tuesday, October 31, 2006, for the purpose of considering government business.

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

All those 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 1348 to 1353.

The Speaker: Mr. Caplan has moved government notice of motion number 220. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Patten, Richard
Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Peters, Steve
Balkissoon, Bas	Gerretsen, John	Phillips, Gerry
Barrett, Toby	Hardeman, Ernie	Pupatello, Sandra
Bartolucci, Rick	Hoy, Pat	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bentley, Christopher	Hudak, Tim	Racco, Mario G.
Bradley, James J.	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramal, Khalil
Broten, Laurel C.	Klees, Frank	Rinaldi, Lou
Brownell, Jim	Kular, Kuldir	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Levac, Dave	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Martiniuk, Gerry	Scott, Laurie
Caplan, David	Matthews, Deborah	Smith, Monique
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Mauro, Bill	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Colle, Mike	McNeely, Phil	Tory, John
Crozier, Bruce	Meilleur, Madeleine	Van Bommel, Maria
Delaney, Bob	Miller, Norm	Watson, Jim
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Di Cocco, Caroline	Mitchell, Carol	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dombrowsky, Leona	Munro, Julia	Zimmer, David
Duguid, Brad	Oraziotti, David	

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

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Chudleigh, Ted	Marchese, Rosario	Prue, Michael
DiNovo, Cheri	Martel, Shelley	Tabuns, Peter
Elliott, Christine	Murdoch, Bill	Yakabuski, John
Horwath, Andrea	O'Toole, John	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 59; the nays are 14.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): We have with us in the Speaker's gallery today two chief whips from the Parliament of Ghana. They are the Honourable Osei Kyei Mensah-Bonsu, the majority chief whip, and the Honourable John Tia, minority chief whip. Please join me in welcoming our guests.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

SCHOOL FACILITIES INSTALLATIONS SCOLAIRES

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): The McGuinty government understands that a school is

much more than a building for teaching and learning. Our schools should serve as hubs for Ontario's communities, improving our quality of life and building the future prosperity of our people. That's why I'm delighted today to announce a new government investment that will build approximately 100 new schools across the province over the next few years.

One hundred new schools will be built with \$1 billion worth of funding: \$700 million will be invested to re-plate schools that are in poor condition as part of the government's comprehensive \$4-billion Good Places to Learn initiative to renew Ontario's schools; \$220 million will be invested to ensure that French-language school boards can provide schools in areas where Franco-Ontarians live; and another \$137 million will be invested in new school construction for school boards experiencing pockets of growth in new residential areas.

These 100 new schools are in addition to the 200 that have already been opened or are in construction under the McGuinty government.

Le soutien aux écoles en tant que pivots communautaires et l'amélioration des environnements d'apprentissage pour les élèves font partie des mesures que prend le gouvernement McGuinty pour appuyer chaque élève et pour oeuvrer du côté des familles ontariennes qui veulent avoir la meilleure éducation publique pour leurs enfants.

A key priority of the McGuinty government has been to keep good schools open. Immediately upon taking office, the government asks school boards to put a moratorium on school closures. This pause allowed the government to develop a new tool for boards to empower local decision-making on school closures.

The new pupil accommodation review guidelines that we released today will ensure that capital planning decisions are made with the meaningful participation of the community and that those decisions are based on the school's value to the students and to the community.

No longer will parents and community members fight to be heard, no longer will they struggle to get the information they need and no longer will they feel that the process has been rushed through because the decision was already made.

Thanks to these new guidelines and our government's investments, school boards will be able to close some of the schools that are in poor condition and build or expand schools to replace them.

Les conseils scolaires et les parents participeront aux décisions sur ce qui arrivera aux installations scolaires de leur région.

We want to make sure that all students go to school in a safe, healthy and vibrant learning environment. These guidelines are just one part of many initiatives this government is undertaking, including new schools, school repairs and new programs, that will help us achieve that goal. By fixing our schools, we're creating good places to learn and helping students across the province to reach their full potential. Because, if we reach every student and help them achieve their full potential, we're working to ensure a strong and prosperous Ontario for us all.

1400

INVESTMENT IN ONTARIO

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues): It gives me great pleasure to announce to this House another outstanding investment in Ontario. The Premier, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Leona Dombrowsky, and I were on hand for the groundbreaking of yet another great investment in Ontario, and I say "great" on purpose. Kellogg's will build a breakfast cereal production plant in Belleville—congratulations to Belleville—the first of its kind to be developed by the company in North America in 20 years, and they're doing it right here in Ontario.

This is great news for Belleville and the surrounding area. It means hundreds of new jobs and many opportunities for workers and their families.

Kellogg's has an outstanding reputation, with 100 years of global success. This year they're celebrating their 100th anniversary. It instills a strong culture of continuous improvement—a level of innovation that our government aggressively supports through Ontario's advanced manufacturing investment strategy.

As a government, we are helping companies position themselves as global leaders so they will continue to have success here in our province by creating good jobs and generating wealth in our communities. This is another great Ontario success story that will help attract more investment and create high-value jobs for families. It tells us we're moving in the right direction when we continue to win major investments like this one, at a time when jurisdictions around the world are competing head-to-head.

This is a great show of confidence in Ontario's economy, in our future, and in our agriculture and manufacturing sectors, a workforce that has given Kellogg's cause to invest more in Ontario. It confirms Ontario is a great place to invest, and that's a strong message, one that we are taking around the world. I hope you're going to indulge us when I say, in the great words of Tony the Tiger, this is grreat.

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

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): Kellogg's new facility is great news to the folks in Belleville, especially the 80 people who just lost their jobs at GH Packaging and Nordenia International when they closed their doors in September; it will be welcome news to the families employed by Monico Industrial Cleaners, who are all out of work with the announced closing of their facility in Belleville; and there will be yet another 145 families looking for work in Belleville once Lipton-Unilever closes its doors forever, as it has announced.

This government continues to ignore the real issues faced by businesses and investors in Ontario. We are all growing weary of their policy of saying anything to get elected. This government seems to have a habit of attempting to take credit for any good-news stories it

happens to stumble across when it comes to our economy, but they continue to ignore the plant closures in Ontario.

Plant closures and layoffs stain the landscapes in Ontario. One does not have to look too far to see the true effects of Dalton McGuinty's high-tax regime in Ontario. You'd be hard-pressed to find one member in this Legislature who hasn't had a layoff or a plant closure notice in his or her riding since the Liberals took power in 2003. Instead of piggybacking on good-news announcements by private investors, the government should be working on alleviating the tax burdens of Ontario's businesses by moving more quickly to phase out capital tax, reform the provincial sales tax to avoid taxing business inputs, and reduce the corporate tax rate.

Three years into its mandate, I have to wonder when exactly this government plans to put business investment in Ontario back on the right track. When talking about the new Kellogg's plant, the Premier ends his release by stating that he is going to work on keeping Ontario one of the most competitive places in the world. Wake up and smell the coffee, Premier—oh, wait: Maybe you can't smell the coffee because Nestlé's closed the door of its coffee plant in Chesterville back in May, putting 300 more people in eastern Ontario out of work.

So Kellogg's is bringing 100 new jobs into Belleville, but what else have we got? We've got GH Packaging, 80 jobs lost; Lipton's, 145 jobs lost; and Monico, 55 jobs lost. That's 280 jobs lost; 100 jobs gained. I don't like your math, Minister.

When will you stop saying anything to get elected and make Ontario a more competitive place to do business in?

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): In response to the Minister of Education's announcement today that she is going to provide funding for some 100 schools, it's interesting that she says, "within the next few years." What we don't know is whether that's two years, five years or 10 years. But typical of how this government continues to make announcements, she announces \$1 billion; what she doesn't tell us is how much of that \$1 billion this government will actually transfer to school boards to build those schools. She gives us a clue: Of the \$137 million, she's prepared to transfer \$10 million. Essentially what that means is that the minister today has made an announcement that by providing \$10 million to school boards, she'll allow them to go into debt for \$127 million. That's what we have from this minister. She also hasn't told us what is going to happen to many of the schools in this province that are now on the plans of school boards to be torn down, to be closed. In one breath, she announced 100 schools to be built at some point in the future; very quietly she tells us that she is going to start closing schools.

I'm going to ask the minister to come very clean with the people of this province. And she laughs. What she is

telling you is that she is not prepared to tell us the facts about this announcement today.

February 2005 is when this announcement was first made. It was a \$4-billion announcement. Based on true calculations, this minister only plans on transferring 7% of \$4 billion and is inviting school boards to go into debt for the balance. If this is a clue of the kind of mismanagement this government is wreaking on school boards, we can hardly wait to see the next budget come from the Minister of Finance which, no doubt, will have more of this snake oil salesman type of accounting that the Minister of Education has given school boards to date.

What we would ask the minister to do is to factually present to this House and to the people of Ontario the true state of finances in the Ministry of Education. Multi-billions of dollars of committed spending shorted by her ministry to school boards across the province: That's why we have school boards in deficit situations, in serious problems, in this province.

Minister, come clean with the people of Ontario. We ask you to do the responsible thing—

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

INVESTMENT IN ONTARIO

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): On behalf of New Democrats, we say to the people of Belleville that this is much-needed good news, because we know there's been a lot of bad news over the last three years since the government has taken office, when it comes to the thousands of jobs that have been lost, or the tens of thousands of jobs that have been lost in northern Ontario, and 100,000 overall across the province.

It has been a very difficult time for many families in this province. We've seen from communities in Fort Frances to Hamilton to Niagara to Sarnia to Cornwall to Ottawa that thousands and thousands of people lost their jobs under the McGuinty government's watch. Finally we have some good news.

Despite what this government's doing in Belleville, we say congratulations to the community of Belleville. These are jobs that will be well needed, but we also understand there is much left to do.

I just say to the minister across the way, if you can only convince the rest of the cabinet and people within your government to deal with the issues that are crucial to making the economy move in Ontario, such as dealing with the price of electricity and others, we would be a lot better off at the end of the day.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): It is a pleasure to speak to this oleaginous, saponaceous and lubricious announcement by this minister. And this is true.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Member for Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Marchese: The Minister of Education is right. I used to use those words for the Conservative government, and she ought to be surprised that I'm using them for her and her government. Why do I say this? Let me, please, do a review.

I remember mon ami M. Kennedy in the first year announcing \$200 million to deal with the \$4 billion of capital needs the Tories had identified in 2002, monies they never spent, but at least they identified the needs. And so Kennedy comes into power and says, "We are going to spend \$200 million, which will generate \$3 billion worth of capital projects."

The first year went by; not one cent had been spent. The next year he comes and makes another announcement—an announcing, pre-announcing, re-announcing kind of announcement—and then he announces that \$275 million will be spent. We're waiting and we're waiting for the money to flow, and they keep on announcing and re-announcing the same money.

1410

Finally, Good Places to Learn comes forth: \$75 million will be spent immediately. We're waiting and waiting, looking at the facts, if we can, if they release it. Well, some money was spent, but it wasn't \$75 million. Of all the \$275 million they promised—that doesn't exist; it's fictitious—only about \$22 million has been spent, and now the minister announces another of that billion dollars will be spent for yet another 100 new schools. They're just announcements after announcements.

You've got to love these Liberals. You almost believe them every time they announce it. You say, "Maybe this time," and then they find some parents or some trustees to say, "Thank God, another announcement. More money is coming." And it never flows. That's why I say, "Oleaginous, saponaceous and lubricious announcements by the Liberals," because it's greasy, it's sticky, it's something you can't get hold of. It's money that just slips through your hands.

So we say to you, when are you going to bring in that standing committee on education finance so we can actually get a chance to review your numbers, so that can you tell us how great you are with your numbers, so that we can get people to come to the committee and say, "But you haven't spent the money that you said you did"? When are you going to keep that simple promise of having a standing committee on education finance so we could make you accountable, as you want to be held accountable, as you often say you are?

Do we not need clarity and accountability? Yes, we do. Is that what the Liberals claim they're doing? No, they are not doing it at all, each and every time. You've got a foul, failed, flawed Conservative funding formula that you are still using, and until you fix that, we've got a financial problem on our hands. So the Liberals finally release this policy on the closure of small schools. I'm going to tell you, until you fix the funding formula, boards are going to want to close schools, because without adequate money they have no other option but to close small schools even if they want to keep them open.

What you've done with the Toronto board, by forcing them to use \$40 million of capital money for operational dollars, I tell you, is, for Liberals, disrespectful at best. Even Peel Catholic said, "We wanted to do the same. We had a meeting with the minister and she said, 'You can't do that.'" Toronto board has its meeting: \$40 million from capital is being used for operations.

You've got to fix the foul, failed, flawed Conservative funding formula, and until you do that, our school system is in trouble.

ORAL QUESTIONS

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier, and it concerns Caledonia. For 246 days now, the Douglas Creek Estates lands have been occupied by protestors, and the government over that time has adopted many different positions. First they ignored the situation for months, then they downplayed the situation, then they said they weren't going to negotiate until certain conditions were met, but a matter of hours later, before the condition were met, they started negotiating again. Then they said they'd compensate homeowners, but four months later there has been no compensation. Then they said they were working very well with the federal government, but now they're saying something quite different. I think it's clear that this government will say anything they can get away with in this matter and do as little as possible in the meantime.

My question is this: On August 30, 2006, the Premier said that the protestors had to be off the land come winter. Is the Premier going to keep his word on this and maintain the consistency of that position or has he changed his mind on that as well?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The leader of the official opposition will know that the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs is meeting this afternoon in Ottawa with his counterpart, Minister Prentice. I think it would be helpful if the leader of the official opposition would pick up the phone, speak with either Prime Minister Harper or Minister Prentice, and help them understand that what we have here is a long-standing dispute between the federal government and the Six Nations community. We're doing what we can to manage this situation on the ground, but at the end of the day the only resolution that is going to come about will come about when the federal government demonstrates some resolve, some conviction and some determination to deal with this matter in a forthright fashion.

Mr. Tory: The only person who requires some resolve, some conviction and determination is the Premier of Ontario, who has his own responsibilities that he hasn't faced up to in this matter.

We all read, of course, that your minister is going down to Ottawa today to plead for some compensation

from the federal government in respect of decisions that the Premier of this province took to buy the land, and the policing decisions, at your cost, and they're your responsibility.

Not long ago, we asked the Premier what the total costs were for this matter so far. We estimated \$55 million, a number the Premier would neither confirm nor deny. His minister said it will cost what it will cost—an incredible attitude with respect to the taxpayers' money. It's now a month later and we think the costs could be up to \$60 million or \$65 million. The minister is going to Ottawa to ask for an unspecified amount from the federal government.

My question is this: Why can't the Premier tell us, if he's the man in charge of the taxpayers' money, how much this has cost us so far? You must know the answer to that question and you should share it with the taxpayers right now.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the official opposition will know that we have now provided support in the following ways: We have purchased the Douglas Creek Estates, something the leader of the official opposition opposes; we provided money for a business assistance plan; we provided money for signage and markings on the land; we are, in fact, going to provide additional monies for assistance for residents; we provided provincial money for a marketing campaign; we provided provincial money for a new school fence and security cameras; we provided provincial money for communications help for the municipality; provincial money for a toll-free info line, and a website; and, of course, there remain outstanding Ontario Provincial Police costs.

All of that is provincial money. All of that is something that Ontario taxpayers have been encumbered with as a result of this matter stretching out further and further and longer and longer.

I want you to know that the federal government has not spent a single penny in order to provide assistance to the people of the community of Caledonia. So I'm looking forward to the result of this meeting this afternoon, and again I ask the leader of the official opposition whether or not he intends to support the demand on behalf of—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Tory: All that was missing from that list was some conviction, some resolve and some determination to actually get something done.

The government has been asked time and time again about the cost, and all the Premier and his ministers are able to say is that it will cost what it's going to cost.

On August 1, 2006, the Hamilton Spectator submitted a freedom of information request to the OPP via the government, requesting policing costs for the ongoing operation. The response, as happens so often, was that it would take 200 hours and cost \$6,000, and we're still waiting. That was on August 1. Compare this to the

actions of the RCMP, in a truly open and transparent government, where they responded quickly with more than 250 documents, including the estimates of the cost or the actual costs, and at no cost to the person asking.

On this matter, I would argue that the Premier of Ontario, the man entrusted with the taxpayers' money, should know how much that whole list costs that he recited a few moments ago and be prepared to share it with the taxpayers. My question is this: Will you find out the accurate estimate of the policing and other costs so far, save a public servant the 20 hours of work, and save the Hamilton Spectator—

The Speaker: The question has been asked.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I said to the media this morning, when asked about this, that we would be making the total figure public very shortly.

Again I say to the leader of the official opposition, no, we will not direct the Ontario Provincial Police.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I think you already did.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: We will continue to work with the communities involved. What we have done is organize a negotiating table that has brought all parties together. We have arranged for the purchase of the land in question, which we are holding in trust. We are working with the community on an ongoing basis to ease tensions.

I notice that one of my good friends opposite is implying directly that somebody somehow, on this side of the House, has provided direction to the Ontario Provincial Police. I want to make it clear to him, as I have to the media and all others in Ontario, that no such direction has been provided and I will not, unlike what has been suggested by the leader of the official opposition, provide any instructions of any kind to the police when it comes to managing this situation.

1420

The Speaker: New question.

Mr. Tory: We'll see who said what to who when we have a full inquiry, which we'll call into this matter when we form the government.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The Attorney General will come to order.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): As the Premier is aware, there were last week serious allegations which go to the root of the trust in the activities of the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. and its security procedures. We asked several times whether the government would appoint a forensic auditor to come in and investigate the allegations and all the facts surrounding this matter on the television report. The government has so far refused, relying on an internal review and analysis, as they call it, and the Ombudsman, who likely doesn't have the resources to finance a proper audit.

Then we find out on Global Television last Thursday that the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. has commissioned a poll to see if everybody can kind of skate this through. Now, how is it, I ask the Premier, that we're able to find the tens of thousands of dollars to finance a poll but you will not allow this matter to be investigated completely by an independent, outside forensic auditor to get to the bottom of it? Why can you afford one and not the other?

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

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I am concerned that the member opposite doesn't have faith in an independent officer of this Legislature: the Ombudsman. I welcome his investigation.

I'm surprised as well that the member opposite is not familiar with the firm of Ernst and Young, one of Canada's leading forensic audit companies. They had a chance to take a look at the OLG's internal controls, and I would quote from their May 15, 2006, report: "The Insider Win policy provides the utmost integrity of the OLG in the conduct of lottery games by ensuring that there is no perception of an unfair advantage by an OLG lottery winner who is closely affiliated with the OLG."

I say with respect that I would recommend to the Leader of the Opposition that we allow the Ombudsman to do his work, issue his report, and any necessary action will be taken.

Mr. Tory: Perhaps I could follow up to the Premier and ask this: In the event that we have the Ernst and Young letter that you referred to, which does not, of course, take account of the facts brought to light by the Fifth Estate television program, and in the event that the Ombudsman finds he doesn't have the resources to do this himself, will you commit now that you will make the funds available to retain that very same firm, Ernst and Young, to update the audit they did earlier to include the facts contained in the Fifth Estate program so that people who go up to the counter at the store to buy their ticket will know that you left no stone unturned in trying to get to the bottom and have outside professional people look at this? A simple request: Will you allow the Ombudsman to have the money, or your self-financed Ernst and Young, to have an independent, outside update of the investigation of these particular allegations so lottery ticket buyers can have confidence that you've gone right to the bottom of this? Will you do it?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I can tell you that a request has been made, at least I hope it has so far, from the Ombudsman to the Fifth Estate to provide the information, the data they used, the methodology that was used, the analysis they did to come to the conclusion of a very serious allegation. I treat this matter and this government treats this matter with the utmost seriousness. That's why I've asked the chair, on behalf of all the shareholders—the people of Ontario—to conduct a review and analysis and to report back as quickly as possible.

I note to the member opposite that I have full confidence in the Ombudsman, who receives funding and support from this Legislature, as supported by all members of the Board of Internal Economy. The Ombudsman says he will report within 90 days. I suggest that we allow the Ombudsman to do his work and give his report. I want to assure the member that any necessary action will be taken by this government to protect the integrity of the lottery and gaming system in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Tory: I am asking the minister perhaps one more time. He said that he took this matter with the utmost seriousness, and I'll take him at his word on that. Therefore, if you wanted to "do everything necessary"—those are the kinds of words that are sometimes used without answering what was a very direct question. I'll ask it again: If you want to do everything necessary to reassure people who are going in and playing the games and buying the tickets that everything is being done to investigate this and determine if it's true or not and what needs to be done about it, why wouldn't you stand up in your place right now and say that you will commit to updating the Ernst and Young study and to having money made available to the Ombudsman, should he request it or that you do it yourself, to make sure that someone independent looks at this and decides if there's something to it or not and what recommendations they would make?

Back in opposition, your Premier said you didn't believe that people should investigate themselves. When you say the chairman is doing it, that's the lottery corporation investigating itself. Will you commit to the money being made available, directly or through the Ombudsman, to finance an audit if he asks for one? Will you do it?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I'm shocked that the member doesn't understand basic corporate governance, that the board of a corporation does not represent the interests of the corporation but rather the interests of the shareholder.

Interjections.

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

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Apparently, I've touched a nerve of the members opposite.

I have full faith and confidence in the Ombudsman. He has proven to be quite an effective advocate when matters are brought to his attention and when he launches an investigation. I know he will do a thorough job. I welcome his report. When it is unveiled publicly, we will have a chance to see what his recommendations are and take the appropriate actions at that time.

In the meantime, notwithstanding that, the chair of the board, Mr. Gough, who was supported by all members of the all-party standing committee on government agencies, which I say to the member opposite was chaired by a member of his caucus, an excellent member—to protect the public interest, to get to the bottom of things and to have action ensue as quickly as possible. That is the desire of this government—

The Speaker: Thank you.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): Premier, every day working women and men in Ontario do their best to make ends meet. They look to their governments to provide some leadership and some direction that will help them in their day-to-day lives. But today, when they open their newspapers, they see you and Stephen Harper engaging in insults and passing the buck.

Shortly after your election, you claimed—and I want to quote you here—to have “ushered in a new era of working constructively with the federal government.” Can you explain, Premier, why the new era looks a lot like the same old pointing of fingers at Ottawa and blaming someone else?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I guess I should apologize to the leader of the NDP if I'm making him feel a little bit uncomfortable because we do what we think is right on behalf of the people of Ontario. It was Prime Minister Harper who said he was going to address this issue of the fiscal imbalance. He said that before, during and after the campaign, after he'd earned the privilege of serving Canadians as the leader of their new government.

We have a very good case to make on behalf of the people of Ontario. By and large, it's the same case we made to the previous federal government, and we will continue to make that case. I thought we had the support of the leader of the NDP. I thought we had two all-party resolutions which said that together we would stand up on behalf of the people of Ontario and, among other things, we would say that when it comes to the money we receive from the federal government for our health care and education, we shouldn't get a penny less than Canadians get in other provinces. We're being shortchanged by \$1.1 billion. I'd ask the leader of the NDP to stand with Ontarians—

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

Mr. Hampton: Premier, my point is that you promised a new era of co-operation with the federal government but what ordinary Ontarians see, when they turn on the television, is the same old blame game being engaged in by your government.

1430

A year ago, the federal government was forced to rewrite their federal budget. As a result of that, there was \$1 billion of new money for students in colleges and universities to reduce tuition fees. There was \$1.4 billion in new federal money for people waiting for affordable housing. There was \$900 million of new federal money for people who use public transit. Your government received that money, received it all. But you know what? Tuition fees haven't come down, they've gone up, there are higher transit fees, and the waiting list for affordable housing gets longer and longer. What did you do with that money, Premier?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I've seen a lot of things in my 16 years in this Legislature, but for the first time, I've

seen the leader of the NDP become an apologist for a federal Conservative government—the very first time.

The leader of the NDP may not think it's important, but we think that Ontarians should receive the same for their health care and education as other Canadians do. We think that Ontarians should receive the same for their infrastructure as other Canadians do. We think that Ontarians should receive the same for their training as other Canadians do. We think that unemployed Ontarians should receive the same for employment insurance as other Canadians do. We're not looking for a special deal; we're just looking for a fair deal. We're looking for Prime Minister Harper to honour the commitment he made to Ontarians before, during and after the campaign.

Again I ask the leader of the NDP, when did he decide that he's no longer going to stand up for Ontarians and that, instead, he's going to stand up for the Harper government in this Legislature?

Mr. Hampton: I'm standing up for the working families across Ontario who want to know what happened to the tuition fee money.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Minister of Health Promotion, I will not warn you again.

Leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: You see, Premier, those working families want to know what happened to that money that was supposed to be used to reduce tuition fees. What happened to that money that was supposed to be used to build new affordable housing? For example, Nova Scotia used that new federal money to actually stop tuition fee increases. Here in Ontario, you took the money that was supposed to be used to reduce tuition fees, you pocketed it, and now you're going to raise tuition fees by 36% over four years.

I'm simply asking, Premier, what did you do with the new federal money that was already sent to Ontario in the last year? It wasn't used for new affordable housing, it wasn't used to reduce tuition fees, and transit fees are higher than ever. What did you do with the new federal money you already got?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I think the leader of the NDP well understands that we're putting billions into housing, post-secondary education and health care as well.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): And student assistance.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: And student assistance. He knows that our \$6.2-billion plan for post-secondary education is the first of its kind in 40 years in this province, and it puts us head and shoulders above any other provincial government in terms of our manifest commitment to the younger generation. I think that's very clear.

Where we remain unclear is where Mr. Hampton stands with respect to standing up for the people of Ontario. Is he or is he not with us when it comes to laying claim to the \$86 per capita we should be getting for our

health care and education? Is he with us or against us when it comes to getting the \$314 million for additional training opportunities for the people of Ontario? Is he with us or against us when it comes to claiming that \$1.2 billion for infrastructure? What the people of Ontario want to know is where the NDP stands when it comes to standing up for the people of Ontario.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): The Premier mentions housing. There are 122,000 families in Ontario waiting for affordable housing. You promised to build 20,000 new units of affordable housing. In your fourth year of government, you're not even one quarter of the way there. You got \$400 million of new federal money to spend on affordable housing, but you're not spending it on affordable housing. Instead, you've got it in a bank account.

Premier, instead of spending all your time bickering and squabbling with Stephen Harper, why haven't you taken that \$400 million of new federal money that was given to you to build affordable housing and used it to build affordable housing?

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

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): Let's get one thing straight: The amount of money that was set aside by both the federal and the provincial governments last year, namely \$602 million, currently is being spent on affordable housing.

One hundred twenty-eight projects are either built or have been built, are occupied or are in the planning stage right now clear across this province, from Toronto to the smallest community that's out there. It's going to create something like 6,500 units of new affordable housing. That's in addition to the 3,500 rent supplement units that we've got out on the market since 2003 and in addition to the 5,000 units for housing allowances that are out there right now, to be used by the service managers for all those vacant units across this province that can be used. We are spending the money that has been allocated for affordable housing on the affordable housing program. We'll continue to do that. We're going to meet our commitment. We're going to make sure—

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

Mr. Hampton: For all those working families across Ontario that are desperately waiting for affordable housing, here is the reality under the McGuinty government. You haven't even spent the provincial money that you promised to build affordable housing. You're not even halfway to the 20,000 units that you promised. Meanwhile, there is \$400 million of new federal money, which is supposed to be used to build affordable housing, that you're sitting on in a bank account.

I say to the Premier, who promised a new era of co-operation with the federal government, with so many

working families desperate for affordable housing, why are you sitting on \$400 million of new federal money intended to be used to build affordable housing? Why aren't you using it to build affordable housing?

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: The thing that is absolutely fascinating is that all the affordable housing money that was set aside by the federal government and provincial government was in the budget for this year, and that party voted against the budget. They voted against the affordable housing units that are currently being built.

As the member well knows, it takes time for projects to be developed; it takes time to go through the planning processes. There are municipalities that have said that their approvals are involved. We are moving as fast as we can to make sure that the commitments we made in April 2005, when the agreement with the federal government was signed—to make sure that those units are being built and occupied as soon as possible.

Mr. Hampton: Well, Minister, even your own officials don't agree with you. We met with Ministry of Finance officials and they were very clear that you haven't spent the \$400 million of new, additional federal money for affordable housing. Yes, you may have booked it in your budget, but it hasn't been spent on affordable housing. In fact, they say that you might not spend it on affordable housing, that you might spend it on something else.

I ask again of the Premier—instead of pointing the finger at Ottawa and their pointing the finger back at you: You've received money for affordable housing; you haven't spent it on affordable housing. You received money to reduce tuition fees; you didn't reduce tuition fees. In fact, you're going to increase them by 36% over the next four years. You received money to lower transit fees; instead, transit fees are going up. Why haven't you spent the federal money that you've already received to make a difference for working families in Ontario?

1440

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: The trust monies, the way I understand it, were only received by the province less than a month ago. As the member well knows, it's going to take time to develop the kind of program that will be needed in order to get that housing money out the door.

It's always been part of the plan with respect to new affordable housing, with respect to the housing allowance program, that it was going to take a period of time to roll this money out. It isn't a question of getting the money one day and just starting a project the next day. If you've ever been involved in a project of affordable housing, you darn well know that. It's going to take time to plan the project, it's going to take time to get the necessary approvals, it's going to take time to build the project, and only after that can the buildings actually be occupied.

We are going to live up to our commitment on affordable housing. We've got \$602 million of federal and provincial money set aside for that right now. That money will be spent on affordable housing so that the vulnerable in our society, whether they're seniors, whether they're disabled or families, can be —

The Speaker: Thank you.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): To the Minister of Education: This morning, Ontarians were treated to yet another one of the minister's dog-and-pony shows. She announced \$1 billion to build 100 new schools in Ontario. What we would like to know is, and I'm sure what Ontarians would like to know, how much of the \$1 billion that she announced today will the Ministry of Education actually transfer to school boards? Of the \$1 billion announced as a government investment in new schools, how much will your ministry transfer to school boards?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): I think I would have expected a little more sophistication from the member opposite in terms of an understanding of how financing works. What we said when we announced Good Places to Learn is that we were going to flow \$280 million a year to school boards, each year for four years, which would leverage \$4 billion of investments in our schools. What we are doing is giving money to school boards in order that they can borrow, and we're changing a regulation so they can borrow at a very good rate over the long term, which is the way school board projects have always been done over time.

I think it would behoove the member opposite to have a conversation with some of the people at the York region school board, where 171 projects have been completed or are under way because of the money that has flowed to them.

Mr. Klees: That brings me to the character education program that I believe this minister should be undertaking, because her announcement makes it very clear and leaves the impression that this government today announced a \$1-billion investment. It is not that. As the minister has just admitted, it's a mere 7% of \$1 billion, and her \$4-billion investment that was announced by the previous minister is 7% of that.

Effectively, what I want the minister to do is to admit that what she has announced and what her government has announced is that they are advocating that school boards across the province that are already facing deficits are now encouraged by this government to incur a multi-billion dollar debt load that they have no way of carrying. Will the minister admit that?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: What we have done today is two things: We have allowed school boards to have access to a billion dollars so they can build new schools. The second thing we've done is put in place accommodation review guidelines, which boards have been waiting for, that are going to allow boards to value their schools, to look at the value to the students, the value to the community, the value to the employers in the community, so that we can make real what governments have talked about in the past: schools as hubs. How do we value the schools in our communities? How do we make sure the services that are available to the community can be located in the school, can work with the school, schools that have libraries in them, as I was told about in North Bay yesterday? Those are creative solutions that we need

around the province—to keep our schools open, to close schools where it's necessary—and we're allowing schools to do that while we're building new schools.

ALCOHOL AND DRUG TREATMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is to the Premier. Premier, across the province, especially in the GTA, teens are struggling with drugs like never before. The Toronto Star says more youth than ever are getting high every day, using serious street drugs and getting into trouble with the law. Teens who want to break the cycle, you know very well, can't do it alone. But they're not getting the help they need under your government. Publicly funded teen treatment programs are just not there for them, especially in the GTA. Private programs can cost tens of thousands of dollars that teens and their parents simply can't afford. Premier, these kids deserve a second chance. When are you going to address the huge and growing demand for residential drug treatment programs for our youth in trouble?

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I would just take this one second to remind members that they need to address their questions and responses through the Chair. Premier?

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

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): Through the Ministry of Health Promotion, we are pleased to be the primary funder and sponsor of the Focus program. The Ontario Focus Community Program implements activities to address the problems, including misuse of alcohol and other drugs. This government, under the leadership of Premier McGuinty, has provided an additional \$400,000 to provide a variety of community groups that the honourable member is talking about, support to deal with alcohol and drug prevention in the province of Ontario. So, yes, we have to do more, but the Focus program has been widely accepted throughout the province as a very effective grassroots program that deals particularly with young people on alcohol and substance abuse in this province.

Ms. Horwath: The government needs to focus on the problem of drug addictions of youth across the GTA, and a \$400,000 program is just not going to cut it. The reality is the number of youth struggling with addictions is up 20% over the past 15 years. There are two provincially funded residential treatment facilities right now, and both of them have huge waiting lists. The GTA needs residential treatment facilities to help these kids to conquer their addictions and to support them as they try to re-enter the community. If we don't deal with these problems among our youth right now, we're going to be forced to pay for them through increased payments over time, in our social services budgets, in our health budgets, in our justice budgets, and that's just not acceptable. So I ask you again, when are you going to provide the treatment that our youth need, the residential treatment

programs to help them get off these drugs and start to create lives for themselves?

Hon. Mr. Watson: I just want to correct the record. The \$400,000, in fact, is new money. We're actually providing \$2.4 million across the province for the Focus program, including organizations like the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, the Regent Park Focus Program; in Vanier, for instance, Action antidrogue Focus, \$99,000; in northwestern Ontario, in Rainy River, \$94,400. These are programs, as I said, that are in the prevention stage to encourage those young people to stay away from drugs and alcohol, and drug and alcohol abuse. It's a program that has been widely accepted and commended by the Centre for Addition and Mental Health. And the fact of the matter is that these are new initiatives that have been brought in by the McGuinty government because we recognize the need to ensure that we put more resources in the front end, preventing these kinds of tragedies taking place, as opposed to waiting for the back end when in many cases, it's too late.

GREENBELT

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I have a question today for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, our government has always been committed to protecting Ontario's precious green space. We made a promise to the people of Ontario to create a greenbelt. In February 2005, our government permanently protected 1.8 million acres around the greater Golden Horseshoe. Throughout this process, however, Mr. Tory and his party opposed preserving our watersheds, opposed preserving our rivers, our forests, our prime agricultural land. They even voted against the creation of a study area, and they voted against the final boundaries. They voted against preserving green space for generations of Ontarians to come.

Minister, what have the people of Ontario told you they think about our greenbelt?

1450

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): Let me first of all congratulate this member for his ongoing and outstanding commitment to the greenbelt. He has been right there from the beginning, and he truly believes in it.

It was interesting to read this morning in the Toronto Star that, according to a poll they've taken, 90% of the people in the GTA not only support the greenbelt but think it was absolutely the right thing to do. Of course, they're just echoing something that David Suzuki mentioned to us last year when we created the greenbelt, when he stated: "I congratulate you for recognizing that urban sprawl represents a major negative impact on the environment.... Congratulations on this initiative." He was talking about the greenbelt.

So 90% of the people of the GTA and David Suzuki think the greenbelt is a great idea. What we want to know is: Does Mr. Tory support the greenbelt at this stage or not? Does he think it's a great idea? That's what the people of Ontario want to know.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I again remind members that the question should come through the Speaker.

The member for Oakville.

Mr. Flynn: Speaker, a question through you: Minister, I know in my own riding of Oakville that the preservation of the greenbelt has been seen as a huge victory for generations to come. It's just one measure our government has taken to ensure that Ontarians can enjoy green space now and in the future.

Here we are a year and a half later, and 90% of people asked, as the minister has just told us, support the greenbelt. We obviously still support the greenbelt, but where is Mr. Tory on this issue? He's in the same place he was during the clean water debates: absolutely nowhere. He wants to pave over our green space while our government protects it. His party voted against protecting thousands of acres of prime agricultural land and tender fruit land so farmers can continue to grow the foods we eat.

Minister, would you please expand to the House, under our government's greenbelt initiative, what else has been accomplished?

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: In addition to the one million acres that were added to the already existing Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges moraine lands for a total of 1.8 million acres of land, about 100,000 acres of Niagara Peninsula tender fruit and grape specialty crop area was included, and 15,000 acres in the Holland Marsh for that specialty crop area. Of course, we're also supporting the preservation of the natural-heritage system for about three quarters of the lakes, wetlands and forests within the greenbelt. We extended greenbelt protection to the sensitive parts of the Rouge River watershed in Richmond Hill. All of this is being done under the auspices of the Greenbelt Council currently and the Greenbelt Foundation.

We think it's absolutely the right thing to do for generations to come. We think that our children's children will thank us for this absolutely outstanding achievement of a greenbelt in the GTA.

TORONTO EXPO 2015

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Minister of Tourism, unaccustomed as he may be. I think he's probably close by.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Do you want to stand it down or—he is appearing.

The Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: I thought the minister was looking a bit left out.

Minister, we're down to three days left before the bidding deadline for a Toronto world's fair bid in 2015. Earlier this year in March, the minister said that he thought such an event would be great for Toronto and great for Ontario, and he said the McGuinty government would be in support.

Now the bid is struggling. I don't think there's anyone here who would support any government in this country

writing a blank cheque, but there also doesn't seem to be anybody in the McGuinty government who even appears to be using every possible effort with every possible minute that's left to see if we can find a solution and save the bid.

Milan and the Turkish bidders seem to have their act together. My question is this: What specific actions and initiatives are you prepared to undertake as Ontario's Minister of Tourism in the remaining days to make every effort to make sure we keep the bid alive and see if we can have a proper bid for the world's fair in 2015?

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I'm actually glad that the Leader of the Opposition asked that question, because of course our province has indicated its very strong support for infrastructure matters that have to be dealt with on the waterfront. We have been the ones who have already been in on this. We provided \$125,000 for the feasibility study in 2004 and half of the million dollars for the city's \$2.1-million phase 1 pre-bid study in 2005. We've indicated we're happy to help with marketing. We're happy to help in every way we can, but, as you know, the stumbling block is, shall the people of Ontario write a blank cheque to cover any cost overrun? Our province, as you know, does not have the financial capacity to do that. I know that the federal government had a \$13-billion surplus last time. They may well wish to do that, but if you're saying this province should write a blank cheque for this, I'm very surprised.

Mr. Tory: I very clearly said that no one in this assembly would be arguing that the government of Ontario or any government in Canada should be writing a blank cheque. It may well be that a deal can't be reached, but not to even try is a pathetic abdication of leadership.

It's my understanding that Ontario didn't even have senior level representation, compared to the other two governments at the meeting that took place last Friday. But my question to you is this: With a big boost for tourism, jobs and investment possibly and a hurry-up on infrastructure at stake, don't you think it is worth it for you to do everything possible to show some leadership and get the governments at the table in a room to see if in the next three days we can get something done to save this bid and see if Toronto can be a part of this? Are you just going to drop out altogether and give up? That's not leadership. What are you going to do?

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I go back to the Leader of the Opposition and ask him—because the make or break is on who will write the blank cheque for any cost overruns. If you, as a so-called responsible politician in this province, one who believes in fiscal responsibility, are prepared to write a blank cheque on behalf of the people of this province to ensure that this proceeds, then I'm very surprised by that.

The federal government has the capacity financially to do so. If you think they should do so, you can indicate that to the Prime Minister, but on behalf of the province of Ontario, we cannot responsibly write a blank cheque

to cover this. We will do everything else possible. We've been in discussions with them on an ongoing basis. They did not satisfy the federal government initially with their business plan. We have been at the table all along, but the roadblock is the blank cheque. Are you prepared to write a blank cheque on behalf of the people of this province for any cost overrun? That's the question to you.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. It's a simple question: Do you think the most appropriate place for an adult with a developmental disability is a senior citizens' long-term-care home?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for franco-phone affairs): I will say to the member of the third party that people with developmental disabilities have the same rights in Ontario as any other people. If the need is that they go to long-term care, they will, but it's not the approach that we have taken so far.

I will say to the member of the NDP that we have been working very closely with the family, because it's important that these people are placed in the right place in the community, in a group home close to their family and with the full participation of the family. No one will be placed in the community without having all the services they need.

In the supplementary, I will continue to explain the process that has been taken by this government to make sure that these individuals are full participants in the community.

Mr. Prue: Again to the minister: Many people with developmental disabilities and their advocates don't think they should be warehoused in long-term-care homes or facilities. They showed up at ministry round tables to tell you so and to say that people with disabilities should be supported in the communities. But your July 2006 long-term-care home access protocol for adults with a developmental disability says providers should move "individuals with increasing health care needs that they are currently supporting residentially into an appropriate LTC home."

1500

Will you force agencies to go against the best interests of their clients, or will you admit your error and reconsider this regressive protocol?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: I'm very surprised to hear comments like this from the member of the third party, because when the parents went into court to object to the closure of the institution, the judge congratulated the government on the approach it took before placing these individuals.

I will say to you that these individuals have the same rights as any Ontarian. The approach that we have been taking is a very personable and caring approach. The family is fully involved in the decision as to where their loved one will go, and no one is placed in the community

without having the full participation and approval of their family. But the main objective is where the best place is for these individuals to go.

WATER QUALITY

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron–Bruce): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. The members of the NDP and Conservative caucuses now seem to be very proud of the fact that they voted against the Clean Water Act. It's clear: A vote against the Clean Water Act is a vote against clean water. When my constituents hear the members of Conservative caucus almost boastfully saying that they voted against the Clean Water Act, they just don't understand. They obviously are not in touch with rural Ontario. I'm wondering if perhaps they were confused in what they were doing.

The Clean Water Act is all about protection. It seems to me that this is the very point of the act, and they just don't get it. Minister, will you lay out in the simplest of terms exactly what the Clean Water Act does so my friends in Her Majesty's loyal opposition will understand and stop staying with pride that they voted—

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

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I want to thank the member for her championing of the issues on behalf of all Ontarians, particularly rural Ontarians.

The members of the NDP and Conservative caucuses have chosen to vote in the clearest of terms against the single most important recommendation that came out of Justice O'Connor's recommendations. Twelve recommendations will be met directly by the Clean Water Act, and the act itself speaks to the operational implementation of 22 recommendations.

A vote against the Clean Water Act is a vote against prevention. It's a vote against an act which will be providing Ontarians with some of the best-protected drinking water in all of North America. It's an act which is leading the way in jurisdictions right around the world as to our approach to source water protection, because the most effective way to ensure that Ontarians have clean, safe drinking water is to keep it clean in the first place.

Mrs. Mitchell: Thank you for explaining to the members of the NDP and Conservative caucuses what they voted against. But by voting against the recommendations of the Walkerton inquiry, it's clear they're flip-flopping and playing politics with our water. Instead of listening to the hard-working families in rural Ontario, the members of the Conservative caucus have decided to ignore what rural Ontarians want and deserve.

I heard that you met with the members of the advisory panel—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker: The members for Oxford and Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound will come to order.

Member for Huron–Bruce.

Mrs. Mitchell: I heard that you met with the members of the advisory panel of the Ontario drinking water stewardship program yesterday, and I'm very thrilled to know that there are several rural representatives on this panel. It's proof that our government listens to rural Ontarians and wants them to play an active role in protecting our water.

Since the Conservative caucus members have no interest in accurately informing their constituents about how the passing of the Clean Water Act is good for rural Ontarians, can you tell rural Ontarians more about this important piece of legislation?

Hon. Ms. Broten: I'm very pleased to relate to this House that I did have an opportunity to meet with the Ontario drinking water stewardship panel yesterday. That panel comprises 11 representatives, many of them from rural Ontario: Al Lauzon, the chair, a University of Guelph professor and past chair of the Ontario Rural Council; Ron Bonnett, president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture; Dale Cowan, the director of the Ontario Agri Business Association; John Maaskant of the Chicken Farmers of Ontario, chair of the Ontario Farm Animal Council and co-chair of the Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition; and many other members who will help our government examine and deliver the \$7 million in stewardship funding that has been put in place, \$5 million of which will be allocated to support action to protect land and water surrounding municipal water wells and surface water intake, and \$2 million to support local outreach programs so that we can deliver clean, safe drinking water right across the province, something that the opposition obviously—

The Speaker: New question.

AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): A question to the Minister of Agriculture: On October 18, 2005, during estimates you said, "The CAIS program has not met their needs." You were referring to grain and oilseed farmers. On November 23 last year, you said, "Their needs are not being met by the business risk management program that's in place at the present time." And on April 7, this spring, you said, "All provinces recognize that CAIS is not working well."

Minister, you've talked about the need to transform CAIS. The only transformation we've seen is your disappearing act of late. Where is the analysis the Ontario Federation of Agriculture requested on farm income if NISA was still in place? Has that analysis been done?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I'm very happy to have an opportunity to correct the record for the honourable member and to speak about CAIS and how our government is working with our colleague ministers from across Canada to improve the CAIS program.

In 2005, we acted very swiftly to replace the deposit that was required of those who were going to participate,

and it has now been replaced with a fee. That's what they wanted. We also announced that we are amending the formula to make negative margins coverable under this program. Another thing that we did just in September came at a cost of some \$96 million, but we did adjust inventory valuations for the program. This is something that was identified by producers. Not all provincial governments across Canada have done this, but we have. At our last meeting in June, again with respect to CAIS, our provincial ministers said that they want to look at—

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

Mr. Barrett: Minister, please don't tell us about changing the method for inventory evaluation. That's old news. That was four months late as it was. You've had three years to get this right. Farmers are getting tired of being tricked on this file. Don McCabe of the OFA says, "We need to see immediate action." OFA president Bonnett states, "Workable proposals to rectify inequities have been repeatedly put forward but ignored by governments."

Just what is this transformation, Minister? Some questions: Are you funding a risk management program for cash crop? Are you bringing back NISA for farmers? What about self-directed production insurance for hort.? What is the transformation? What are you doing?

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: I'm very happy to stand in this House and remind the honourable member—I find it interesting you are quoting Ron Bonnett today when just the question before, our member cited Ron Bonnett, the president of the OFA, and you laughed at him. Shame on you.

What our government has committed to do with respect to business risk management for farmers—in our budget document, we said that this government remains committed to a multi-year strategy that will stabilize and strengthen the agriculture industry, but it does require the federal government's participation. And let me remind the honourable member that a few weeks ago, when the federal government had a \$13-billion surplus, they put it in the bank. They didn't assign one cent to farmers or to risk management programs. So if you want to talk about people stepping aside from the issue, you call your federal member.

The Speaker: New question.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The leader of the third party is waiting to ask his question.

1510

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Forest-sector communities across northern Ontario have been devastated by the McGuinty government's misguided hydro rate policy, your policy of driving hydro rates through the roof. The northern Ontario Forestry Coalition says that a total of 25,000 direct and indirect jobs are being destroyed as a

result of your misguided hydro rate policy. The latest casualty is St. Marys Paper of Sault Ste. Marie, which filed for bankruptcy protection last Thursday. The question is this: Is your government going to act to reduce industrial hydro rates for the forest products sector in northern Ontario, or are you going to destroy an additional 400 direct jobs at St. Marys Paper in Sault Ste. Marie?

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

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): I'm pleased to inform the House that the Independent Electricity System Operator now points out that the industrial price of electricity is lower today than when this government took office three years ago.

We acknowledge that there is a challenge for the forestry sector, and this government has responded with a \$1-billion investment that is applied across the north, particularly in the northwest. We remain committed to working with those communities.

It's because of the steps we undertook three years ago, steps that member voted against—you know, he's really interesting. He voted against putting a price cap on power and then he voted against taking it off. He's been all over the map on it.

I've got to tell you, the only way to lower price in electricity is to increase the supply of electricity or to decrease the demand for it. We're doing both: a \$13-billion investment in the energy sector that's resulting in lower power prices.

I say to the member, unlike the 40% price increase you inflicted on this province, the industrial price of electricity is—

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

Mr. Hampton: I'm not surprised that the Premier doesn't want to answer this question. After all, it was the Premier who spoke to northern municipal leaders, now about seven months ago, and said that the McGuinty government was going to look at reducing hydro rates. But since then, thousands more jobs have been destroyed in the northern Ontario forest sector.

Premier, you know what northern Ontario municipal leaders, union leaders and forest sector leaders asked of your government. They said, reduce the hydro rate for the forest products sector to 4.5 cents a kilowatt hour, all fees and charges included. St. Marys, in their press release, said that your misguided policy of driving hydro rates through the roof was a major factor in driving them to seek bankruptcy protection.

My question to the Premier is this: When are you going to act on what you said in Thunder Bay? When are you going to reduce hydro rates for the forest products sector—

The Speaker: Thank you. The Minister of Energy.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: A skill-testing question for the House: Who was it that in 2002 said regional pricing wouldn't work? In fact, what did he say? Here's what someone said—a skill-testing question for the member,

who lacks any skill when it comes to electricity. He said, "This essentially means that the one-price system we've always had, the system that says we're all equal citizens of Ontario, would be gone.... It means some consumers should be prepared to get whacked over the head." He opposed that then; now he's changed his mind.

Let me tell you what we've done. We have increased the supply of electricity and decreased the price of electricity. Unlike that member opposite, whose government cancelled conservation programs, we have embraced them in a terrific way. In terms of the forest sector industry, \$1 billion in investments to protect the northern economy, to protect the men and women who draw their incomes—

The Speaker: Thank you.

PETITIONS

LANDFILL

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there is currently a proposal to more than double the size of the Carp landfill in west Ottawa; and

"Whereas this site has been in operation for some 30 years and had been expected to close in 2010; and

"Whereas the surrounding community has grown rapidly for the past 10 years and is continuing to grow; and

"Whereas other options to an expanded landfill have yet to be considered; and

"Whereas the municipal councillors representing this area ... and the MPP, Norm Sterling, all oppose this expansion;

"We, the undersigned, support our local representatives and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure the Minister of the Environment does not approve the expansion of the Carp landfill and instead finds other waste management alternatives."

COMMUNITY MEDIATION

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It has been sent to me by Wayne Browning and Gillian Taylor from Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services; they're some of the 50,000 clients of ICNSS every year. It reads as follows:

"Whereas many types of civil disputes may be resolved through community mediation delivered by trained mediators, who are volunteers working with the parties in the dispute; and

"Whereas Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services established the Peel Community Mediation Service in 1999 with support from the government of Ontario through the Trillium Foundation, the Rotary Club of Mississauga West and the United Way of Peel,

and has proven the viability and success of community mediation; and

“Whereas the city of Mississauga and the town of Caledon have endorsed the Peel Community Mediation Service, and law enforcement bodies refer many cases to the Peel Community Mediation Service as an alternative to a court dispute; and

“Whereas court facilities and court time are both scarce and expensive, the cost of community mediation is very small, and the extra expense incurred for lack of community mediation in Peel region would be much greater than the small annual cost of funding community mediation;

“Be it therefore resolved that the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of the Attorney General, support and fund the ongoing service delivery of the Peel Community Mediation Service through Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services.”

This is an excellent petition. I am pleased to sign and support it and to ask page Adam to carry it for me.

WATER QUALITY

Mr. John O’Toole (Durham): I am pleased to present a petition on clean water. It may explain one of the questions in the House today. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas every Ontarian wants the best water quality possible; and

“Whereas the goal of clean water can be achieved effectively through amendments to existing legislation; and

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberals are determined to hammer through the flawed legislation known as the Clean Water Act; and

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberals have failed to put in place adequate, stable, long-term funding into” Bill 43; and

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberals have failed to effectively address the numerous problems in the bill; and

“Whereas rural Ontario stands to suffer significantly under this poorly-thought-out policy;

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

“To not pass Bill 43 (the Clean Water Act) until proper funding and amendments are in place.”

I am pleased to present this on behalf of Megan Doherty of Peterborough, Martin Dinisson of Kapuskasing and other people from the province of Ontario.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Speaker, thank you very much for recognizing me. I keep getting petitions on Bill 124 in support of skilled immigrants. The Minister of Citizenship is here to listen to this. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the McGuinty government is committed to establishing measures that will break down barriers for Ontario newcomers; and

“Whereas these measures will ensure that the 34 regulatory professions in Ontario have admissions and application practices that are fair, clear and open; and

“Whereas these measures will include the establishment of a fairness commissioner and an access centre for internationally trained individuals; and

“Whereas, through providing a fair and equitable system, newcomers will be able to apply their global experience, which will not only be beneficial to their long-term career goals, but also to the Ontario economy as a whole;

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

“That all members of the House support the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, Bill 124, and work to ensure its prompt passage in the Ontario Legislature.”

I’m delighted to affix my signature to this petition, because I—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Petitions, the member for Ottawa–Orléans.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): Nepean–Carleton.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. MacLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look a lot like the member for Ottawa–Orléans, eh?

1520

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): In any event, “We Call on the Government of Ontario to Eliminate the Health Tax....

“Whereas, according to the Department of National Defence, there are over 30,000 serving military personnel calling Ontario home; and

“Whereas, according to the most recent census data, there are more than 1.6 million senior citizens over the age of 65 living in Ontario; and

“Whereas the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario plans on eliminating this illegitimate tax for all Ontarians after it forms government in 2007; and

“Whereas, as an interim measure, the illegitimate health tax should be removed from those who protect Canada and those who have built Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, call on the government of Ontario to immediately eliminate the illegitimate health tax, beginning with serving military personnel and senior citizens.”

I approve of this, and I will affix my signature.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition. It’s addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas Scarborough Southwest is a growing community dependent on public transit to move people around;

“Whereas the city of Toronto and the Toronto Transit Commission are calling for and predicting continued growth in Scarborough Southwest over the next 25 years;

“Whereas the Toronto Transit Commission, in its growth plan, has called for the expansion of subway service to cover more of Scarborough;

“Whereas the government of Ontario has traditionally assisted the city of Toronto in funding subway expansion as recently as the Sheppard subway expansion project;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to work in concert with the city of Toronto and come up with a funding arrangement to assist in expanding subway service to Scarborough.”

I agree with this petition, affix my signature to it and give it to page Jasmine, who is here with me today.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have more petitions I’ve received to do with hydro line maintenance. It reads: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Hydro One Networks Inc. provides hydro to many communities in the region of Parry Sound–Muskoka; and

“Whereas there have recently been several lengthy power outages in this region affecting both private residences, schools and businesses; and

“Whereas rural customers pay among the highest distribution and delivery charges for electricity;

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

“That the Minister of Energy and the Ontario Energy Board require Hydro One Networks Inc. to make improvements in line maintenance and forestry management in the region of Parry Sound–Muskoka to ensure reliable energy for its customers.”

I support this petition and affix my signature.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): This one is titled “We Call on the Government of Ontario to Eliminate the Health Tax

“To the Parliament of Ontario:

“Whereas, according to the Department of National Defence, there are over 30,000 serving military personnel calling Ontario home; and

“Whereas, according to the most recent census data, there are more than 1.6 million senior citizens over the age of 65 living in Ontario; and

“Whereas the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario plans on eliminating this illegitimate tax for all Ontarians after it forms government in 2007; and

“Whereas, as an interim measure, the illegitimate health tax should be removed from those who protect Canada and those who have built Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, call on the government of Ontario to immediately eliminate the illegitimate health tax, beginning with serving military personnel and senior citizens.”

I wholeheartedly support this petition and affix my signature.

LANDFILL

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): This is on behalf of my constituents in Nepean–Carleton.

“Whereas there is currently a proposal to more than double the size of the Carp landfill in west Ottawa; and

“Whereas this site has been in operation for some 30 years and had been expected to close in 2010; and

“Whereas the surrounding community has grown rapidly for the past 10 years and is continuing to grow; and

“Whereas other options to an expanded landfill have yet to be considered; and

“Whereas the municipal councillors representing this area ...” as well as myself “and the MPP, Norm Sterling, all oppose this expansion;

“We, the undersigned, support our local representatives and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure the Minister of the Environment does not approve the expansion of the Carp landfill and instead to find other waste management alternatives.”

I affix my signature. I support this wholeheartedly.

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I’ve received petitions to do with the Clean Water Act. This petition reads:

“Amend the Clean Water Act

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas every Ontarian wants the best water quality possible; and

“Whereas the goal of clean water can be achieved effectively through amendments to existing legislation; and

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberals are determined to hammer through the flawed legislation known as the Clean Water Act; and

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberals have failed to put in place adequate, stable, long-term funding into the bill; and

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberals have failed to effectively address the numerous problems in the bill; and

“Whereas rural Ontario stands to suffer significantly under this poorly thought out policy;

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

“To not pass Bill 43 (the Clean Water Act) until proper funding and amendments are in place.”

PROPERTY RIGHTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): This is a very important issue to my constituents in Nepean–Carleton.

“Whereas the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is silent on property rights; and

“Whereas the Alberta Bill of Rights specifically protects the right to the enjoyment of property; and

“Whereas the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms provides that ‘Every person has a right to the peaceful enjoyment and free disposition of his property, except to the extent provided by law’; and

“Whereas ownership rights should not be abridged or usurped without due process of law; and

“Whereas owners of all lands affected by expropriation should have the right to be included as parties to a required inquiry to consider the merits of the objectives of the expropriating authority; and

“Whereas the decision of an expropriating authority should be subject to judicial review; and

“Whereas, subject to specific limitations of law, the right to peaceful enjoyment of one’s land must be recognized by Ontario law;

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

“To pass Bill 57, the Land Rights and Responsibilities Act, 2006.”

Since I spoke in favour of and voted for that bill, I affix my signature.

CAFETERIA FOOD GUIDELINES

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas childhood obesity rates have tripled over the past two decades in Canada; and

“Whereas the annual amount of money the health care system uses to mend preventable obesity-related illnesses is \$1.6 billion; and

“Whereas the Ontario food premises regulation only provides safety policies that must be followed by the Ontario school boards’ cafeterias, but no defined regulations regarding the nutrition standard of the food being served at the cafeterias; and

“Whereas there is a need to encourage nutritious standards in high school cafeterias that support Canada’s Guidelines for Healthy Eating; and

“Whereas the private member’s bill proposed by Nupur Dogra under Making the Grade and her fellow students at Iroquois Ridge High School will require all Ontario school boards’ cafeterias to adopt and abide [by] healthier eating standards (similar to Canada’s Guidelines for Healthy Eating) that will govern the food choices;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass the private member’s bill that will amend the Ontario school boards’ cafeteria food guide-

lines to follow healthier food standards in all Ontario high school cafeterias.”

IMMIGRANTS’ SKILLS

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

“Whereas action by Ontario’s trades and professions could remove many such barriers, but Ontario’s trades and professions have failed to recognize that such structural barriers exist, much less to take action to remove them, and to provide fair, timely, transparent and cost-effective access to trades and professions for new Canadians trained outside Canada;

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

“That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario’s regulated professions and trades to review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario’s employers, Ontario’s newcomers and their own membership, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families.”

I completely agree with this and will sign it.

1530

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2006 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2006 SUR LES MESURES
BUDGÉTAIRES (NO 2)

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 30, 2006, on the motion for second reading of Bill 151, An Act to enact various 2006 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts / Projet de loi 151, Loi édictant diverses mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2006 et édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): I’m pleased to kick off today’s debate for the Budget Measures Act, the second act stemming from the 2006 Ontario budget.

The PC finance critic, my good friend from Erie–Lincoln, will be speaking to this bill tomorrow night, on his birthday no less, as a deferred lead. I'm sure he will present the Legislature with a very detailed and thorough presentation.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, around six months ago, shortly after the March 30 by-election, I gave my inaugural speech in this place. In fact, my inaugural speech was regarding the original budget bill. Members may recall I ran on the heels of the by-election budget, a smoke-and-mirrors show by the McGuinty Liberals to buy votes off the electorate using the electorate's own money. Of course, we know how this worked; in fact, it didn't work. That is why I'm joined here by my colleagues and friends the members from Whitby–Ajax and Toronto–Danforth, who also ran in the by-election.

At the time of my inaugural speech, on April 18, 2006, I indicated to this chamber the points of view of the people of Nepean–Carleton. As you will agree, the people of Whitby–Ajax, Toronto–Danforth and Nepean–Carleton all had a direct voice on how they viewed this McGuinty budget. I informed the Legislature last April that the people of Nepean–Carleton viewed the budget with cynicism. I told this place:

“When a government spends itself purposely into deficit when it should be in the black and continues to tax Ontarians, the people of Nepean–Carleton are justifiably concerned. When a government takes a \$2.4-billion tax hike in an illegitimate McGuinty health tax—a tax ... on hard-working families—and then the government claims to provide better health care yet has spent millions of that health tax outside the health sector, you will understand that families are understandably upset. When a government has the audacity to call its leader the education Premier while college professors are on strike and thousands of students are fretting over a lost school year, it is more than reasonable for parents, students and college professors to demand that their government take some leadership on a crisis that you'll remember only came to a head as election day drew near. These are the very sorts of issues that condemned the scandal-ridden federal Liberal Party out of office and into defeat.”

Mr. Speaker, you know all too well that my party has opposed each of the budgets of this government. That is because we fundamentally oppose the high taxes, high hydro rates, and runaway-spending nature of this McGuinty government. The McGuinty Liberals have over \$6 billion more in revenue than they said they needed in the last election campaign in order to keep their plentiful promises. It is time they reduced the burden of taxes on Ontario's working families, seniors and businesses. This budget lacks tax relief for the working families and seniors of Ontario. The McGuinty government has approximately \$6 billion in surplus, as compared to their election fiscal plan, yet continues to condemn working families to paying \$2,000 more in taxes, user fees and hydro costs than they did before the last election.

Last May, when I asked this Legislature to join me in supporting my motion to eliminate the illegitimate health tax for seniors and serving military personnel, even

though there was this massive surplus, the Liberals voted against it. That's shameful. Why does the McGuinty government have such disdain for working Ontarians? Even though the dollars were there and with a good, clear conscience we could have given a hand to our seniors living on a fixed income and to our soldiers sacrificing their lives for us in Afghanistan, who are not even covered under OHIP, this Liberal government voted against them. There is still no plan for this Liberal government to repeal their illegitimate health tax, the single biggest promise of this government. The Premier looked into the camera and promised Ontarians he would not raise taxes, but he did it anyway.

In fact, the only reason the McGuinty Liberals had to break their promise on taxes is that they also broke a promise on spending restraint. Their own public accounts prove that, in 2006, they spent a massive \$5.7 billion more than they promised in the fiscal plan released during the 2003 election. The Premier claimed, when he implemented the health tax on the middle class, that it was needed—needed—to pay for his promises in health and education, but the public accounts prove that's just not true. He needed \$2.4 billion from the so-called health tax on the middle class in this province to fund that broken spending promise and still balance the budget.

That being said, provincial revenue without the health tax was actually \$2.7 billion more than he counted on in his election promise, and the last budget still wasn't balanced. That will be just another in a long line of saying anything just to get and stay elected.

The McGuinty Liberals tried to use the report of former auditor Erik Peters to say that there was a permanent or structural deficit and that they needed a permanent tax on the middle class to deal with it, but Mr. Peters never said there was a structural deficit. In fact, \$4.4 billion of the potential \$5.6-billion deficit he identified was in revenue shortfalls, mainly because of one-time factors. Let me read them to you. In fact, most of the circumstances he cited were one-time events. These one-time events included \$961 million in lower crown corporation revenues because of SARS and the blackout; \$1.16 billion in lower tax revenues due to SARS and the sudden appreciation in the dollar; \$720 million in SARS-related health spending; and \$130 million in tourism tax breaks after SARS.

Peters also assumed that the \$771 million in increased transfers from the then federal Liberal government would not flow. In reality, a few months later, the federal transfers flowed as outlined in the Eves budget. Peters accepted the Liberal assumption that there wouldn't be any of the estimated \$300 million in year-end savings, even though the Liberals included at least that much in year-end savings in every subsequent budget and have actually increased it steadily until it reached \$700 million in the 2006-07 budget.

Now, the so-called health tax wasn't to meet their spending promises. After all, if the McGuinty Liberals had kept their spending promises, they would have eliminated that health tax last year and still would have

had a surplus of over \$2 billion. Speaking of breaking the promise on fiscal restraint, if there's one thing that characterizes the McGuinty government more than anything else, it's broken promises: broken promises on energy costs; broken promises on coal plants; broken promises on private hospitals. In my own constituency, the Royal Ottawa Hospital: we campaigned, of course, in 2003 to build that hospital; they, on the other side, campaigned against it. I remember being at the rally that said, "Save our hospital. We will build this hospital." But they were too afraid. They flip-flopped and broke their promise, and now that hospital, of course, is flourishing like it should be.

They broke their promises on taxes, as I've just said, broken promises that have hurt hard-pressed families right across Ontario, and today, we add one more to the list: Dalton McGuinty's broken promise to restrain spending. Over the past three years, under the McGuinty Liberals' watch, program spending has increased by an average of 8.4% while the economy was growing at 4.4% GDP, and this when times were good. What we are seeing now is more of the same runaway, out-of-control Liberal spending, but now the economy is slowing and good jobs are disappearing.

We've seen this before. Government spending that exceeds the growth of the economy simply isn't sustainable. It doesn't protect jobs, and it doesn't help real families cope with economic uncertainty. Mr. McGuinty simply cannot break his spending restraint promise by almost \$6 billion and still have an attractive business climate at a time, by the government's own reckoning, that we need it the most to encourage investment and help save good-paying jobs.

This is a major disconnect between McGuinty's spending and real people's lives, the people we represent on the floor of this Legislature.

1540

As I said in my inaugural speech, during the by-election budget, the people of Nepean-Carleton were given an opportunity to judge the McGuinty government and its priorities against their values, and they resoundingly rejected this government, its priorities and its ever-convenient by-election budget. Nowhere in the budget were self-reliance, strong families or safer streets. In fact Nepean-Carleton and the city of Ottawa weren't valued at all. Instead, we saw a budget from the GTA where \$244 million was taken out of the agriculture budget and \$82 million was taken from the children and youth services ministry. There were no new infrastructure funding announcements in my city of Ottawa and no new long-term-care beds, which we desperately need in our city.

The McGuinty government did little to offer the people of Nepean-Carleton strong leadership in that budget and they did nothing to offer the farmers in my community solutions to the crisis on the family farm, whether they are from Greely, Richmond, Osgoode or Metcalfe. Farmers have all been forgotten by this government, and we see that each and every day with different pieces of legislation.

The McGuinty government also did nothing to offer young families like mine who live in Stittsville, Barrhaven, Manotick and Greely, a better way to make ends meet. Instead, families like mine with young children are paying over \$2,000 more in taxes since this government took office.

The McGuinty government did nothing to offer patients reduced wait times. In fact, each week in this Legislature, I raise the issue of long-term-care beds and the crisis that's evolving in my city because we are short, as I have mentioned repeatedly, 850 long-term-care beds, and they're doing nothing about it—absolutely nothing—three years into their mandate; just a pittance of funding, only after it's raised in this Legislature.

This is a government addicted to spending but without a plan. There's no accountability, no guarantee that we ever get value for money. Rather, they recklessly spend on items that are meaningless to the people of Ontario and certainly to the people of Nepean-Carleton.

Let me illustrate how the crowd opposite recklessly spends our money: \$6 million to drop the C from OLG; \$20 million for raises for Liberal appointees on government agencies and boards; \$100 million for partisan government advertising; \$91 million to fire nurses; \$219,000 to pay Liberal ad firms to redraw our trillium—a trillium logo, I might add, that made it through 42 years, seven governments and three major political parties, yet members opposite believe they are above an institution that has served this province for over 42 years. That is the blatant disrespect they not only have for Ontario's institutions but for Ontario's voters and taxpayers. This government is out of touch, spending ridiculous amounts of money while thousands of hard-pressed Ontarians can barely keep up with the bills.

This bill implements measures contained in the 2006 Ontario budget that was presented to the Legislature by the former Minister of Finance, Dwight Duncan, on March 23, 2006. Nothing has changed since the seven days preceding that by-election budget. As I said, on April 18, my people had a choice between a McGuinty government that cuts and slashes the agriculture budget or the Progressive Conservative Party that defends the family farm, and they chose the Progressive Conservative Party, the party of rural Ontario, and they'll do it again on October 4, 2007. The families of Nepean-Carleton had a choice between the fiscal irresponsibility of this Liberal government or the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario that demands balanced budgets and scrapping an unaccountable tax on families. That's what they're going to get on October 4, 2007.

Last March, they chose fiscal accountability and sent a Progressive Conservative to Queen's Park because families like mine need a break. They need to make sure that the health tax is not in the government's pocket, because it's going to anything and everything but health care in this province. You can tell when you're looking at surgical wait times in my city, which are the highest on average in all of Ontario, when you look at the wait times at CHEO, which I know the members opposite are

hanging their heads about right now, because the children in Ottawa are waiting, on average, one year to get spinal surgery. We don't have that type of time for young children who are developing. We don't have a year to wait. The platitudes—

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot): Send us the cheque.

Ms. MacLeod: Yes, “Send us the cheque.” That's what they're asking right now, if we can just send a cheque to the Liberal Party of Ontario so they can continue to spend your money recklessly. But seniors in Nepean–Carleton had a choice, too, between a McGuinty government that creates more bureaucracy—not more doctors, not more nurses and not reduced waiting times—with its local health integration networks or the Progressive Conservative Party, the party that wants to explore new options in health care so we can put patients and seniors—not more red tape—first. I'm begging them today, if they want to fix that long-term health crisis in Ottawa right now, do it. You can take the credit for it. I can just keep raising it every single day in this Legislature, but fix the problem. Eight hundred and fifty beds—if you want to do it, I encourage you to do it.

This government lost credibility on day one with the everyday hard-working Ontarian and the everyday person who lives in Ottawa, because they're struggling to pay the bills and there is absolutely no improvement in their life whatsoever. When a government claims a deficit but has a surplus, and yet continues to tax families, just as this government does, people lose faith in their institutions and their representatives.

The people of Nepean–Carleton are not alone in judging the Budget Measures Act. The fine people of Whitby–Ajax, Toronto–Danforth and so many more areas across this province—we recently had a by-election, and they have the same lack of faith in the Premier's view of where we should be taking Ontario. Rather, it's the opposition parties that have benefited from it, because, actually, we on this side of the Legislature speak for the people of Ontario.

Bill 151 does nothing but leave a ticking time bomb of property tax increases for Ontario's homeowners; families that just cannot take yet another tax hike; families that heard, “I won't raise your taxes,” and then thought perhaps a politician might be honest. Little did they know.

The amendments to the Assessment Act will result in three-year assessment increases hitting Ontario property taxpayers in a single year. But wait, the increase will not come into effect until after the next provincial election—just like everything else, dithering and delaying; putting it off until after the next provincial election. Whether it's the municipal review, whether it's our property assessments, whether it's virtually anything, they have undefined timelines, goals and objectives, just so they can say anything and do anything to stay in the seats they're in. That didn't work for the federal Liberals and, sadly for my friends opposite, it's not going to work for them.

Whether it's increasing the Liberal-appointed LCBO board members—actually, we might have to wait and see

if it's going to be the LCB, because by the time this bill goes through, they might want to drop the O just so they can give another Liberal ad firm a handsome contract—or giving more sweeping powers to the Canadian Public Accountability Board, giving them more and more access to confidential and privileged information, while the Ontario Bar Association and the Certified General Accountants Association are left concerned about this.

Just like the 2003 election platform, just like the Liberal Red Book, just like every Liberal election document in the last 20 years, all we have here in this Budget Measures Act is saying anything and doing anything to stay elected. The voters of Nepean–Carleton and I would like to know, why did the McGuinty Liberals even bother with bills like this? With budgets at all? Because all they're going to do is ignore them.

Before I close, I'd like to go through a couple of media clippings here and talk about what the people across Ontario, particularly the press, are saying about this budget. Let's talk about the Ontario Bar Association: “However, the pressing matter at hand as this bill is now before the House for second reading debate, is the matter of solicitor-client privilege. Given that this is a fundamental principle for our profession, it is disappointing that there was no contact with relevant stakeholder groups in the legal profession for input in the development of this legislation.” I ask my colleague to the left of me here from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, have we heard “lack of consultation” before with this government? Have we heard that before?

I want to go to the Toronto Star editorial. They always have something entertaining to say.

“Sorbara portrayed the downturn as ‘a bridge to a new cycle of expansion within an economy that is fundamentally strong.’

“Because of this rather sanguine outlook for the projected economic slowdown, Sorbara clearly sees no need for much of a response. He proposes to put a somewhat greater focus on services and programs to help job-threatened or laid-off workers; to fast-track a number of infrastructure projects; to encouraging interprovincial trade; and to launch a new campaign to persuade Ontarians to vacation in the province.”

While the first two elements of that package may provide some relief over the next 12 months, it adds up to very little. This is another one of their smoke-and-mirrors games here, where they delay and dither and have all of these grandiose plans but they never really materialize to very much, aside from, of course, picking fights with the federal government, because that's what they do best.

1550

Another excerpt from the Toronto Star: “Despite the continuing failure to balance the budget—spending is up \$913 million to a record \$88 billion in 2006-07—the government enjoys an additional \$190 million in proceeds from the Teranet land registry that will be spent on new initiatives.” Instead of trying to balance the budget or eliminate the deficit, they're just going to spend it on new initiatives.

“Economist Hugh Mackenzie said the Liberals promised to be more compassionate to the poor. However, when inflation is factored in, those on social assistance are actually worse off today than when the Liberals were elected.” They’re hanging their heads again. As we heard from my colleague the leader of the third party here today, talking about the amount of money this government has for affordable housing, they’re not injecting it into affordable housing. I’m sure he’d like to comment on this when I finish speaking.

As I close, because I notice I have about 30 seconds left, I’ll just finish with this: “‘Dalton McGuinty was terrific in 2003. He improved in every way from [the 1990 election] and he deserved to win and we deserved to win,’ says one senior Liberal. ‘But that platform was a disaster. We tried to be all things to all people. And now we’re paying for it.’” That’s from the Toronto Star’s Robert Benzie and Mr. Ferguson. There you have it: Even Liberals are ashamed of this plan and this budget. Come next election, I’m sure they won’t be sitting on that side of the Legislature.

Thank you very much. I look forward to their questions.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments on the member’s speech?

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I always listen with interest when opposition members comment upon the budget and the budget papers and the budget legislation of the McGuinty government. The one point that stands out in the member’s speech is that this is a government that would promise virtually anything and everything before the last election in order to solicit votes. This was a government that said, for example, they were going to fix the flawed and inadequate school funding formula, but, as the member pointed out, if we go across Ontario we find that the flawed and inadequate school funding formula has not been fixed. We still see schools taking money out of the special education budget or out of the English-as-a-second language budget and using it to pay the hydro bill. Of course the board knows that unless you pay the hydro bill, the school can’t function. You won’t have heat, you won’t have light, you won’t have anything to power much of the equipment.

Similarly, in terms of the property tax system, I remember the now Premier saying that the property tax system was broken and that he was seized of the issue of fixing it. Well, I think what we have now discovered is that to the McGuinty government, “seized” means seizing it up until after the next election. Nothing is happening to address this whole issue of property tax assessment rates that are skyrocketing and forcing seniors to sell their homes.

For those points, I commend the member.

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I want to make some comments on Bill 151. I want to make clear that Bill 151 will assist the changes that we in Ontario have been asking for, that is, to have a strong community and a prosperous economy. This bill will assist in that objective. I think we have all been hearing from everyone

that the economy in Ontario and in North America is not predicted to do as well, this year or next year, as it has in the past. Because of that and a number of other reasons, it makes sense that everything we do, as honourable members of this House, is to assist the economy, as much as possible, to perform better than is expected. Again, this bill will go to some degree in assisting that objective. It’s an objective that the people of Ontario have made very clear that they want to see happen. It’s an objective that, as I said, will give us strong communities, communities that need to be built better, that need to be built stronger. By doing that, it will provide a better and a more prosperous economy, an economy that will benefit the entire province. Because of the size of our province, it will assist and help the Canadian economy because, after all, probably around 43% of the economic activity that takes place in our country comes from Ontario.

Because of this and a number of other reasons which I will certainly spell out later on, I think Bill 151 should have full support.

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): I want to comment on the speech by the member from Nepean–Carleton. First, I know a lot of people in the area around Ottawa, including Nepean–Carleton, and I’ve got to tell you, the feedback I get about the kind of job that the relatively new member from Nepean–Carleton is doing is absolutely tremendous and positive. She gets up and speaks for the people who sent her here, unlike many of the people on the opposite side of the House. She commented today about the failure of this government in addressing the problems in our agricultural sector. She commented on the failure of this government, other than in a few areas, to address wait times with regards to medical procedures in this province, particularly with regards to children. There’s so much work to be done on that.

I was here yesterday, too, and I listened to the finance minister. I must say that I didn’t know whether he really had a budget bill or not, because all he wanted to talk about was this government’s propensity to pass the blame and to pass the responsibility for governing this province onto the federal government. For goodness’ sake, we elect a government in the province of Ontario. I think the people are well within their rights and their expectations to believe that that government will actually take the responsibility of managing this province seriously and not, every time that it can be shown that they have messed up, run to the federal government and say, “You guys are going to have to fix it now, because we can’t.”

A case in point is the crisis in Caledonia. The Premier wanted to be the hero in Caledonia. They’ve been involved since day one in February—long before that, actually—but they have botched it so badly that now they’re looking for a way out. What do they do? “We don’t have the answers,” they say, “so it’s up to the federal government.” Shame on this government for handing it over to the federal government—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Questions and comments?

Hon. Caroline Di Cocco (Minister of Culture): I'm pleased to rise to speak to the comments of the member from Nepean–Carleton. I wish that the member from Nepean–Carleton would not choose to ignore history quite as easily as she does —

Mr. McMeekin: She doesn't have much history.

Hon. Ms. Di Cocco: —because I want the member to remember that we sat here in this House—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Hon. Ms. Di Cocco: —during those long eight years when I remember—it's fact, and it's the case—that 22,000 acute care beds were gone. They closed.

Mr. McMeekin: You left that part out.

Hon. Ms. Di Cocco: A number of hospitals—

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot, what don't you know about the word "order"? Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Di Cocco: Thank you, Speaker.

They closed 28 hospitals. And the doctor shortage: I remember the Minister of Health, when she was asked in this House in 2002 and again in 2003 the question, "What are we doing about the doctor shortage?" Her response was one of denial, that there was no doctor shortage in this province, that it was a doctor distribution problem. I just indicate that it is very, very difficult to sit here and listen to the comments when I see that history has been, again, just reshaped, conveniently reshaped.

I also say to the leader of the third party that he, too, in 2003 denied that there was a doctor shortage. He indicated again that in 1992, although they cut medical spaces, it was now, in 2003—and I remember hearing him say this—a distribution problem, that we didn't have a doctor shortage.

1600

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Nepean–Carleton has two minutes to respond.

Ms. MacLeod: I really appreciated the comments on the other side because, according to them, just because I was elected by the people of Nepean–Carleton with the highest majority of anyone on this side of the place, because I'm 32 years old and I was elected when I was 31, I don't deserve to be here. That is typical Liberal arrogance and their typical sense of entitlement. They don't care.

To the Minister of Culture, if she wants to talk about history, then she'd be investing in our museums and our historical places all throughout this province. I wrote to her earlier this summer and asked her to give some money to the Nepean Museum, which needs it. I wrote on their behalf, and she gave me a little letter that says, "Not this time, ma'am; not this time."

To the member from Thornhill, to the Minister of Culture and to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, thank you very much for your comments. I appreciated them.

In the last minute that I have, I want to remind these people of the deficit that they pretended they had. Let's talk about the Peters report one more time, just so you

don't forget about it, because you're so into history. In fact, most of the circumstances he cited were one-time events. These one-time events include: \$960 million in lower crown corporation revenues because of SARS and the blackout; \$1.6 billion in lower tax revenues due to SARS and the sudden appreciation in the dollar; \$720 million in SARS-related health spending; and \$130 million in tourism tax breaks after SARS.

All these guys can do is blame the ghosts of Parliaments past—and how appropriate that they're doing it again today on Halloween—and they're going to continue to finger point, which has become my favourite source of entertainment in this Legislature, the pointing at the Harper government.

Give us all a break. It's all your fault. You guys have broken the 50 promises; you guys are taxing and spending out of control; you guys are the people who are dickering around with Ontario's institutions, without the people of Ontario even asking for it. Do your job, stop pointing the fingers and lower our taxes.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for Kenora–Rainy River and leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: This bill is a budget bill. As it says, it's an omnibus bill dealing with many budgetary items. So I want to raise a number of budgetary items today. I want to raise the budgetary issues that matter to the working families across Ontario that aren't being addressed by this government.

To give you an example, I want to raise the issue that was raised by a number of college and university students who were here in front of Queen's Park just yesterday and who held what might be called a mock funeral; a mock funeral because, for many of them, watching the McGuinty government raise tuition fees by 26% over the next four years is going to mean that a post-secondary education becomes unaffordable. What is really, I think, outrageous about this is that this is the Premier who, before the last election, said that tuition fees are already too high. In 2002, 2003, he said, "Tuition fees are already too high." But now, after the election, this government is going to drive up tuition fees by a further 26%.

I simply ask the question: How are students who come from modest- and middle-income families going to be able to afford this? Those students who were here in front of Queen's Park holding a mock funeral yesterday provided the answer. They said that students coming from modest- and middle-income families simply won't be able to afford these tuition-fee increases. What it will mean is that if they want to get a post-secondary education, they will have to go higher and higher into debt.

We already know that graduates from Ontario, graduates of universities and colleges, already are carrying some of the highest debt loads in Canada compared to any other province. I simply raise this issue.

In contrast to this happening, we know from the budget documents presented by the McGuinty government that in the last year alone, they ran a budget surplus of over \$1.7 billion. You would have thought that a government that says it cares about what's happening to work-

ing families, that says it cares about what's happening to students, could have used some of that \$1.7-billion budget surplus to ensure that tuition fees weren't driven through the roof for college and university students who are already hard-pressed. But despite that \$1.7-billion budget surplus, and despite receiving new federal money which was earmarked to be used to reduce tuition fees, the McGuinty government didn't reduce tuition fees and didn't hold tuition fees stable. Instead, they embarked upon a scheme to jack up university and college tuition fees by 26%. I think that's outrageous, and I know that it is going to create real hardship for a lot of daughters and sons of working families across this province.

Similarly, the whole issue of affordable housing: We know that there are 122,000 families in this province who are on a waiting list for affordable housing, that they're spending more and more of the modest income they have to keep a roof over their kids' heads—122,000 families waiting for affordable housing. The McGuinty government promised to build 20,000 units of affordable housing, but here we are in the fourth year of the McGuinty government. Have they built 20,000 units of affordable housing? No, not even one quarter of that. What is even more outrageous in all of this is that, once again, this is a government that had a \$1.7-billion budget surplus. Did they choose to use any of that money to build affordable housing? No.

This is also a government that is sitting on \$400 million of new additional federal money which was earmarked to build affordable housing. Are they using any of that money to build additional units of affordable housing? No. This is a government that's bankrolling that \$400 million. We saw in the pages of the *Toronto Star*, just in the last week, confirmation that far from using that money to respond to the desperate needs of working families across this province, the McGuinty government has got that money sitting in a bank account. I expect what they're going to use it for is some pre-election announcement to try to make themselves look good on the eve of an election. Meanwhile, 122,000 families are desperate for affordable housing.

In line with that, I want to raise the issue of the poorest children in this province, the lowest-income children in this province. These are children whose income is so low that the federal government directs about \$200 million to those kids and their parents in this province. It's called the national child benefit supplement: \$200 million dollars of federal money goes to those kids and their parents to try to raise their income to a level where they can get by. What does the McGuinty government do? The McGuinty government actually claws back from those poorest kids in Ontario, claws back that \$200 million of federal money that is intended to help the poorest kids, the lowest-income kids, in the province. Once again, this is a government that, last year, had a \$1.7-billion budget revenue surplus. They could have easily eliminated the clawback of this \$200 million of federal money that's intended to go to the lowest-income children in the province. Did they do that, Speaker? No.

With a \$1.7-billion budget revenue surplus, the McGuinty government continues to take \$200 million a year of federal money away from the lowest-income kids in this province. Shameful. Shameful in any context, but especially shameful when the McGuinty government had a \$1.7-billion budget revenue surplus and continues to take that money away from the lowest-income kids in the province.

1610

I want to raise the issue that many seniors across this province confront, seniors who have worked hard all their lives, who have paid, in some cases, 20 years, 25 years of mortgage to own their own homes and to live in their own homes. And now that they are retired and living on a limited or fixed income—a pension income—they're being faced with skyrocketing property tax assessments.

Just in the recent by-election of Parkdale–High Park, as I canvassed door-to-door in that riding, I ran into literally hundreds of seniors who said, "I have done everything that you should as a responsible citizen in society. I worked hard. I raised my kids. I supported them to help them get a start. I paid my taxes. I paid for my home. And now, under this property tax assessment system, I am being forced, literally, to sell my home, because this property tax assessment system is so unfair and so ridiculous." Even the provincial Ombudsman has looked at this unfair and broken property tax system and has denounced it as being unfair, has denounced it in terms of its prejudicial treatment of seniors and property tax owners. And what has the McGuinty government done to assess, to redress this problem? They're not going to do anything. What they're going to do is, they're going to study the problem; they're going to study the problem until after the next election. They're going to allow this injustice to continue.

I know very well what's going to happen to those seniors after the next election. There will be two property assessments from this year and next year, and then the year after the election, they'll all come at once. That's what is going to happen here. This is the age-old Dalton McGuinty promise made before the election—"I'm going to help you after the election"—and then after the election the promise is broken, and people are hit with a huge property tax assessment increase.

When the Dalton McGuinty government had a \$1.7-billion budget surplus last year, and I predict a budget revenue surplus in the current year that we're in, this government could have done something to address those serious injustices, those serious wrongs that we see in the current property tax assessment system, but the McGuinty government chose to do nothing. They chose to continue to put seniors in a position where they're literally forced to sell their homes in order to be able to afford to live, because the property tax assessment level is so high.

I also want to raise the issue of what's going on with hydro rates. I said here earlier today that, literally, boards of education across this province have been forced to raid

their English-as-a-second-language budget, have been forced to raid their special education budget to pay the school hydro bill. Why? Because the McGuinty government has a policy of driving hydro rates through the roof—a 55% increase in hydro rates for residential and institutional buildings like schools, hospitals, homes and apartment buildings.

The minimum wage hasn't increased by 55%. Perhaps the people who have been appointed to boards and commissions by the McGuinty government have had huge increases in their pay, but the majority of working families across this province haven't seen a 55% increase in their take-home pay. But they sure see the increase in the hydro bill, and this is creating hardship.

What was the response of the Minister of Energy just a few weeks ago when he was asked in Sudbury—people in northern Ontario have colder winters—what his advice was to those folks in northern Ontario who might have to use electric heat? Do you know what it was? He said, “Well, they should get themselves a bottle of wine and a blanket and find someone to cuddle up to.” That was the McGuinty government's Minister of Energy's advice. That was his advice to low- and modest-income people who are already having trouble paying the hydro bill as a result of the McGuinty government's policy of driving hydro rates through the roof.

But the biggest issue with respect to hydro rates is the tens of thousands of people across northern Ontario who are losing their jobs, their livelihoods, their homes and their community as a result of the McGuinty government's misguided policy of driving hydro rates through the roof. This is what is happening.

Industries that utilize a lot of electricity in the production process—paper mills, pulp mills, mining operations, smelting and refining operations—literally look at the increase in industrial hydro rates that have been forced on them by the McGuinty government and many of them are saying, “Do you know what? We can't afford this. We cannot afford hydro rates at 6.5 cents and seven cents a kilowatt hour in Ontario for our mills and our smelters and our refineries when we can move the mill or the smelter or the refinery to Quebec or Manitoba or British Columbia and pay a much more reasonable hydro rate.”

Do you know what the real travesty is here? Many of these operations in northern Ontario are surrounded—literally surrounded—by hydro dams that produce the lowest-cost electricity, and not just the lowest-cost electricity in Canada, not just the lowest-cost electricity in North America; they're surrounded by power dams that produce some of the lowest-cost electricity in the world. Yet it's McGuinty government policy to force those pulp and paper mills and mining and smelting operations to pay 6.5 cents and seven cents a kilowatt hour for that electricity that's produced right out the back door of their mill or their smelter at the lowest cost in the world.

There are primarily two reasons that the paper industry and the pulp industry and sawmills located in northern

Ontario: (1) some of the best wood fibre in the world, and (2) an affordable and sustainable supply of electricity, some of the most affordable electricity in the world. Those were the two primary reasons why pulp and paper mills and sawmills were established across northern Ontario, and they still see their electricity being produced right out their back door. They see it being produced 20 kilometres away on the river, 30 kilometres away on the river. They still know it's got the lowest production cost in the world, but the McGuinty government says, “You have to pay 6.5 cents and seven cents a kilowatt hour for that electricity that is being produced just outside your mill at one cent a kilowatt hour.” Those companies are simply saying, “We can't do that.”

So what have we seen? We've seen now almost 5,000 direct jobs destroyed in pulp mills, paper mills, sawmills in one-industry communities across northern Ontario. The forestry coalition says that when you add in the multiplier, the indirect jobs that depend on those direct jobs, 25,000 good-paying, family-supporting, community-sustaining jobs have been destroyed by the misguided policy of the McGuinty government to drive hydro rates through the roof. Kenora, Dryden, Thunder Bay, Red Rock, Longlac, Espanola, Sault Ste. Marie, Nairn Centre, Chapleau, Hearst, Smooth Rock Falls, Kapuskasing, Kirkland Lake—dozens of communities where some of the best-paying jobs, jobs that sustain the economy of the whole community, have been eliminated by the McGuinty government.

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All of this could have been prevented; all of this could have been avoided. I remember, two and a half years ago, in the summer of 2004, when the forest sector representatives came here to Queen's Park when the McGuinty government was presenting their electricity policy, Bill 100. The representatives said, “Look, the pulp and paper industry right now is a very competitive industry. We face a number of challenges.” They said to the Minister of Energy and to the McGuinty government backbenchers who sit on the committee, “If you do what is in your policy, if you drive hydro rates up by the amount we see here, you will destroy thousands of jobs in the pulp and paper sector, in the mining and smelting and refining sector in northern Ontario. You will destroy thousands of jobs.” They pleaded with the McGuinty government, they pleaded with the Minister of Energy, they pleaded with McGuinty government backbenchers, “Don't do this. Don't destroy these jobs. Don't deprive all these people of a livelihood. Don't destroy the heart and soul of the economies of these communities.” Yet the McGuinty government pressed ahead and did that. It was all avoidable and preventable. The McGuinty government could have listened and could have adopted a different hydro rate policy, but they didn't. As a result, 25,000 good-paying jobs have been eliminated, and this is an injustice—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): I listened closely to the leader of the third party, and one of the

things that's important to get on the record is this issue regarding dollars from the federal government that have left us short. The fact is, the federal government maintains that the trusts it established in its 2006 budget, including the public transit capital trust, the affordable housing trust and the off-reserve aboriginal housing trust, should replace funding promised to the province under the Canada-Ontario agreement. That approach would leave Ontario \$1.1 billion short. Unfortunately, instead of standing with us and standing up to the government in Ottawa, instead of standing with us and standing up, on behalf of all Ontarians, to the Harper government, the Leader of the Opposition chooses to take another tack. I think it's the responsibility of the Leader of the Opposition to stand with us and be strong and speak out for the people of Ontario. We're being ripped off at this point in time. The Harper government owes \$1.1 billion to the people of Ontario, to those who need that money for affordable housing programs, to those who need that money for investment in infrastructure, in transit and in other types of infrastructure.

This government is doing a lot when it comes to building housing, when it comes to helping the vulnerable. We have committed to more than 15,000 new units of affordable housing and 5,000 rent supplements. So far, we've produced 2,500 new units that are occupied, another 2,500 that are under construction, and 1,500 more in the planning and approval stage. That's 6,500 new units so far. We'd love to be able to produce more in this short period of time that we've had, but it does take time to build this stuff. I know this for a fact, because I was chair of community services at the city of Toronto for many, many years when we were the only builders of housing in Toronto. Finally, the McGuinty government's come along and the province is back in the game; the feds were in the game under the Martin government. We all owe it to ourselves to fight for Ontarians and those who require housing.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): It's my pleasure to add some comments to the speech from the member for Kenora–Rainy River on the budget measures bill, Bill 151. I would like to correct the member from Kenora–Rainy River. He said that the Minister of Energy's advice for northerners about how to face high energy costs was to get a bottle of wine, a blanket and to cuddle with someone. He actually said, "Get a good bottle of red wine." Now, as to how people are supposed to afford that good bottle of red wine when they can't afford their energy bill, you'd have to ask the Minister of Energy about that.

He also told us today in an answer to a question in question period how he's putting his energy policy into effect. He said, "You need to control demand." I think, as was pointed out by the member from Kenora–Rainy River, most businesses in northern Ontario, most of the pulp and paper mills, the sawmills—the users of electricity—are all shutting down. So I guess he's achieving his plan of reducing demand for electricity, particularly in the north.

In 2004, I visited Red Rock, one of the locations that was mentioned by the member for Kenora–Rainy River, and met with the mill manager. He made it very clear that energy costs were about a third of his costs of doing business and that he needed the government to address the cost of energy. Obviously they didn't, and now the Red Rock mill is shut.

It's painfully obvious that the strategy of this government is to blame everything on the federal government, as the Minister of Finance did in his speech and as the member from Scarborough Centre just did in his two-minute comment. Instead of taking some action themselves, just about every member of the government who gets up blames the federal government. Every day, they find new and creative ways of blaming the federal government instead of taking action. That's their strategy.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It's my pleasure to make a few remarks on the speech of my leader, Howard Hampton from Kenora–Rainy River. I have to say, from my perspective, he has hit on all of the major issues facing families who live in the province of Ontario, everything from job losses to the national child benefit clawback, things that people have to deal with on a day-to-day basis that the McGuinty Liberal government they put here is turning its back on and ignoring. Whether it's a job loss in a paper mill in the north because of soaring hydro rates, whether it's a job loss from a plant closure or a staff or worker reduction in a manufacturing plant in southern Ontario, the bottom line is that this government's record has hurt the families of Ontario as opposed to helping the families of Ontario.

I'm very proud to be here, once again hearing my leader put on the record the serious issues this government continues to ignore in bringing forward a budget bill that, again, does not address the real problems facing the families and children of Ontario, particularly issues like affordable housing, as was mentioned, and underfunding of schools, where ESL and special education are being pickpocketed for the benefit of covering off the operating dollars that schools need just to make ends meet. It's a crying shame that this Liberal McGuinty government doesn't see its way to start investing in things that the families of Ontario would like to see investments in. People are falling behind. People are feeling like they're hanging on by their fingernails as hydro prices increase, as they're unable to maintain a quality of life in the province of Ontario. Yet what do these Liberal members do? They continue to harp, harp, harp about Harper instead of doing the right thing by the people of this province.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): It's a privilege to engage in this discussion about Bill 151. In case people are wondering what we're talking about here, we're talking about An Act to enact various 2006 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts. It's basically to try to correct some of the problems in past budgets and to try to stimulate more action and corrective legislation.

The member from Kenora–Rainy River offers us challenges, and I respect that. He does offer the opportunity

for us as legislators to try to make sure that as many people as possible don't get left behind. I haven't ever stood in my place and said that wasn't a laudable objective that we should all be doing, so I appreciate the fact that the member is offering us those challenges.

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The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka says there's a strategy here. Well, let's talk about the strategy. Here's how it works in this place. The opposition has relentlessly been standing up—less from the NDP, more so from the Conservatives, forgetting history—telling us we've done everything wrong and everything's bad. We're going to stand up and say that everything we're trying to do is for the benefit of the people of Ontario.

What I'm hearing now is that everyone is basically arguing over who did what when, where and why and how. What I'm going to suggest is something rather unique, that is, to take the challenges being put in front of us and attempt to make sure that the people of Ontario are receiving the best they can. So here's what we do: We get the best possible solutions when all three levels of government are working together and firing on the same pistons, so what I want to suggest to you very respectfully is that Bill 151 does talk about some of the things we can make corrections to that would get us there.

This place knows I've been pushing pretty hard on one thing, and that is to give municipalities more flexibility and additional provincial support in funding brownfields redevelopment. If we can get that off the ground, we can start getting those derelict properties back working again.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Kenora–Rainy River, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Hampton: I'm pleased to have this opportunity to respond. Let me say this, just some advice to the McGuinty government. We all know that the McGuinty government has received new federal money that has been earmarked for affordable housing. I suggest that if the McGuinty government wants to be able to enhance arguments about getting more federal money, then it should spend that \$400 million of new federal money that was earmarked for housing. It should be spent for housing now. The McGuinty government has received literally hundreds of millions of dollars of new federal money that was earmarked to reduce university and college tuition fees. Has the McGuinty government used that money for that purpose? No, it hasn't. In fact, it's put that money in its pocket and engaged in a process of driving university and college tuition fees up by 36% over the next four years. If the McGuinty government wants to have any credibility in complaining about the federal government, the McGuinty government should spend that money that was earmarked to reduce university and college tuition fees for that purpose, as other provinces like Nova Scotia have done. Then the McGuinty government might have some credibility in terms of arguing or complaining about the federal government.

I just want to bring out one other point with respect to this bill, and this is for people in northern Ontario. People in northern Ontario should look at this bill, because it contains a provision which will result in the same skyrocketing property tax increases in northern Ontario unorganized areas that you're already seeing in organized municipalities. It's going to result in a skyrocketing increase in property taxes for those people, and those people who live in an unorganized territory should be looking at this very carefully.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Racco: Let me continue what I said earlier today, and that is that Bill 151 deserves strong support because one of the objectives of this bill is to continue the change for Ontario that we have committed ourselves to as a party and that will create stronger communities and a prosperous economy.

Among the things this bill will do is to create an enhanced dividend tax credit to encourage investment in Ontario corporations. As I said earlier, the economy needs a little stimulus right now, and certainly that is one way of encouraging individuals to invest in Ontario corporations. If more people invest in those corporations, then more money will be available to those companies and individuals who wish to come up with new products that will make the operation more efficient and ensure that the economy in Ontario will do better; they will come up with new products that we will be able not only to use in Ontario but also to sell in the rest of Canada and to the rest of the world. That is how jobs are created. That's how economies are stimulated. Providing opportunities to the financial market to lend money to those individuals who come up with some bright ideas, with new products, will create jobs in the province of Ontario. That tax credit will assist us in achieving that objective.

In addition to that, it will enhance the interactive digital media tax credit. This incentive for a better tax credit will encourage individuals to invest in that area. As I said earlier, by investing in that area we will be able to create more jobs and we will be able to have a more vibrant economy.

In regard to giving more flexibility or more tools to a municipality, additional provincial support in funding brownfield developments and public infrastructure will be created. There will be two pilot projects that will be affected. Of course, one of them is the very famous project that some of us have been working on for so many years. Unfortunately, the Conservatives in Ottawa are blocking or preventing or delaying—whatever word you want to use—allocating the money to build the York–Spadina subway extension. You know very well that this honourable House has already allocated \$670 million for the construction of that subway extension all the way to the corporate centre of Vaughan, from Toronto to the region of York. The province has already put the money in the bank. The money is earning interest. Unfortunately, Ottawa is not coming in.

This bill will give more momentum, will give the tools to the municipalities. That would be the region of York

that is responsible, and Toronto and potentially the city of Vaughan. Of course, it's up to the local region or municipality to make that decision, but they may need to participate in that very, very important project, a project that has a value today of \$2.1 billion—not \$2.1 million but \$2.1 billion. Three ways, it's about \$670 million from each level of government. Again, the province has done so, but the feds have not.

I ask the opposition party members who know someone in government in Ottawa to encourage this step that the feds must do, because quite frankly, this is the time that we need to stimulate the economy. We are told that the economy will not perform as well this year as it did last year or the year before. This is the right time for us to do whatever we can to stimulate the economy. That major project of \$2.1 billion will certainly create hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs; and the spinoffs will certainly create thousands of jobs. Most importantly, it will give us a cleaner environment. It will minimize or decrease gridlock. It will allow people to work instead of wasting time in their cars or whatever way they are able to reach their destination. It is a win-win all the way. The only problem is that the feds don't seem to get the message. I hope that Bill 151, which is giving some of the tools to the municipalities, will assist at that level, but we still need the federal level to come in.

In addition to that, this bill will increase the income threshold of the Ontario property and sales tax credit for senior couples. Everybody speaks about assisting our seniors, that the taxes are too high and that we should do something about it. That's what this bill will do. It will take another step, something better than today. Certainly, the two opposition parties must support that. All of us should be supporting our seniors who are having major challenges paying their realty taxes. As you know, some of them bought their property, their home—their first home, possibly—40, 50, 60 years ago. They want to stay in their house until the last day of their lives. I understand that's only a small step, but whatever we can do in Bill 151 or any other bill coming up, for our seniors, all of us should support and encourage, because they are the ones who allowed us to be here today, who created us and have given us good wisdom to do what we are doing.

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In addition, Bill 151 excludes income received under the federal universal child care benefit from the eligibility calculation for the Ontario property and sales tax credits and for the Ontario child care supplements for working families. Again, that's another step to assist a family that is having more challenges than average Ontarians to pay the bills. The bill understands that and is going to assist to some degree those families that need some assistance.

It also announces the effectiveness of the Canadian Public Accountability Board—which reports public confidence in the financial reporting in Ontario capital markets—oversight of the auditing of public companies. All of us must know that investors all over the world look around to see where they can do better with their invest-

ments. Some companies have money that needs to be invested for 20, 30, 40 or more years—long-term investments. I'm talking mostly about pension money. People buy whatever investments so that at a certain age in their lives they will have some extra income from the private pension they have bought. Those companies all over the world, including Ontario, are looking where to invest, and of course, if they can rely on the economy, if they can rely on the system, they will be much more interested in making those investments.

There is nothing more healthy, in my opinion, than making sure that an investor—in particular those who don't live in the province or in the country—feels comfortable; that when they read a statement, it's a statement that is reflective of the financial situation of a company at a certain time in the lives of the corporation, and they can rely on it; that the investment will not be lost, but in fact there is enough confidence for them to really feel comfortable and make more investments in those companies.

Again, Bill 151 will do that. It will give those powers, that flexibility and those enforcements to the accounting profession and therefore will certainly send a strong message to international investors and also to Ontario investors and Canadian investors that those companies' financial statements are a reflection of the truthful value of what is reported in them. We don't have to go into specifics, because not too long ago we all read about the unreliability of some of those statements. Again, Bill 151 insists on that area, and I think all of us should embrace and support it very strongly.

To conclude, let me say how damaging it is for people to use tobacco, to smoke cigarettes and so on. We all speak quite often about the costs and the unhealthiness of such a product that is in our province, in our country and in the world. This bill will have some enforcement provisions to penalize those companies that, unfortunately, do not operate properly.

Those are a few reasons why Bill 151 must be supported, and I encourage all of the honourable members to do the right thing and support it.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. MacLeod: Surprise, surprise: We're attacking the federal government yet again when we're talking about financial pressures in this province, not to mention the fact that I just spent 20 minutes talking about the fact that this crowd opposite me has taxed and spent its way into virtual oblivion. We reference it by the close to \$4.4 billion that the former auditor in this province, Erik Peters, basically said was a one-time funding problem, largely due in part to the former federal Liberals who were slow in getting us money with respect to SARS, the blackout and almost everything else. So that is awfully troubling. They talk about history, but they often forget their own federal Liberal past, which is quite unfortunate, because of course this was the crowd that spawned sponsorship scandals and the Gomery report, because they literally stole billions of dollars from Canadian taxpayers. Now they're trying to shift the blame onto their federal counterparts who were elected by the people for the people to represent us in the House of Commons.

If they're going to continue to go on through the next year in such an antagonistic way, how are we ever going to get anything done? We have to be working together. They sit here and every day they ask us to phone our federal counterparts. Well, excuse me, that's their job. They were elected by the people of Ontario to put forward budgets that reflect the issues and the interests of the people of Ontario. They don't do that. They've been asked by the people of Ontario to work with the federal government that was duly elected by the people of this province and this country on January 23, 2006, and they refuse to do it. In fact, they say one thing to Ontario's face and they do another behind its back. The thing is, how can Stephen Harper and the New Democrats, how can Jack Layton, want to work with these people when all they do is say one thing, do another, break a promise here, break a promise there? That's all they do.

Ms. Horwath: It's my pleasure to make a few comments on the remarks made by the member from—I can't remember the member's riding.

Mr. Racco: Thornhill.

Ms. Horwath: The member from Thornhill; I apologize.

I think it's interesting to watch the government members in their debate of this particular bill this afternoon, because really they're spending most of their time not talking about what they are trying to accomplish with their legislation. Rather, they're harping about what they can't get accomplished with the federal, Harper government. It's passing strange to hear the government spending all of its time—instead of talking about how proud they are of the pieces of legislation, of the clauses in Bill 151 that we're supposed to be debating today, instead of talking about how proud they are of their accomplishments and achievements, they're talking about how problematic their relationship is with the federal government. Well, really, in this Legislature, as we debate bills, we're supposed to be talking about this government's achievements and its ability to deliver for the people of Ontario. I'll be able to speak to this myself specifically in a very short period of time as I have an opportunity to debate this bill as well.

I believe the people of Ontario want to hear what the government plans to do about the fact that there's still a problem with the funding formula in the school boards across Ontario, who are robbing one program or two programs or three programs, the ones that are needed for the children who have English-as-a-second-language challenges, for the children who have special education needs. Those programs are being robbed so that the school boards can pay just to make ends meet.

We see a lack of affordable housing in this province. That means that families continue to struggle and scratch to put food on their table. We see hydro rates increasing to the extent that people are not able to make ends meet and then are losing jobs on top of it because companies can't afford to pay their hydro bills. Those are the issues that the province of Ontario needs to work on.

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): You know, I almost think that the member from Hamilton East—

Ms. Horwath: You're supposed to be talking about Thornhill.

Ms. Matthews: I know, but you gave me a good introduction. You gave me a very good introduction, because you asked us to talk about things we're really proud of. There are many things that I'm very proud of in this. One of them, the interactive digital media tax credit, will create jobs in my riding. People are working because we're paying attention to this growing sector.

Another thing that I'm really very proud of is what we're doing for seniors. We think that seniors who receive the guaranteed minimum level of income should get the full benefit of the Ontario property and sales tax credits. This legislation will increase the threshold to make sure those low-income seniors will get full advantage of the tax credits that they are entitled to.

The other thing I want to quickly talk about is the universal child care benefit. I hesitate when I call it a child care benefit because we all know that this has nothing to do with child care. But this legislation would ensure that that money is not clawed back from our most vulnerable children. This is on top of other changes we've made to improve the quality of life for children in low-income families. There's much more to do, but we have done a lot. And because we have not increased the clawback—we've allowed people to keep the increase of the NCBS since we were elected—that means that a single mom with two kids has had an average increase of 15.7% in income since we were elected. This now would add an additional \$2,400 of income to those very poor children, and I applaud that component of this.

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Mr. Yakubuski: I found it interesting listening to the member for Brant, who spoke about, you know, "How you're going to make this thing work in this Confederation is the three levels of government are going to work together, talk and settle these things and work in a productive fashion." And then the member for Thornhill, who has the floor, goes right back to the same old story about, "It's the federal government." That's the whole crux of this, the failure of this government; everything hinges on the federal government.

Not so many months ago, the Premier talked about how he thought he could work with Messrs. Baird, Flaherty and Clement in Ottawa, but now he senses that there is some political gain for him to be bashing them. So what does he do? He starts bashing them with personal ad hominem attacks, those members of the federal government, because this government has absolutely totally failed to live up to its responsibility. And when it feels the heat, it lashes out at the federal government for two reasons: one, it covers up the fact of their own failures, but two, they're hoping that the media actually takes a different tack and starts talking about that issue in the media again and fails to talk about how this government has failed, failed from a financial perspective.

When they took office, the budget in this province was sitting at \$68 billion; now it's at \$88 billion. That's a \$20-billion increase in spending in this province in under four years. How long can you sustain that?

It's because they can't say no when they should say no, and they don't know where to invest the money that will really pay dividends for the people of the province of Ontario. They can't say no in Caledonia. That bill will soon be up to \$100 million. What have they done there? They've just dropped the ball to the federal government and said, "We can't deal with it anymore. I guess we were in over our heads, and now we want the federal government to come in and bail us out." I say again, shame on this government for no leadership.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Thornhill, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Racco: Let me say thank you to the member from Nepean–Carleton. Let me also remind her that I specifically spoke about items on the bill. And if the subway is one of the items on the bill, certainly it's important that we raise it. She may wish to speak with her counterparts in Ottawa.

To the member from Hamilton East: I spoke about the major point of the bill, and I'm sure if you will look at the Hansard, you will note that that is what we spoke about on the bill. And, of course, the member from London North Centre spoke about some of the items that I raised and clarified for the member.

The member from Pembroke did not address Bill 151 at all. I think that you had a golden opportunity to stress the issue that you felt instead of complaining about the issue that we raised. That was a golden opportunity for us to hear where you agreed or disagreed with the bill. Unfortunately, you did not touch that part.

Let me tell you this, though. Bill 151 in fact provides tools to municipalities such as Toronto and the region of York to be able to deal with a major infrastructure project, which is the extension of the subway to the region of York, the first time from Toronto going out of Toronto into another region, the region of York. Unfortunately, that project is not going anywhere today because of your colleagues in Ottawa who are not contributing. Bill 151, as I said, is addressing the issue, is giving the tools, and of course, we are waiting to see what the other level of government, whoever is going to be there at the time, will be able to do.

Having said that, I want to say thank you again to the four members who spoke on this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): I welcome the opportunity to address Bill 151 this afternoon. As we know, this is the Budget Measures Act. In looking at this piece of proposed legislation, I would like to try to determine how it would relate to my riding down in Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant and what it might do, being a bill about our economy, to help out with respect to our farm economy and our rural economy in Ontario.

There's an expression in rural Ontario: "You can't spend your money until you earn it." That is a very

simple way of looking at things. It's something that I personally attempt to subscribe to. I feel in many ways that should be government policy. I do believe in balanced budgets, although we do know that in times of warfare or dire economic circumstances, one does have to run a deficit on occasion. I really question why any level of government would even think of running a deficit and compound an existing debt during the good times, but we have seen that pattern, actually, with several governments in the province of Ontario.

Bill 151 is an economy bill. As you would know, much of rural Ontario and farm Ontario is in a bit of trouble with respect to their economy. I find—and I suggest this to the members present today—that we have an opportunity right now, between now and November 13, to continue to stay plugged in, if you will, in our home areas by either attending the many all-candidates nights that are happening across the province or, at minimum, monitoring what's coming up through our local media.

I've attended a number of nights in the past, and I have an opportunity with our small-town local media to stay informed. Many questions are being raised. Many of them do relate to issues economic, certainly in my area down in Haldimand, Norfolk, and Brant counties, and there are plenty of ideas coming forward with respect to economic development and ways of dealing with many of these issues as a result of the economic downturn in certain areas in my riding. Good ideas come forward. I attended an all-candidates night in Dunnville just last week—excellent presentations from all concerned at the level of mayor, the municipal level and at the school board level.

In much of my area, agriculture really is the heart of the economy, and I can't say this enough: We're going through some tough times. We have some opportunities down my way. One opportunity, which has apparently been put on the shelf somewhat, is what I refer to as the mid-Pen corridor, that transportation corridor to move people, goods and services out of the Buffalo–New York area towards Toronto, by and large. This mid-Pen corridor was raised many times at the all-candidates nights to date in the Haldimand area.

Other issues raised: Obviously, we need to cut red tape. Those of us in this House are fully aware of the myriad of rules, regulations and red tape that suffocate so many good intentions. Red tape essentially takes the fun out of doing business. Again, at these nights, we hear the need for water and sewer infrastructure, road and highway development.

One unique comment that comes up time and time again through these all-candidates nights, and certainly through the feedback I receive at my constituency office, is the need to return to the realm of law and order. The standoff in Caledonia, the illegal occupation just south of town, has created a tremendous amount of uncertainty with respect to our local economy. It's not an issue that can be addressed through Bill 151, but everything is interrelated. As we all know, uncertainty is very bad for

business. The other thing that's very bad for business and job creation is any government that jacks up taxes.

1700

Another threat in Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant: Brantford is a major supplier, for example, for the Nanticoke generating station. Six hundred jobs are on the line at that plant, 600 jobs that this particular government has indicated they're more than willing to sacrifice. They're more than willing to subtract not only 600 jobs, they're more than willing to subtract \$3 million from the treasury of Haldimand county.

I find that many people aspiring for municipal office, they get it, they understand it. They understand the need as an elected representative to make it very clear that the province of Ontario and counties like Haldimand, Brant and Norfolk are open for business. They make it very clear that in order to realize the opportunities that are there in agriculture, the opportunities in small business and industry and in the housing industry, we need to show a serious commitment to infrastructure, to better roads and to transportation links.

I go back to the mid-Pen corridor. It's crucial for a community like Dunnville to have that link, to have that access to the mid-Pen, as what appears to be the economic trend continues east, as the people in Dunnville continue to look toward the Niagara region with respect to not only economic activity but social interaction as well. The bottom line: Jobs are so important in a rural area. Without jobs, people leave, young people in particular, to pick up work elsewhere.

Farther west in my area, communities like Delhi and Langton, the heart of tobacco country—it wasn't that long ago that virtually every single farm in the Langton area was growing tobacco. I think something like 97% of the agricultural activity in the Langton area, down in the southwest, was related to growing leaf. Right now, constituents are reeling from the news very recently announced by the tobacco board that 150 pink slips are in order for the coming crop year, if there is one. Again, this kind of uncertainty is very bad for business. We're not seeing much in the way of answers in this particular bill, Bill 151. I know it makes reference to tobacco taxes; it seems that just about every budget that comes out from this government takes a hit to tobacco taxes. But I see no plan. I don't see a plan in this legislation or in the various sections that provides much encouragement for the rural areas that I represent in my particular area, the rural south of the province of Ontario.

Delhi, a case in point, is an example of economic devastation. The threat to downtown Delhi can be exemplified by, and in fact I would suggest has been accelerated by, Ontario government policy. We lost the MTO office and we lost the licence bureau. This government put out a request for proposals. People with business sense in the community applied, put their money on the table and discovered that that RFP had been withdrawn. Again, we only hope that adjacent businesses and businesses thinking of coming to Delhi would not follow the McGuinty lead of essentially abandoning

small communities, taking out an MTO office. We need something much better than that. We need solutions, essentially, and I see little of that in this particular piece of legislation, the Budget Measures Act.

It's not only Delhi and what's reflected with the hit on the downtown in the community of Delhi. There is concern in parts of Simcoe, in the town of Simcoe. I recall downtown Dunnville in the 1980s. I used to consult in that community with business and industry, and there was devastation in that particular town in the 1980s. It's time to plan for that now and do everything we can, not only to attempt to spruce up downtown but to work on the underlying economic underpinnings, the foundation of communities like Delhi, Simcoe, Dunnville and the neighbouring area that provides the customers, provides the visitors to the town and provides the economic foundation to ensure that we have a healthy downtown. In this Budget Measures Act, I fail to see any indication or any real hope, essentially, that would help out.

Our rural economy needs stimuli. We see this with tobacco. Obviously, in the last several years, we have seen a war on tobacco—this government is upfront about referring to it that way—and any war on tobacco or on farmers is not the answer. There are some approaches. For a number of years I've called for a feasibility study to take a look at a pipeline, for example, to draw raw water north from Lake Erie, raw water that would be available for our irrigation-based agriculture on what's referred to as the Norfolk sand plain, the sand area that touches east Elgin, southern Oxford county, Brant county primarily in the west and much of Norfolk county. Untreated water could be available for irrigation. Once it hits Highway 3, water would be available for treatment to serve those towns, ranging from Tillsonburg, Delhi, Simcoe and Waterford. As far as who pays the bill, I really feel there is a tremendous potential for partnerships with the city of Guelph, for example. Kitchener-Waterloo—a certain percentage of their water draws on the Grand River, Brantford draws on the Grand River, and so many smaller towns. Burford, Oakland and St. George in my riding rely on wells in that sand plain. Perhaps the time has come and we need to check out the feasibility of a water pipeline.

I look at Bill 151 in the context of being a member of the PC caucus in this Ontario Legislature, a caucus that opposes tax increases and higher taxes, a caucus that is very concerned about high electricity rates—essentially what we consider the runaway spending nature of a series of budgets now coming from the McGuinty government. This government has taken \$6 billion more in revenue than was felt to be needed to keep that litany of promises that was presented to the people of Ontario during that last election three years ago. Those promises remain broken. We have seen no reduction in taxes—no reduction in taxes for Ontario's overtaxed low-income seniors, for example, and no reduction for overtaxed families or businesses. I don't see any tax cuts announced in this particular piece of legislation named the Budget Measures Act.

Over the years, we've seen what I call a rise and then a fall of the traditional Liberal tax-and-spend, tax-some-more-and-spend-some-more recipe of disaster for this economy. Under the current regime, the tax-and-spend orthodoxy is seeing a renaissance, and I am concerned that we are well on our way to the bad old days. In June 1997, I did a presentation in this House on tax-and-spend Liberal economics and made reference to the previous government as well. The NDP government, coupled with the Liberal governments at that time, during their era passed on to people in Ontario a total of 65 tax increases. They gave consumers 65 reasons not to spend money, they gave businesses 65 reasons not to hire new employees and they gave investors 65 reasons to keep their money out of the economy. Those were tough times. Wages increased 54%. However, taxes increased something in the order of 73%. Nobody got to see a single penny of those raise increases because government was giving itself yet again an ever-increasing and bigger raise.

1710

I used the treadmill analogy at that time, and I'm seeing this coming now. People were running on a treadmill, but every time they ran a little faster and worked a little harder, invested more in the economy or did their best to better their skill set, Liberal and NDP governments just increased the speed of the treadmill. In the end, people were working harder but they were not seeing the fruits of their labour. This philosophy of punishing hard work can be downright dangerous, in particular for the economy. With this budget bill, Bill 151, I see no evidence or indication of attempting to turn back the clock on this one.

In 2003, Premier McGuinty—Dalton McGuinty, at the time—looked into the eyes of Ontarians and said, and I quote the oft-quoted expression, “I will not raise your taxes.” Do you remember that? I remember reading that election platform. It also said, “We'll balance the budget.” In 2003, the present government said they would balance the budget and they would keep taxes down. In 2003, Liberals pretended they had learned that Liberal tax-and-spend economics don't work. They promised that they had learned those lessons, but they're Liberals: A promise is a promise that must be broken.

Let's be clear: In my view—and I'm really synthesizing my degree in economics, if you will, and my experience in this House over the last 11 years—tax cuts do create jobs. What do tax hikes do? They kill jobs. Deficit spending just mortgages the future of our children. This current regime is obviously on the wrong side of this economic equation.

I was reading the Toronto Star this weekend. I don't do that often, but it was sad to see a story titled, “Liberals Expect to Face Election with Deficit.” In it, Greg Sorbara promised to deliver yet another large budget deficit this coming spring. It's a sad day when the provincial Minister of Finance is promising a flood of red ink. Why would he do that just before an election? I do try and search for the silver lining. Maybe the Liberals will see

their deficit promise like some of their other promises: Maybe they'll break it.

The Toronto Sun—now there's a paper that I do have occasion to read a little more regularly. In fact, in many parts of my riding, it's pretty difficult to find the Toronto Star, but you can find the Toronto Sun. Again, I'd like to read more about the McGuinty Liberal economic train wreck, in my view:

“McGuinty takes the blame in our downfall, too—with lame-brain policies like higher taxes, skyrocketing electricity prices and the highest property tax burden in the industrialized world, which has sent firms packing and caused plants to close. At last count, Ontario had lost more than 100,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs, and the list continues to grow.”

That's the Toronto Sun. Regrettably in what we heard this afternoon during question period, that list is continuing to grow. Nobody is feeling the pinch of this government's failed borrow, tax and spend policy more than the good people throughout rural Ontario. It's been less than a month since the McGuinty Liberals downloaded the massive cost of source water protection onto rural Ontario. Rural Ontario has a long memory. Rural Ontario remembers—

Ms. MacLeod: They will never forget this crowd.

Mr. Barrett: They remember well. They won't forget. They remember when Dalton McGuinty made the promise—get this one. Here's another promise: “We will make the Ministry of Agriculture a lead ministry.”

We're debating a budget bill. Take a look at the last budget. Cash crop farmers ended up with a 51% decrease in assistance. This government continues to pay lip service to farmers by telling them that agriculture is a top priority, but you know, as we've seen in the House this afternoon, it has degenerated to running and hiding. And when they do get caught, they kind of turn around, they're in a corner, and they point towards Ottawa—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Questions and comments?

Ms. Horwath: I certainly want to commend the member from Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant for his remarks on Bill 151. He brought some interesting perspectives to the table that I think are necessary, particularly around the challenges that rural communities are facing in terms of their economy and the ability of their economy to grow and to be prosperous in these particular times. I think the concerns that he raises are ones around whether or not the government has forgotten their responsibilities, their obligations to make sure that all parts of the province are thriving and doing well, that families everywhere in Ontario have an opportunity to share when things are going well economically.

Granted, we're all fearful that the economy is going in the wrong direction, but jeez, if the economy was going in the right direction for some time and these communities are still suffering, then obviously governments need to understand that there are some things that need to be done to buoy those communities so that when we do get into more difficult economic times, those communities

aren't completely devastated. I say that from the perspective, of course, of not a rural community, but actually that's maybe not true, because I do have my friend from another riding close to mine from the Hamilton area. Hamilton has the kind of luxury that many communities don't have: We're made up of both an urban centre and what are considered to be more traditional rural, agricultural types of areas. So my friend here from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough—

Interjection: Aldershot.

Ms. Horwath: Aldershot; I want to say Westdale every time. That's next time around.

He's someone who represents more of the rural types of areas, as well as even urban centres in his riding. It's quite a diverse area.

Again, the member from Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant brings some important issues to the table. It's unfortunate that in the context of debating a budget bill, the frustrations he's experiencing on behalf of the people that he represents is at such a high level. The government needs to look at these issues and start responding to some of the rural communities and their concerns.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): I certainly am very pleased to be able to take a moment to comment on the issues that the member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant has brought forward. He talked about things such as that farmers don't spend what they haven't earned, and yet I can say, as a farmer, very often that's exactly what we do. We start our spring with a line of credit from our local bank. We have to put our crop into the ground somehow. It's a cycle that we repeat every year, and we work from that. It certainly makes a lot of people who look at our accounting systems and our books a little bit nervous when they see the kinds of dollars that we invest into our communities and the kinds of dollars that we invest in our businesses as farmers, but we nevertheless do take those kinds of risks. It's part of being a farmer.

He talked about the war on tobacco, and I say that's true. As a government, we are waging war on tobacco. We know the impact that it has on the health system. But a war on tobacco is not a war on tobacco farmers; it's far from that. We recognize that the tobacco industry and the tobacco producers in this province certainly need some assistance. We have provided that kind of assistance in the past, and we're looking for our federal counterparts to help with that, because I think it's very important.

What this budget bill does do is talk about trying to deal with the issue of tobacco taxes. We recognize that what we have in this situation now is tobacco taxes that are being reduced because we are asking people to use less tobacco. What we want to do in this bill is at least maximize that which we can still capture in terms of revenues; that would be taxes from tobacco that people use in a legitimate way. And we want to penalize the illegitimate use of tobacco.

1720

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'd like to say to the member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant that I

listened very carefully to his comments. First of all, I want to thank him on behalf of our caucus for what I would consider to be really the true leadership we've seen in the Caledonia situation, someone who's worked for I think now it's 245 days, 247 days—in that area. I know that the member has kept a close eye and tried to work with the whole community with this crisis that's going on. I think in that time period he's probably noticed the negative impact that this Caledonia crisis has had on his community and, at least with our caucus and day after day in this House, has tried to support his constituents the best way he can, and that is to bring those issues to the forefront here.

He's also seen tens of millions of dollars wasted now. We have no idea how much money Caledonia has cost the taxpayers of the province of Ontario. I understand today that they sent the Minister of Natural Resources, who has the responsibility for aboriginal affairs, to Ottawa. He's going to tell them how to do it up there. I bet you he comes back with a big cheque tomorrow, which will be just a joke because you know he'll come back with nothing. It will be just one more day when we'll question that government over there on how much money Caledonia has cost. We don't know. The Premier refuses to answer. If you can believe it, the Minister of Community Safety has no idea—he will not inform this House if he does—how much the OPP policing has cost the citizens of the province of Ontario. I find that disgusting. I can go to any police service board. I can go to any—

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): I find you guys disgusting. Rednecks.

Mr. Dunlop: Isn't this pathetic? He's over there babbling away. Make him apologize.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? The member for Brant.

Mr. Levac: Bill 151, the Budget Measures Act, is a bill that introduces continuation of the budget that we were talking about earlier—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay, order now. Minister, order. Members, come to order, please. Member for Brant.

Mr. Levac: As I continue to talk about it, I'd like to bring to the attention of the House, for those who may not have heard all of the things that are in the budget, an interactive digital media tax credit. Now, that might sound like a perplexing issue, but we had the owners of a new digital animation studio come before us and say this is probably one of the most progressive pieces of legislation they've seen in their business in a long time. What that basically does is that it's a tax credit rate from 20% to 30% and that represents jobs created in this industry.

They enhanced the property tax and sales tax credits for seniors, another one that has been missed by the debate tonight, the proposed increased income threshold for property and sales tax credits for seniors with their spouse or common-law partner from \$22,000 to \$23,000

starting in 2006 and an increase with social security so that those people can apply that to the ownership of their home.

Universal child care benefit: Ontarians who qualify for the federal UCCB would keep the benefits they're entitled to receive under the Ontario property and sales tax credits for the Ontario child care supplement for working families.

Some of these point got missed and I wanted to make sure that we mentioned them. I will repeat, for the sake of sounding a little bit boring, that we're going to give the municipalities flexibility and additional provincial support in funding for brownfield redevelopment. I'm telling you this one is going to be a sleeper. This one is a sleeper. This one is going to put those properties back to work to collect taxes.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Are we ready? The member for Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Barrett: Thanks to the member from Hamilton East. As Haldimand goes through tough times, they rely on the city of Hamilton. I'd say that for a hundred years Haldimand farm boys have worked in the steel mills in Hamilton. Their reputation is well-known. In fact, over the years they did such a good job that they finally moved the steel mills down to Haldimand county, as the Lake Erie Works down at Nanticoke.

The member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex pointed out, rightfully so, that farmers do spend. I was watching my partner last night trying to get beans off and I think of the investment in not only beans but corn, just the operating cost, the money you have to put out for spray, nitrogen and diesel. It was tough going last night. I hate to think what the land is going to look like next spring with the compression, given the amount of rain that we've had down our way. But I guess all we ask is that the government help out in times of need. There are fixed costs. I look at that combine that he purchased. That's not something you can be accommodated through the CAIS program, and it becomes almost a liability in a sense.

The member for Simcoe North knows the policing issue well. He knows Caledonia well. He has talked to a large number of our officers. I'm pro-OPP, and it's up to everyone in this House to do everything we can, including the member for Brant, to restore the good reputation of our OPP.

I was in Caledonia last night. It's not hard to find a meeting in Caledonia. You just roll into Tim Hortons. There's always a group there that are at the ready and on the watch—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Further debate?

Ms. Horwath: I've got to tell you, I think the government has a little plan that every time I've got to get up and make a 20-minute speech they send my friend Ted McMeekin from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot over to chat me up for a while so that I get off my game. But nonetheless, it was a very pleasant conversation. Actually, I quite enjoy my conversations with my

old friend from the old regional council of Hamilton–Wentworth at the time, which is now the city of Hamilton.

I'm pleased to have an opportunity, all kidding aside, to speak to Bill 151, An Act to enact various 2006 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts. It's quite a large bill—192 pages long. It has a number of measures in it. It's an omnibus bill, a house-keeping bill, whatever. It basically enacts a number of various things that the government has been talking about and needed to get done. I know that my critic, Michael Prue, spoke about this issue last night, and I have his remarks with me, so I'm going to touch on a few of the things that he raised. But the most important that I wanted to start with is the issue of the assessment freeze which was announced by the government in response to the pressures that came about when André Marin, our Ombudsman, released that quite critical report on the assessment system in the province of Ontario. I know that the government responded to some 17 or so, I think, of the recommendations of the Ombudsman's report, but there are still several recommendations that are outstanding.

One of the important ones, and certainly one of the important ones from the perspective of people in my riding who have had challenges with their assessments, is the entire issue of who has the onus of responsibility for proving that the information that MPAC is using to assess properties is in fact the correct information. Of course, as anyone knows who has tried to appeal their assessment, their assessed value, the burden of proof is placed on the property owner, so that the person who is appealing somehow has to be able to find the evidence that would justify the fact that the opinion that they have, which is that their property is in fact over-assessed, is real. The problem with that is that, of course, the assessor is the one who has the file, who has the information and who uses the information to come up with a number. The homeowner has no idea what is in that file and what the assessor is basing that estimate of the value on. So by having the onus on the homeowner or the property owner, it creates quite a difficult situation, sometimes quite an impossible situation, because it's like a stab in the dark trying to figure out what the assessment office is basing their opinion on.

So one of the things that the Ombudsman recommended was that the onus is reversed, so that the property assessment corporation is in fact the one that has to prove that their assessment is based on appropriate information, that the value that they put on a property has merit because of these following reasons which are on file for that particular property. But that hasn't been followed up on, and neither have a couple of other issues.

1730

What I found interesting is that one of the things the government did around that same time was to determine—and I think it was also the added pressure of a bill that I believe a member from the Conservative caucus brought forward, the Homestead Act or something of that

nature. It was his response to this property assessment problem that we have in the province of Ontario, a problem, interestingly, started by that party and their wrong-headed approach to downloading particularly, as well as the assessment system they put in place. We've been struggling with this flawed assessment system, and with the pressure from the Ombudsman as well as the pressure from that private member's bill, the government's response, instead of actually dealing with the real problems that exist out there—their knee-jerk reaction was to get them over the next election hump, which is October of next year. They decided, "Oh, what a great idea. Let's just freeze the assessed property values in the province so that maybe the people of Ontario are going to forget that there's a big, huge mess when it comes to assessment. Maybe if they don't have to deal with values going through the roof this year and next year, when it comes to election time this won't be an election issue for us."

But the people of my community, I can tell you, are not so easily duped. There are significant systemic problems in the city of Hamilton. Of course, the McGuinty government is not unaware of this. They're not unaware of it because every single year the city of Hamilton comes to this place, with cap in hand, asking the government to fix the problem the city has in its inability to meet the needs of the residents of Hamilton because of the lack of funding or the lack of acknowledgement that the downloaded services the city of Hamilton ended up with, as a result of the formula the previous government put in place, far outcosts their ability to pay for them. We have a situation where, whether it's \$19 million or \$21 million—unfortunately, the number is increasing as opposed to decreasing, so the problem is getting worse. But the bottom line is that the city of Hamilton has an ongoing systemic problem, as do many, many other municipalities in the province. The government is not unaware of AMO's criticisms of the previous downloading situation that the last government stuck cities with across this province. It's a huge problem, and it's a problem this government knew very well about when they were elected, had some criticisms of when it was being put in place, yet three years into their mandate, instead of coming clean and saying, "You know what? This is definitely a problem and we're going to work hard to fix it," they just put it all on freeze so the people of Ontario can maybe forget it's a problem and they don't have to address it going into the next election.

It's really disappointing. The minister who brought the freeze forward says, "We need time to study it." Well, the reality is that the studies are out there, and they're out there in spades. There is a great deal of information that was put together by AMO. Individual municipalities have put together in-depth analyses of what's happening with their budgets, where the pressures are, where the downloading revenue-neutral theory that the previous government had does not wash, does not add up, is not appropriate in terms of the perspective from the municipal side. Unfortunately, the government has chosen to

sweep that problem under the carpet—or try to. It's a big, huge lump under the carpet, though. I'm sure the people of Ontario would like to see some kind of information from the government as to how they're going to deal with the combined pressures of the market value assessment or current value assessment system with the downloading.

I've gotta give it to the previous guys; they knew how to obfuscate the reality of the dual pressures of the changed assessment system along with the downloading. Many, many municipalities spent a great deal of time just trying to figure out what it was: Was it amalgamation, was it CVA, was it downloading? What was it that caused all the problems with the budgetary pressures at the municipal level? Of course, the answer is that it was all of those. But the answer today is that it's this government's responsibility to figure out what needs to be done to make it better in terms of the financial pressures on municipalities.

My party did spend some time consulting with and talking to the people of Ontario. I attended many different town hall meetings in many different jurisdictions across the province. We came up with a plan ourselves. If we can come up with a plan ourselves, imagine what kind of plan—if the government only put its mind to it, with all the staff and all the resources and all the researchers and all the financial people it has at its beck and call. If they had only put a little bit of time to it, I'm sure they could have come up with some kind of recommendations as well. But they chose not to. Instead, they chose to simply sweep the problem under the carpet, keep their heads down and hope it doesn't come up in the next election. That's certainly not the kind of responsive leadership that people hope for from their governments. It's exactly the opposite.

In the context of Bill 151 particularly, the government is talking proudly about taxation on seniors and making sure that seniors are not doubly taxed, and there is a bit of a reference to that in this bill. But seniors at this point in time have been so burdened by the property tax inequities that they've had to live with and deal with over the last couple of years. If the government really wanted to see seniors get what they deserve in terms of acknowledgement and recognition of the efforts they've made in this province over time, we would be dealing with the problems that exist with the property tax system. A lot of those seniors have been pretty much run out of their homes because the system has not been fixed over the first three years of this government's term. The pressure has been enormous, and people on fixed incomes have simply not been able to keep up with the property tax increases. The reason it has become even more difficult for seniors to keep up with those increases is that the property tax increases have been exacerbated by other cost-of-living increases that have put pressure on seniors on fixed incomes.

I speak specifically about the increase in hydro rates—well over 50% so far—that this government has allowed to occur since it took office a mere three years ago. That is unacceptable. People simply cannot afford to have

hydro increases at that rate. It's not like we're talking about luxury goods or some kind of purchase or payment that could easily be weeded out of a budget, where somebody could put some austerity measures on their lifestyle and say, "Well, I'm no longer going to go to the bingo or whatever once a week. I'm going to cut back because I can't afford it any more." With hydro, people don't have that choice. Hydro is a basic need, particularly in a province like Ontario. But certainly anywhere in a civilized nation, a civilized province; we would understand that hydro is a basic need. People are required to pay their bills to have a fridge that runs, to have a stove and, in some cases, unfortunately, to have heating, to be able to run their lights and their appliances and everything else. So it's not like these people, particularly fixed-income people, and in this context of my discussion today, fixed-income seniors, have the option to opt out of purchasing or consuming hydro.

So what does this government do? This government adds insult to injury by telling seniors—seniors who are already scrimping and saving every penny, seniors who are already overburdened by tax increases that in some cases are chasing them out of their homes, seniors who are already having a difficult time making ends meet, many of whom are on subsistence-level pensions—that the answer to their problems is a smart meter. "The answer to your problem is that you consume too much hydro."

1740

Well, I've got to tell you that the seniors in Hamilton East were offended—offended—by the thought, the suggestion. These are people who have lived through the Depression in some cases. These are people who know what austere times are. These are people who understand quite clearly how to try to make ends meet, because, unfortunately, many of them have experienced extreme hard times. So for them to be told by their government, while the government is increasing the rates by over 50% in a matter of a couple of years, that the answer for seniors is that they need to do laundry at 3 o'clock in the morning or that they should take their showers at 9 o'clock at night is just not acceptable. Not only is it not acceptable, but it's insulting. It's insulting because what you're telling those people is that they don't have the common sense to figure out how to reduce their consumption and that the reduction of consumption is what's going to show up on their hydro bill.

It's passing strange. When the government was lauding the recent hydro rates, saying there was no rate increase and that there was a reduction, people looked at their own hydro bills and realized that in fact that didn't happen, that in fact some \$3 a month are the only savings that people got to see. It was a slap in the face to those senior citizens. It was truly a slap in the face.

I say to the government, as you're talking the good talk and trying to convince seniors that you're actually doing something for them, I think you actually need to look in their eyes and talk to them about the real effects, listen to them and hear what they have to say about the

real effects of the McGuinty Liberal lack of action on property taxes and action in the wrong direction on hydro prices, because those things, put together, are not going to make up for this small, little clause in Bill 151 that speaks to the harmonization of tax rates for seniors.

I have to tell you that it's a difficult reality to deal with, but certainly I hear it in my community. I think that members of this Legislature, particularly government members, need to go home and talk to some of their senior citizens. Go to the Legions. You'll be seeing many of those seniors in a very short time as we congratulate the survivors of our wars—the First World War, the Second World War, the Korean War—as we talk about how much we respect the sacrifices those soldiers and their families made over the years and decades to try to build this wonderful country and build this wonderful province. We'll be talking to them, and you should be talking to them as well about whether or not they are actually seeing any positive benefit from the McGuinty Liberals' reign in office. I can tell you that certainly the ones in my community have serious, serious concerns that they have been all but ignored by the government.

Speaking of seniors, one of the other issues that came up in my riding recently was long-term-care centres, long-term-care homes and the extent to which long-term-care homes are providing quality care, or not, for the seniors of our communities. It was painful and horrific to tour some of those long-term-care homes in the dog days of summer, in August, and see the condition that our senior citizens were expecting to subsist in. It was a disgrace to see that those long-term-care facilities are not required to maintain a minimum cooling standard in the hottest days of the year. Unfortunately, when the Minister of Health brought his new long-term care, or lack of standards for seniors, into the Legislature recently, he didn't bother to include minimum cooling standards for our senior citizens who are living in long-term-care centres.

You know what? The saddest thing of all is that people will know that senior citizens have many issues around circulation. So, for them, they don't need to have a 62-degree temperature, a 68-degree temperature to keep them cool. In fact, they don't want that cool a temperature because with their blood circulation, oftentimes they don't experience the heat at quite the same level as we do, which isn't to say that they don't deserve to have a level of comfort, a level of heating that is comfortable for them. It wouldn't cost a fortune to do that; it wouldn't require significant expenditures, I don't think. But even if it did, goldarn it, those people are worth it. They've contributed so much to our communities over the years. We talk the platitudes, but when it comes to actually putting our money where our mouth is, in terms of really representing the dignity and quality of life of our seniors, we don't see it—I don't see it—coming through. I don't see it shining through in the legislation this government brings forward here at Queen's Park, and it's unfortunate. In fact, it's worse than unfortunate; it's completely inappropriate, and it saddens me greatly.

Nonetheless, I've spent my entire speech talking about senior citizens, and I did that because I believe that if we can find ways to make sure we are doing the right thing by them, then we also know that, as a result, the quality of life we expect for others in our community will also be improved. For example, as we look at hydro rates and how they negatively affect senior citizens, so too do they affect other families.

Coming from a community that has a growing rate of poverty—in fact, a rate of poverty that has now matched Toronto's—I know that issues like increased hydro rates, lack of affordable housing, lack of affordable daycare and the national child benefit clawback are all things this government needs to address.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Hon. Ms. Di Cocco: It's a pleasure to respond to the member for Hamilton East. One of the aspects of this discussion that I'd like to draw everyone's attention to is to speak to the bill: to Bill 151, the Budget Measures Act. I'd like to convey to the House that this bill is about moving forward on some required changes for Ontario. Why we are moving forward is to have strong communities and a prosperous economy. How? Because this bill does a number of things. One, it creates a new and enhanced dividend tax credit to encourage investment in Ontario corporations. I don't think I heard any of the members of the opposition speak today about the content of the bill or whether they support it or do not support it. They certainly spoke about a range of issues but not about what this bill is actually proposing to do, so I don't know if they agree with that or don't agree with that.

The other issue this bill proposes is to give municipalities flexibility and additional provincial support in funding brownfields redevelopment and public infrastructure through the use of tax increment financing for two pilot projects. I guess the question I have is, do they agree or disagree with that aspect of the bill?

The other one is that it enhances the interactive digital media tax credit. Another aspect is that it increases the income threshold of the Ontario property and sales tax credits for senior couples. I say to the member for Hamilton East that this is another example of maintaining a fairness level for seniors when it comes to their property tax.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): I think I can clarify for the preceding speaker that we're not supporting this legislation and that there are very significant concerns.

I know that my colleague mentioned earlier that, a little over three years in office, this government has increased spending by \$20 billion. You know, that's mind-boggling: \$68 billion to \$88 billion. I assumed, having been around here with the former Liberal government, that they would have learned their lesson in terms of tax and spend and the payback from the electorate of Ontario, but clearly they have not.

I recall Mr. Peterson's prolific spending, and the governor of the Bank of Canada expressing public concern that the spending practices of the Liberal government at the time were driving up inflation in the country.

Mr. Petersen effectively told him to go fly a kite. But that's where we're heading, with the same sort of spending patterns on the part of this government. Taxation: bringing in heavy taxation on the people of Ontario and hoping they can get over this event next year. That's when most of the chickens are going to come home to roost. They're hoping they can get over that and somehow muddle their way through, change leaders at some point and hopefully continue to have some electoral success, but I think people are on to them. They know that this, "Say anything to get your vote;" process is not going to work again.

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The Liberals are hoping that, going into this election, breaking 50 promises, they can use the theme, "We really mean it this time." Well, the people of Ontario are not going to buy that.

I was in Ottawa last night for the opening of the new Royal Ottawa P3 hospital that the Premier condemned when he was opposition leader, talking about the Americanization of health care in Ontario. There he was, cutting the ribbon, talking about the big H-word.

Mr. Duguid: I'm pleased to join in this debate as well. I guess we're not shocked that the member for Leeds–Grenville is not supporting this bill, although frankly I'm a little disappointed. What we're talking about here is a bill that provides additional support for seniors, a bill that provides tax credits to strengthen businesses, something anybody would want to support.

When we look at this, there are a number of progressive and soundly thought out measures in this bill that really implement a number of the measures taken in our previous budget: measures that are helping us get waiting lists down across the province; measures that are helping Ontarians gain access to primary care; measures that are helping us provide greater investments in home care, that are helping to remove some of the problems we're having in our emergency wards; measures that are helping us create and hire more nurses right across this province; and measures that are helping us invest in hospitals.

We're talking about real dollars here. In my own riding, \$57 million are being invested in our emergency and critical care wing. That's really going to help improve the quality of care in Scarborough. Those investments are being made right across the province.

We're talking about investments in education as well that are contributing to smaller class sizes: billions of dollars to improve our schools, our classrooms; billions of much-needed capital dollars; better training for teachers; and more teachers, to ensure that our kids are getting the best education we can give them. We're also investing in post-secondary education through those budgets that we've seen come forward over the last three years—\$6.2 billion going into post-secondary education to improve access for our young people.

All of this combined is going to build a stronger economy. That's why I'm surprised that the opposition parties, both of them, don't get it; don't understand the importance of these investments.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Hamilton. I would say on the bill that, first of all, it's a very, very large bill—about 200 pages long—and it has some 35 schedules with a whole bunch of attachments to it. But to look at some of the specific schedules that I have some concern with, it would be fair to say that one of them that is before each of us in Ontario is under schedule G. This is the treachery that I'm dealing with here. It's under the Corporations Tax Act; it replaces the references “Canadian investment income” and “foreign investment income” with references to “aggregate investment income.” But subtly, in that same schedule, it extends the term of office for municipal politicians and school trustees from three years to four years. How it is stuck into this bill and is the poison pill, if you will, is one more reason to be not very trusting sometimes of what this McGuinty government moves forward.

There's another section here that's quite troubling as well. It's to deal with the changes in schedule A, which is the Assessment Act. We know that municipal property assessment has been a big issue, not just for us as provincial members but for municipal members as well. What they've done is they've shelved this review of assessment for a couple of years until after the election—again, another example of how they deal with things that are somewhat suspicious. Why are they not dealing with this, as opposed to shoving a lot of this stuff—they should be dealing with this as a separate bill.

I understand that there are some things in here where we need to have the revenue to make Ontario function, but every time I look at all of these schedules, right down to Z4, Z9, almost all of them do one thing that's a typical footprint for a Liberal government: They raise the taxes of the hard-working taxpayers of Ontario.

I don't think I'll be supportive, but I'm certain there'll be more said on this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The member from Hamilton East, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. Horwath: I want to thank the Minister of Culture, the member for Leeds–Grenville, the member for Scar-

borough Centre and the member for Durham for their remarks.

It's interesting that one of the things the Minister of Culture raised was the issue of tax incremental financing. It's interesting because my own municipality, through some community improvement area plans, has been using tax incremental financing to revitalize our downtown in terms of residential housing stock in old buildings that used to be class D office space and class C office space. So tax incremental financing is an interesting tool and one that will hopefully do some good. But the problem becomes the extent to which the properties are so below even breaking even because of the con-taminations that exist on them that even tax incremental financing has not been very effective when it comes to brownfield redevelopment, because the amount of tax increment that you need to make many of those really difficult properties work is so extremely significant that the payoff time is 100 years into the future, so that it still remains unfeasible. In terms of brownfields, a real progressive government would be doing a lot more than just tax incremental financing in that regard to deal with some of our brownfield problems. I know the member from Brantford has those issues in his community as well, as he's indicating across the way.

Interestingly enough, the member for Scarborough Centre talks about all of the progressive pieces in here. One of the things that my critic raised just the other day was that this government is increasing taxes on ethanol in Ontario to equal the same as gasoline. How is that progressive? It seems to me that if we want to encourage greater use of ethanol in the province, then you sure don't tax it the exact same as gasoline. It seems silly, so you have to really look at what you're doing here and make sure you're trying to progress and move the province forward on these issues.

The Deputy Speaker: This House is adjourned until 6:45 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1757.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

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

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