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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 22 April 2008

Mardi 22 avril 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 22 April 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

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The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Michael Bryant: I move that pursuant to standing order 46 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 35, An Act to authorize the Minister of Finance—I'm sorry, I'm supposed to say—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): You have to call the order first, yes.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Speaker, I apologize.
Government order 6.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I move that pursuant to standing order 46 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 35, An Act to authorize the Minister of Finance to make payments to eligible recipients out of money appropriated by the Legislature and to amend the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, 2004, the Ministry of Treasury and Economics Act and the Treasury Board Act, 1991, when Bill 35 is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment, and at such time, the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs; and

That the vote on second reading may, pursuant to standing order 28(h), be deferred until the next sessional day during the routine proceeding "Deferred votes"; and

That the committee shall be authorized to consider the bill at its next regular meeting following the referral of the bill. The committee shall report the bill to the House not later than the first sessional day that reports from committees may be received following the completion of clause-by-clause consideration, and not later than May 5, 2008. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith,

and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading; and

That when the order for third reading is called, two hours be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill. At the end of which time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That the vote on third reading may, pursuant to standing order 28(h), be deferred until the next sessional day during the routine proceeding "Deferred votes"; and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The government House leader has moved government notice of motion number 61.

Mr. Paul Miller: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek on a point of order before I recognize the government House leader for his leadoff remarks.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just a small correction to an earlier statement: I was incorrect when I stated a million megawatts; what I meant to say was a million solar roofs in California, if that could be added to the record.

The Speaker: Thank you very much.

Leading off the debate, I recognize the government House leader.

1850

Hon. Michael Bryant: We are here today to debate, pursuant to standing order 46, a motion that would bring Bill 35 to a vote before this House, specifying in particular the amount of time devoted to clause-by-clause consideration as well as specifying that the order for third reading allot two hours of debate time for the bill, at the end of which time it then goes to a vote.

This is a motion that is necessary at the end of the days of debate that we have had on this particular bill, because while it is a bill which to my understanding has not received vociferous, if any, opposition, nonetheless we were unable to come to an agreement as to how many days of debate would take place. The question then becomes, does the government of the day make a decision to continue debate indefinitely or, on the other hand, is an agreement achievable? No, the agreement was not achievable, and thus here we are in a night sitting debating this particular motion.

It is a night sitting in which we're debating this particular motion, a night sitting that the government brought forward by way of a motion that the government supported and that was opposed by the opposition, these night sittings being necessary at this time in order to ensure that there is an appropriate amount of time for debate in this Legislature. Under the new proposal—and I'll just spend a minute on this before getting back to the motion at hand—we would not be having night sittings. We would not be having this matter debated at night; rather, it would be something that was addressed either in the morning or in the afternoon. I would argue that in fact that is not only something that the opposition parties called for but something that is in the best interests of this House in increasing the quality of the debate.

It is always a case that opposition members are concerned, and sometimes mightily offended, by motions of this sort. The government usually will cite some statistics, which I'm sure we will hear tonight, about how many times time allocation was brought forward by the Harris-Eves Conservative government, and we'll talk about how many times it was brought forward by the NDP government and how the NDP government in fact created the time allocation system we now have. I believe that in fact 60% of the bills were time-allocated under the previous government, the Harris-Eves government. This government has, yes, used time allocation, but less than half of the amount that the previous government used; in fact, about 25% is the number.

This particular bill addresses quality-of-life issues with respect to investing in our municipalities. There will be some discussion—maybe, maybe not—in the debate tonight where members will say that in the good old days there were certain bills that got a lot of attention and a lot of time and a lot of debate, and there were other bills that did not, because they were not seen as highly controversial, because the opposition—whether they agreed or disagreed with them—didn't feel they merited significant debating time. There would be little, and in some cases no, debate at third reading and limited debate at second reading. That's why you saw in fact the number of bills passed by governments—Conservative, I guess, if we're going to go back before 1985. But up to and including 1990 there was this approach.

The House leader for the third party has talked about this at length in this Legislature, and I remember him talking to me about it when I was in opposition. He's raised it in House leaders' meetings as well, the idea of "Okay, we can spend a lot of time on bills that we really want to get into and not a lot of time on the other bills." The problem with all that is, is this one of these bills to which a significant amount of time ought to be devoted?

This is a bill that's based on similar legislation that's been passed by the federal government. The Investing in Ontario Act sets out specific terms for debt repayment and investments of any unanticipated surplus. If there is an unanticipated surplus of \$800 million or more, the government pays \$600 million to debt reduction. Then

there are further discussions about the unanticipated surplus.

I would venture to argue that this would not have been one of those bills in the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s about which the House leaders would have said, "This deserves a lot of time. This one is going to, if not invoke a filibuster, at least deserve a lot of attention." I doubt that this one would have received a lot of attention. But under the new system, under the new normal, I suppose you might say—which has been in place, arguably, off and on, but mostly on, since 1990—bills of this nature in fact do get a significant amount of debate.

At some point, the government has to make a decision. In the absence of an agreement being reached, either the government is going to see that this bill is debated day after day and night after night, or the government is going to say, "Well, this seems to be a bill on which we've had ample debate." It is not a matter which would seem to reasonably seize the attention of the House in a way that you think might be aligned with something involving debt repayment and investments, but in fact this does. Under the new normal, this is one of those bills that gets endless debate until such time as the government makes a decision about time allocation. It is unfortunate, the new normal that we are in. I remain hopeful, nonetheless, that we will reach that time where the new normal ends.

There was, I would say, a certain reciprocity that existed over the last 18 years. By that I mean, what comes around goes around. From 1995 forward, the opposition was unwilling to co-operate with the government of the day, the NDP opposition in particular. Why? Because of the lack of co-operation that they saw between 1990 and 1995. Fast forward to 2003, and the same thing: You didn't co-operate with us; we won't co-operate with you. Now we are here in 2008 and the reciprocity continues. At some point, that reciprocity will either come to an end, we'll get some closure on that and we'll get the kind of agreements that we talk about nostalgically, that we'd like to have, or we will find ourselves here debating motions such as that.

I'm not sharing my time because it goes by rotation, if I'm not mistaken, so I will just say in closing that this is never a motion that a government House leader wants to bring. It is part of a new normal that none of us want to have happen, but it is the way in which the Investing in Ontario Act, an important bill that we do need to get passed—

Interjection.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Believe me, municipalities want this, and every mayor and council want it.

I would submit that it's a straightforward bill. While surely changes will want to be made and there will be a desire from the official opposition to have more, plus tax cuts, and with respect to the New Democrats, concern around funding and then at the same time an increase in funding, we do think this is a bill that ought to come to a vote, and that it has been debated thoroughly. Thus we

are here tonight debating it pursuant to this motion. I believe the official opposition is up next in the rotation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm pleased, I suppose, to join this debate, another time allocation debate brought forward by this government. The government House leader began his evening by apologizing because he was out of line with his timing on bringing forth the motion. I hope it's something that he gets used to, because I'm expecting to hear an apology in this House tomorrow—not for me, because he hasn't offended me, but he certainly made accusations against my colleague from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington. I will certainly be interested tomorrow to be hearing that apology. I can't wait to get here, actually. I'm going to be here before 1:30.

1900

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Why, are you apologizing?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, I'm not apologizing, but I expect tomorrow—and the Minister of Agriculture might be apologizing too, because she was part of those comments that were made to the member today, accusations against my colleague from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington of an illegal act. We will be interested to see if the day starts that way tomorrow.

Anyway, on with the debate on time allocation. The government House leader seemed to want to talk more about the standing order changes, which is interesting, because that's all part of what the problem is here. This government and the government House leader did articulate how previous governments had used time allocation motions when they felt that the business of the House was being ground to a halt by the obstructionist tactics of the opposition. In fact, we have documented proof of some of those things. The member for Welland talks about it himself—how he held this House to ransom, so to speak, for 17 consecutive hours when he did a filibuster. I don't even know exactly what the topic was at the time.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Auto insurance.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Auto insurance. Thank you very much to the member for Simcoe–Grey.

He went on and on for 17 hours on auto insurance and basically ground the business of the House to a halt. The Conservatives—they were in opposition between 1990 and 1995—named every body of water in the province of Ontario in the title of a bill, which went on for hours and hours. But this government has not experienced those kinds of obstructionist tactics from either one of these opposition parties. There is no reason. The debates have carried on and been dealt with, and the government has had their legislation passed. There's never been any reason to bring in those kinds of motions—not like the former member for Scarborough–Rouge River, who had to have members shrouded around him so he could relieve himself in the chamber.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'd just caution the member on the use of his language so as to ensure that it continues to be parliamentary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker. Excuse me while I relieve myself of some congestion.

When the former member from Scarborough–Rouge River was shrouded by colleagues so he would not be viewed as he relieved himself, to carry on—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's exactly what I hope you would avoid in the context of this debate tonight, so I would caution you again.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Those kinds of obstructionist tactics have not been used by the opposition in this Parliament or the previous Parliament, but this government continues to bring forth time allocation motions. They railed on continuously whenever the previous government would bring in any kind of time allocation motion or closure or whatever.

Let's talk about the Investing in Ontario Act, Bill 35. The government went out on a public relations tour or spin tour prior to even introducing this legislation and told the public and municipalities, "Look, here's what's going to happen. If there's a surplus in the province of Ontario of \$800 million or more, the first \$600 million is going to go to debt reduction and then the next \$200 million and so on above that is going to go to municipalities." Well, every municipality out there thought, "Wow, this is great news. We're very, very happy."

I've got to give them credit. They're very good at doing that part of it. They're not very good at keeping their word; we have tons of documented proof of that. But they're very good at spinning that stuff and trying to spin a message and get the word out on something that they want.

The municipalities got this message and said, "Hey, this is great." The prerequisite supportive quotes from municipalities and municipal organizations were rolling in, so that the Minister of Finance and the Premier and the House leader could all quote and say, "Look, this is what a great job we're doing for municipalities. They're all happy. See what they have to say about our proposed Investing in Ontario Act? They're all very, very happy about it." Well, who wouldn't be? They were going to be getting \$200 million to start, and there was no question in their minds that they were going to be running surpluses of at least \$800 million, because the news was starting to leak out that the government had a huge surplus this year. As it turned out, it was \$5 billion. "Oh, but after we've got this store box of quotes"—that's not a prop, Mr. Speaker, that's a bill. "After we've got these quotes lined up, indexed, alphabetical, rated on a scale of one to 10, from 'Really loves the government,' down to the last one, 'Loves the government somewhat'"—because all of those quotes would have been positive—"now we're going to tell the real truth: Here's the budget. We're expecting a \$600-million surplus. Sorry, municipalities. Thank you for those nice quotes. We're going to use them and we'll use them over and over again in this House." And they'll say, "Did I say to you what so-and-so from municipality X said? Well, then, let me tell you"—because we're getting them already today, over and over again: the Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneur-

ship today bringing out a quote from the convenience store owners that I'm sure was written two and a half years ago. They'll do anything over there.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yeah, exactly. Sooner or later, the member for Davenport will be bringing quotes from the Havana Express or something, and everybody will be thinking that that's a new riding here in the province of Ontario.

Anyway, that's the kind of spin-doctoring that this government does. So they've got all this stuff lined up and then, when things get a little tough and the opposition starts to do as they're supposed to do, and that's ask some tough questions—"Well, look, did you mislead municipalities? Did you intentionally give them misinformation?"—they might ask that kind of question, and the opposition has a responsibility to do just that when they see some misbehaving on the part of the government. And the government is going to say, "Au contraire. Have we read to you the quotes from the municipalities about our Investing in Ontario Act?" And you'll see that all of those quotes came before March 25, the day the budget was tabled.

After the budget was tabled, it hasn't been so sweet. Now the municipalities are saying, "Gee, did we get fed a bill of goods here?" They're very, very skeptical now about anything that might come out of this government. At the end of the fiscal year, of course, they got handed a large part of that \$5.2-billion surplus. So people are a little quiet now. Never has a government been so poor at forecasting the year-end.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: It never happened before.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You're right. The member for Essex says that it's never happened before, and he's absolutely right. Never has there been a government, a Minister of Finance and a Premier of this province so inept at forecasting the year-end of this province.

Now you've got municipalities wondering, "What is going to happen in 2008-09? Where are we really going to stand?" You see, this is another little game of Liberal deflecto: "Okay, let's get them off the real issue." The real issue is, what are they actually doing to permanently deal with the financial straits that municipalities find themselves in?

At the AMO conference of 2006, Premier McGuinty promised that within 18 months they'd have a new deal in place, working with municipalities about who's going to pay for what—it's the fiscal capacity review, something to that effect. And here we are here closing in on 24 months. Before you know it, it's going to be August 2008, and what do we have? We have nothing, but they've played political games with it.

1910

They've thrown a little bit here, a little bit there, which quite frankly has cut the you-know-what right out of the whole committee. Instead of the committee being left to deal with the fiscal imbalance, the government has played politics because they wanted to get re-elected last time, so they announced some for the drug plan. They're

talking about more for social housing and all of this and that, and the truth is that it all should have been part of this fiscal review. So they've really neutered the fiscal review before it even came back with its report.

That's the kind of games this government loves to play. They're not really interested in working with the municipalities, finding out what the real problems are and what we can do on a sustained, long-term basis to solve the malaise they find themselves in.

There's never been a winter worse for roads in the province of Ontario than this winter. The municipal roads are in real trouble because the kinds of thermal movements we had in our temperatures this winter really made it difficult for those asphalt surfaces. If you get a long, cold winter that starts cold and stays cold, and the frost gets in the ground and just keeps going deeper, you're going to have some problems in the spring, but not the same kind we've had this winter where it freezes and thaws, freezes and thaws, and water gets in underneath the asphalt and then freezes and expands. That's how you get your potholes, to simplify it. The next thing you know, you've got a real mess on your roads.

This kind of winter has been really hard on them. Municipalities know they've got a lot of work ahead of them, and they want to be able to say, "In 2008-09, this is what we're going to do. In 2009-10, this is what we're going to do," and so on and so forth for at least five years down the road. That's the point of this review. That's what John Tory, our leader, talked about in our platform: sustainable, long-term, dependable, guaranteed funding for municipalities so that they wouldn't have to play the guessing game or play the lottery like this government has forced them to do for four years.

This government talked about improving the situation for municipalities, but when I talk to municipalities in eastern Ontario, they say that their fiscal condition has deteriorated under this government. The fiscal condition has deteriorated. When we met with the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus at ROMA this year, their statement was clear, that the fiscal condition of municipalities in eastern Ontario has deteriorated under this government. They want long-term sustainable funding so that they can deal with all these things. They don't want some kind of a shell game. They don't want some kind of hide-and-seek; now you see it, now you don't.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Come on.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's not what they're looking for, I say to my friend from Northumberland-Quinte West. That's not what they're looking for, Lou.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: They're looking for something that they can depend on. That's what they want. They don't want some kind of a cat-and-mouse game with \$200 million or \$600 million. They want something dependable, but now we find out that in this bill it doesn't actually say that that money will be going to municipalities. No, no, no, no. We could have slushgate II, because what it says in the bill to describe eligible recipients—I will quote:

“(2) In this act,

“‘eligible recipient’ means a person or entity, other than an individual but including a partnership whose members may be individuals, that does not carry on activities for the purpose of gain or profit.”

In layman’s language, that sounds like a cricket club.

There was \$150 million of the taxpayers’ hard-earned money. And you know what? They’re really starting to hurt over that. People in my riding who’ve had a hard time paying their heating bills this winter are starting to hurt about that and worry about that.

The Premier was talking today about public transit. Well, I’m wondering when the subway is going to come to Renfrew county. Our people have to get to and from work, get their kids to and from the hockey rink, go shopping and get the groceries, with a vehicle. The gas prices are hurting them. The cost of heating their homes this winter was abhorrent. And this government gave out \$150 million last year to the likes of cricket clubs that didn’t even want the money. But because they thought it might get them more votes, they threw out the money.

What they could do for municipalities and what could help is if they would share that gas tax with municipalities, just as the federal government does—and has legislated as permanent—so that rural municipalities aren’t left with nothing. There’s a nice saying I could use there, Mr. Speaker, but I’m afraid you’d be standing up. If they want to talk about fairness and making sure that the people in this province are treated fairly, what about those people in rural Ontario who have no choice but to drive long distances for the services that people in the cities take for granted? What about them?

The House leader was talking about changes to the standing orders and how they’re family friendly. I don’t hold him individually responsible for this, but it’s just indicative of the kind of mindset of the McGuinty government. It’s become so urban-centric, particularly Toronto-centric.

He was quoted in the paper—and I’ll paraphrase it because I don’t have the newspaper in front of me. He was talking about the move to make this place more family friendly, which these changes have done anything but. They could have just as easily accomplished everything, and we’d be completely in favour of it—you can still have a 9-to-6 calendar. Question period could still be in the afternoon; it doesn’t have to be in the morning. This is about making this harder on the opposition and easier for the cabinet ministers, so they can flitzen out of here, like flitzebogen, in the afternoon.

He talked about this being family friendly. He made a comment that, “Now, if we get rid of these night sittings, isn’t it going to be nice that an MPP can go to his son’s hockey game or his daughter’s ballet”—and I’m just paraphrasing—“or have dinner with his or her family?” It’s clear that the House leader lives in Toronto. Either that or he’s a big Star Trek fan and he figured that somehow I can just say, “Beam me home, Vicky,” and I’ll be up there to have supper with them. It’s just not feasible for people who drive distances and come from a long

way to serve here at Queen’s Park. But it is indicative of the kind of myopic view of the life of a politician that some politicians here have. They don’t really think that much goes on north of Highway 7. But that’s on the standing order changes.

We’re going to go back to Bill 35, the Investing in Ontario Act. I think I’m running out of time here, much to the disappointment, I know, of my friend from Davenport. I am running out of time. I just want to conclude. I’m getting the nod from the whip. He’s finally come to. He was buried in something there.

I want to again say that bringing in this bill was the height of cynicism, playing those kinds of games with our municipalities, with our taxpayers, with this Legislature. These kinds of tricks and these kinds of games are part of the reason that there are creditability issues out there with politicians when they play these kinds of games.

1920

Mr. Paul Miller: I’m just going to start off tonight with a couple comments on the motion.

This is ironic, to say the least. The minister stands up and talks about expedience on the bill, trying to cut down on the discussion on the bill: “Let’s move it through. Let’s get it moving in the right direction. It’s not an important bill. There doesn’t seem to be much opposition to this bill.” That is so far from the truth that it’s unbelievable.

The ironic part about this is that they want to expedite their bill, they want to push it through, they want us all to be agreeable and work together as a team, yet when I brought Bill 6 to committee—which would’ve helped people when they lose their severance when plants close down, it would’ve helped people when they lose their back pay and their holiday pay, it would’ve helped the workers of this province—not only did they not even read my bill, they didn’t even know what the bill was about, and the government members of that committee shot it down before it even got to first base.

So it’s ironic that the minister stands up and thinks his bill is wonderful and that we should all agree to it without any long debate on it because it’s a wonderful bill. Well, I think it’s grossly underfunded and falls short of what we want. So as far as that motion goes, I have real problems with that.

Now to Bill 35, the Investing in Ontario Act: Why do we not want this bill to go through so quickly? Maybe because we have a few problems with it. I’d like to share a few problems I have with this bill. It’s the first time I’ve spoken on Bill 35, and I would like to talk about it.

One of the things we in the opposition benches are well accustomed to under the present government is the introduction of new legislation where pomp and ceremony consistently supplant content and detail. Like cash-starved municipalities, in the budget we had hoped for action in addressing Ontario’s mounting infrastructure deficit and the chronic need for repairs and upgrades to our municipal water systems, sewer systems, roads and bridges, as well as the expansion of our transit systems.

New Democrats had hoped that when it came to providing the desperately needed long-term funding for infrastructure investments to protect public health, our environment and our economy, the McGuinty government would have come forward with a sizable down payment on the growing \$60-billion deficit facing infrastructure in Ontario municipalities, including the \$30-billion to \$40-billion deficit in our water and sewage infrastructure alone. But another budget has come and gone and cash-starved municipalities still struggle under provincial downloading, and, consequently, infrastructure renewal on the scale necessary just isn't happening.

Before I discuss the details or, more specifically, the lack of details contained in Bill 35, the Investing in Ontario Act, 2008, I would like to address the issue of municipal infrastructure funding, the issue which this bill was supposed to deal with.

Downloading and infrastructure deficit: As New Democrats have argued time and time again, revenue spent funding provincial programs over the past years has left the municipal cupboard bare, and infrastructure funding has greatly suffered. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities estimates that Ontario bridges need \$2 billion over the next five years for rehabilitation alone. So it's little wonder why the government's \$1-billion end-of-the-year rollout is to be seen as little more than a down payment on what's needed. At the same time, as the lifespan of infrastructure is reaching an end, many municipalities across the province—especially those dependent on agriculture, manufacturing and forestry—are finding their municipal taxpayers overstretched and, increasingly, unemployed.

Losing industry is devastating to the property tax base of Ontario municipalities. In many smaller communities, property taxes on the local industries make up a substantial proportion of the property tax base. So when a mill or plant shuts its doors, municipalities can find themselves having a very difficult time paying their bills. Yet because the McGuinty government is failing to fully fund provincially mandated services, these same municipalities have little choice but to raise property taxes to cover services which shouldn't be theirs in the first place. So the funding that should be used for infrastructure goes to paying the bill for provincially mandated services downloaded onto our municipalities.

Province-wide, municipal governments presently pick up the following costs for provincially mandated social programs: ODSP and related drug programs, \$1.3 billion, of which about \$600 million is ODSP; social housing, \$879 million; ambulance, \$289 million; public health, \$250 million; child care, \$193 million; total, \$3.1 billion.

There was a deathbed repentance by the McGuinty Liberals just prior to the 2007 election campaign, where they promised to eliminate the roughly \$660 million for ODSP that municipalities are forced to pay by the year 2011—four years too late. The McGuinty Liberals said they would also upload \$173 million for the Ontario drug benefit program, but when we add up the promises and subtract them from the \$3.1-billion total, municipalities

are still out of pocket over \$2 billion—\$2 billion of property taxes going to pay for provincial programs when municipalities desperately need those funds to repair roads and other infrastructure, as well as transit.

In the city of Toronto, property taxes increased this year by 3.75%. Why? Because Toronto is forced to bear significant provincial costs due to provincial downloading. Another common scenario, as seen in the region of Waterloo this budget year, is where councils are forced to dip into reserve funds to keep taxes around 4%. In my community of Hamilton, initially 20 years ago 70% of our tax base was industrial or manufacturing; 30% was residential. As of last year, that is exactly the opposite. We in the Hamilton area are one of the highest-taxed people in Ontario, yet we don't have the resources; we don't have the backing of this government to the point where we can even survive. Also, we have the unpopular position of being one of the poorest areas in Ontario: 20% of the people in my area, 20% of 500,000, are living below the poverty level—disgraceful.

Bill 35 specifics: So what's the McGuinty government's response to the public infrastructure deficit across Ontario? A long-term plan with funding certainly is requested by municipalities. No. The McGuinty government's answer is to allow any future provincial surpluses to be allocated to any "eligible entity" at a time when designated long-term funding is required by Ontario municipalities.

The minister announced that he proposed to introduce Bill 35 at a press conference with municipal politicians on March 12, which included the mayor of Mississauga and the president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. The minister stated that the bill would be a way to fund municipal infrastructure in times of future surpluses. Now, forget about the fact that there may not be a large enough surplus in the 2007-08 fiscal year to turn over any infrastructure funding in Ontario municipalities, as the estimated surplus has already shrunk from \$750 million in the fall economic statement to the \$600 million in the budget, both being less than the government has said it required to trigger the legislation.

Forget about all that, because now that we have the legislation in hand, we can see that it's very troubling indeed. The word "infrastructure" is not mentioned once in the legislation. Further, municipalities are not mentioned once in the legislation. This bill may, in the event that surpluses of any size ever return to Ontario, fund eligible recipients. But that does not necessarily mean municipalities, and it doesn't necessarily mean infrastructure.

I ask the minister whether municipal councils across the province, those same municipal councils starving for infrastructure funding, are aware that this bill is not specifically about them and their needs but could include any non-governmental organization to which the government chooses to channel funding. Not only does the cupboard now appear bare, with the surplus required supposedly to trigger this legislation slipping out of sight, or at least the surplus the minister says is required, be-

cause the actual threshold is not stated in the legislation, but also the legislation doesn't guarantee any funding for municipal infrastructure funding, period.

As structured, this legislation is a cruel joke. The enabling and open-ended nature of this legislation does nothing other than create a legislative framework through which the government can potentially roll out any surplus funds at year end to any group they want through an order in council. We know that the McGuinty Liberal government was caught rolling out funding to various groups at the expense of others without proper guidelines in place last year during the slush fund scandal. And I know, I would venture to say, that this legislation is a veiled attempt by the McGuinty government to create a legislative framework for them to continue picking winners and losers in times of budget surpluses. It is seriously flawed in its present state and New Democrats will not be supporting it. We will be amending this legislation so that it applies specifically to municipalities and especially their neglected infrastructure and future needs.

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One is left to wonder, why couldn't we be using this legislative time to do something that would benefit municipalities and their infrastructure needs, like making long-overdue amendments to the Development Charges Act? Instead of spending time providing a legislative framework to inoculate the government against future slush fund scandals, as witnessed last year, why are we not listening to the request of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, the people who deal with this every day, the people who know the communities?

The Development Charges Act, to ensure that any future growth pays its own way, should happen now. New Democrats have raised this issue in the past and will continue to call on the McGuinty government to stop subsidizing developers at the expense of municipal governments. But we won't be sanctioning the McGuinty government's desire to be able to channel surpluses away from municipalities and municipal infrastructure, as this bill will do in its present form. What happened under the McGuinty government—and we see it exemplified again in this proposed legislation—is that the content and detail have given way to spin and fluff.

In conclusion, I can say that I'm very disappointed in the lack of communication between the opposition parties and the government as far as sitting down and discussing these bills in detail. It all seems to be announcements in the House, followed up by no committee work. My bill, Bill 6, was the only bill in front of the committee. They didn't read it; they didn't look at it; they shot it down and it went on the backburner—the only bit of business they had to deal with, and they couldn't do that. Yet they stand here today, the minister stands there and says, "Oh, we want co-operation from the opposition. We would like to move this through quickly. This is a good bill. We can't understand why anyone would oppose it. We don't hear any opposition to it."

I don't know if they're walking around with earmuffs on, but there is a lot of opposition to it. It's grossly underfunded. It doesn't do what it has to do for the working people of this province and the municipalities. Until they deal with that, until they're willing to bring it in front of committees and get input from the opposition, who—they claim, "We're all here working together. We're here to work as a team for the people of Ontario." I don't think the word "I" is in the word "team."

I really have big concerns. They're pushing it through. They're not dealing with it. They're not dealing with us. That's the scary part about a majority government. When you have a minority Parliament, more things get done for the people of this province. Until we have another minority Parliament, we are not going to get a heck of a lot done for the benefit of the people in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I'd like to add my part to this debate, but before I speak about the Investing in Ontario Act, let me just say a few words in response to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. The member had indicated that our government is really unable to come to grips with the \$800 million, in terms of determining what's in the budget.

Let me point out to you how quickly he forgets what happened just a very few short years ago. I remember sitting over here and being somewhat surprised that the forecast of the budget, just before the election took place—do you remember that? What was the difference when they were saying to us that the budget is balanced? That's when we went into an election, assuming that the budget was balanced. What was the difference in the budget?

Interjection.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: We're not simply talking about a few million. I know that the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke doesn't want to hear this. Look, he's turned his back. He's turned his back on the fact that the budget was out by \$5.6 billion. We're not talking about \$1 million here. No. We're talking about the Conservative approach just before the election was called. It was not \$1 million, but it was \$5.6 billion.

Mr. John Yakabuski: On point of order, Mr. Speaker: I need to point out to the member from Davenport that the fiscal year ended six months after they were elected.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I don't think that's a point of order.

I'll return to the member from Davenport.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Whatever the member says now is really questionable because he didn't want to hear the point of \$5.6 billion. If you're responding to my point, why don't you just admit that you were wrong by \$5.6 billion, and we can continue with the debate? We can continue with the debate. Just accept it, apologize to the people of Ontario and say, "We were wrong by \$5.6 billion."

I want you to know why the Liberal government got elected in the first place.

Interjections.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Mr. Speaker, look: They are shouting us down.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'd ask the member for Davenport to make his remarks through the Chair.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: They are shouting us down. Why? It's clear to see why they're shouting us down. They want to forget what \$5.6 billion could buy. Today, let's look at the facts, and I would also appreciate—

Interjections.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Yes, Mr. Speaker, again, shouting us down. Why? Because they were wrong by \$5.6 billion.

Interjection.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I was quiet and I listened to you very respectfully. I was quiet and listened to you because I wanted to prepare the response to your point of why we may be out by \$1 billion or \$2 billion in a budget that has billions of dollars in it. Yet at the same time, if you are in a glass house, remember this: Don't throw stones. Don't call the kettle black; remember that. That's an important item. If you ever stand up again and want to criticize this government being out by a few thousand or a few million dollars, I want you to remember that you were out by \$5.6 billion. I think that is a deficit that is still unforgivable. That's the reason why on this side of the House we are more believable than a debt of \$5.6 billion.

Let me turn to the NDP. They were quiet up to this point.

Interjections.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: They were very quiet but now they are beginning to speak. Look at them. Why doesn't the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek explain to us, to this House tonight, why they voted against the Spadina subway extension? Tell us that, please. We are ready in this budget to commit the funds to have the people of Toronto able to go to York University by subway. Now, what's wrong with that? What's wrong with having people of Toronto being able to access a university by subway? What's wrong with that? You stand there in your place and you expect—

Mr. Paul Miller: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm very concerned about the outburst from the member across. The member is throwing accusations and throwing my name around. I wasn't even here when they voted—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): You don't have a point of order.

The member for Davenport has the floor.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: It's not a point of order. I did not throw your name around. I just wanted you to explain to the people—and let's face it, you're really making a point that doesn't have anything to do with the subway. Okay.

Mr. Paul Miller: I don't live in Toronto.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: It doesn't matter.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'd just ask the member for Davenport to take a seat. Decorum in this House will be enhanced if the member for Davenport would make his comments through the Chair. I would ask him to do so.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: The main point of all of this is that this government for the first time is giving two cents per litre to whom? To the municipalities. And you know what? They voted against it.

Interjection.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: You voted for it or you voted against it. Tell the people of Ontario why you would do that. Tell me this.

Interjection.

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Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Is it true or not? How did you vote? You voted against the tax funds for transit.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member for Davenport: This is I think the third time I've asked him to make his comments through the Chair, and I would ask him to do so.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Mr. Speaker, I see nothing in the standing orders that prevents me from pointing over there.

If you want to say anything, I will listen to you respectfully, as I hope you'll listen to me.

Mr. Paul Miller: I didn't attack you personally.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Look, I did not attack you personally. The question here is, does the NDP really care about municipalities? Let's have the record straight. You voted against gas tax funding for public transit.

Mr. Paul Miller: Who did?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: The NDP. You voted against uploading public health. You voted against increased infrastructure funding for roads and bridges. They voted against the Spadina subway extension, they voted against the gas tax funding for transit, they voted against increased funding for the arts and they voted, above all else, against more affordable housing. Is this true or not? Is this a fact or is this not a fact?

Mr. Paul Miller: No.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: You voted against affordable housing. I've got many more facts. Let me simply point out one more thing, if I may. This goes directly to the heart of this issue and to this bill. What does the mayor of Mississauga say about this?

Interjection: Can you give us the date of that vote?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: It says here, and I've the quote, March 12, 2008. That's the date. Is that what you want? What does it say? The mayor of Mississauga says, "It's a step in the right direction." Right. Now hold on.

What does Doug Reycraft, the president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, say? That includes all the municipalities. What does he say about this? He says very simply, "This is another significant step in the province's commitment to partnering with municipalities to help ease the infrastructure challenges they are facing."

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm now going to caution the opposition to refrain from heckling the member for Davenport, and again ask the member for Davenport to make his comments through the Chair, and that would help us to enhance the decorum in the House.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: There are many more quotes that I have here, but my time is up. I want to say thank you very much to you and to my colleagues.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I do want to say to the member for Parkdale–High Park—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Davenport.

Mr. Tim Hudak:—Davenport: Holy crow, that was even longer than one of your petitions. There's a motion on one of your petitions, but even longer than one of my colleague's petitions.

I'm always pleased to rise in the assembly to speak to a bill, but it's unfortunate that we find ourselves once again rising to speak to a time allocation motion by the government, which is effectively killing debate on Bill 35, the so-called Investing in Ontario Act.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The executioner was in here earlier.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I did see the executioner, I say to my colleague for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, walk in with his sickle and cowl on his head as he brought down the guillotine on Bill 35.

It's surprising, because I don't think in any way that this opposition has been obstructionist. We are debating the bill because we oppose this bill. It creates a new form of slush fund for the Dalton McGuinty government. They certainly have demonstrated it with their \$1-million funding announcement, by way of example, for the Ontario cricket club, but they really don't deserve the trust of taxpayers when it comes to Liberal slush funds.

A lot of the same gang that operated those famous slush funds for Jean Chrétien are now here at Queen's Park, so once bitten, twice shy. Twice bitten is a new expression; I don't know what that means. So there's a reason to be skeptical.

We were raising valid points on Bill 35. We, hopefully, will have a chance in committee to suggest reasonable amendments to the bill. If the government is adamant to pass it, we will look for reasonable amendments, and hopefully we'll win support from government members.

I know my colleagues in the third party—the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek was speaking earlier and the member for Toronto–Danforth as well—similarly have concerns about the new powers that the government wants to give itself to spend slush funds in the middle of summer; not by coincidence, I'm sure, before the next election as well. Just like we saw the last Dalton McGuinty slush fund throw out all kinds of money to various groups to buy their support before the election campaign, this would make that an annual event, and then would occur probably in August or September 2011, just before the writ is dropped for the next campaign.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Just before the weather really warmed up. They'd call it the annual slush party.

Mr. Tim Hudak: A good line by my colleague from Renfrew.

So we have raised legitimate concerns about this bill. They are legitimate concerns. I know my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke brought up earlier that the minister had said that municipalities would be receiving this money given a certain surplus level, knowing full well what the surplus was going to be. It was only a week before he introduced the legislation that he had the press conference with municipal representatives and talked about all this funding that was going to municipalities, leaving the impression—whether he did so intentionally or not; I think he did—with municipalities that this money was going to flow and they were going to have all kinds of funds coming out as a result of the surplus, knowing full well what the surplus was going to be.

I can say this with great certainty, because when the finance minister was called to lower the tax rate by the official opposition, to give a break to working families and seniors or to help create a better investment climate in Ontario—similarly called on to do that by the federal finance minister—the Ontario finance minister, Mr. Duncan, basically in reply said, “Well, the budget's already written. It's been written for some time and it's at the printers.” I think he actually knew what the surplus was going to be when he made this announcement. He brought in a surplus of \$600 million when the trigger point was to be \$800 million, according to his press conference.

So we have good reasons to be skeptical about the government's true intentions around this bill. We have brought them up in debate, and now we find ourselves tonight with a time allocation motion, effectively ending debate on this bill now—brought the hammer down.

Interjection.

Mr. Tim Hudak: One of my colleagues across the floor says, “About time.” Well, I don't think we were using delaying tactics. We weren't ringing bells; we were bringing thoughtful suggestions forward on this bill, and the government decides, “Well, that's it, we're cutting off debate.”

I guess that's suitable, Mr. Speaker, because as you well know, earlier today we were debating rule changes in the Ontario Legislature that the government has brought forward under the guise of being family friendly. They're anything but, particularly for young parents who come from outside of Toronto. Under the new rules, they will probably find it more difficult to participate in debates, and it's discouraging to women and men with young children who live outside of Toronto.

But the most upsetting thing is the way they are limiting the access of the press to ministers, and limiting the access of the press to have stories from question period for their afternoon news. You may be aware that on April 22, which is today, the press gallery in a rather unprecedented move—I'm not familiar with another time when the press gallery has written a letter like this to the

government, to the Premier and Mr. Bryant. They said the following: “Gallery members have grave misgivings the new schedule would limit access to cabinet ministers and the Premier by reporters in the following ways.”

They talked about post—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I caution the member to speak to the motion that is before the House. I return to the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I appreciate that. I’m trying to make the point that it’s sadly unsurprising that we have the time allocation motion before the assembly that’s consistent with the pattern this government has adopted in a pique of second-term arrogance, to try to limit the ability of opposition members to hold them to account. The press gallery notes that, “The new schedule would cut this access to cabinet in half.

“The gallery considers that any reduction in access would undermine the function of a free press at Queen’s Park.”

Their third point: “Losing the access to ministers after question period in the afternoons makes it more difficult for reporters to get reaction to news stories breaking later in the day.” I won’t belabour that point, although it’s an important one because it shows Dalton McGuinty’s true view of the Legislature.

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I know my colleagues opposite were probably quite outraged, like I was, when Dalton McGuinty suggested that members of his own caucus don’t work before noon. Dalton McGuinty said something to the effect that how could he tell Ontario families that work in the Legislature wouldn’t start by 9? I know that members of the Liberal Party are probably very upset with the way their Premier characterized them as not working before 1:30 in the afternoon. I was outraged, and I know you are as well. I hope that you bring it up in caucus. I hope that you have the guts to stand up in caucus and say to the Premier that this is outrageous that he told his own members, effectively, that they’re lazy. The Premier stood here in the Legislature and said that his own members in the assembly don’t start work till 1:30 p.m. The member for Huron—Bruce hopefully had the guts to stand up in caucus and call the Premier on this, because that’s exactly what he said.

The other issue here is that the minister claimed that his bill, Bill 35, which is the subject of the guillotine motion—the time allocation motion—tonight, was modelled on federal Bill C-48. Federal Bill C-48 was brought forward by the then Paul Martin government. I know that there are a lot of Paul Martin supporters here in the assembly and a lot of Stéphane Dion supporters among the Liberal caucus members here tonight. Why they are strong supporters of Stéphane Dion, I’m not sure, but I know that there are a lot of Stéphane Dion supporters on the Liberal benches. This was Paul Martin’s Bill C-48. It was short-lived. It lasted, by the design of the bill, two fiscal years only. Bill 35, brought forward by the finance minister, is entirely different. It would be in perpetuity. This legislation would envision the government annually

doing these summertime slush funds to Liberal friends. The Paul Martin bill, at the very least, was only two years before it sunsetted.

Also, Bill C-48 detailed in legislation specifically where the funds would go. My colleague from Renfrew and my colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek both noted that the word “municipalities” is not even mentioned in Bill 35. The word “infrastructure” is not mentioned at all in Bill 35. In fact, the bill gives cabinet very expansive powers to give grants to just about any group under the sun, as long as they’re not-for-profit. Just by way of example, cricket clubs: Cricket clubs could receive funding under Bill 35.

Mr. John Yakabuski: They’d have to be Liberal-friendly.

Mr. Tim Hudak: As my colleague says, it looks like the only qualification, judging by the act we saw last time, is that they’re Liberal-friendly.

Bill C-48 was for two fiscal years. It said, “The enactment authorizes the Minister of Finance”—again, this is federal—“to make certain payments out of the annual surplus in excess of \$2 billion in respect of the fiscal years 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 for the purposes and in the aggregate amount specified. This enactment also provides that, for its purposes, the Governor in Council may authorize a minister to undertake a specified measure.”

Then Bill C-48, supposedly the model for Bill 35 before the assembly, gets into actual allocation of payments: “(a) for the environment, including for public transit and for an energy-efficient retrofit program for low-income housing, an amount not exceeding \$900 million”—so it’s clear what the funding would be used for and the exact amount of the surplus that would be so designated; “(b) for supporting training programs and enhancing access to post-secondary education, to benefit, among others, aboriginal Canadians, an amount not exceeding \$1.5 billion.” Again, they specify the groups that would receive the funding and the amount of funding clearly in the legislation itself.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No cricket clubs in there, right?

Mr. Tim Hudak: A cricket club has not been mentioned yet, although I do have sections (c) and (d) to get to still: “(c) for affordable housing, including housing for aboriginal Canadians, an amount not exceeding \$1.6 billion; and

“(d) for foreign aid, an amount not exceeding \$500 million.”

Bill C-48 outlined specifically the amount of funding to be set aside and the purposes and the particular groups that would receive grants if the bill were passed. It was passed. The NDP supported it. This was part of the Jack Layton and Paul Martin accord. This was part of that package, and it did pass at the time. The Conservative Party of Canada did oppose this legislation. It’s no longer in existence because, as I said, it was sunsetted.

At the end of day, though, the fact is that if the Liberal government and the finance minister and the Premier

truly wanted to allocate slush funds to municipalities or other groups, they would have done one of a few things.

First, they would have actually put that in the bill. As I said, we oppose the bill. I think a sensible amendment that the Progressive Conservatives may bring forward, however, if the government still plans on doing this, would be to actually put in the legislation, through amendment, “for municipalities and for infrastructure.” If that’s truly what they were interested in, they would actually put that in the legislation.

Secondly, you could follow the model of C-48, which the government says it’s trying to do, by being much more specific in the legislation, rather than leaving this wide-open section with respect to slush funds, as they have done with this bill.

In fact, Carolyn Parrish, a former federal Liberal member and now a councillor in Mississauga—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Running for mayor.

Mr. Tim Hudak: My colleague from St. Catharines says she’s running for mayor, which could very well be the case—did pin the tail, so to speak, by saying that this legislation is a ruse by the government; it is not about support for municipalities.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Hazel likes it.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, I’m not sure. My colleague says that the mayor of Mississauga likes it.

Mr. John Yakabuski: What’s the date of that quote, Jim?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Yes, I think that quote that she gave may be stale-dated, because she gave that quote far before she saw the details that this would be contingent on a surplus of \$800 million or more and that municipalities and infrastructure were not in the bill.

So I regret that we have to rise to speak to a time allocation motion once again on a bill on which we have been constructive in opposition. We will have our suggestions at committee, and I hope we will have government members’ support for those amendments, to truly make it about funding for municipalities, if that is the true purpose of the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: This evening, I have been asked by my House leader to come and talk to Bill 35, the Investing in Ontario Act, 2008. Quite honestly, I didn’t expect, when I got my House schedule, that time allocation would be imposed. I think, on the part of the government House leader, this is a fundamental error. It’s reflective, I think, of second-term arrogance on the part of this government. Quite honestly, this is an important bill, but I had no sense from the opposition or from my colleagues that we were going to spend days talking this to death. People were making substantive points about the content here. But for whatever reason, this government that has in the last few weeks found that we were running out of debate in the evenings has decided to put forward closure on this bill. That’s extraordinary to me. Why on earth was this required? What feverish moment

seized the government House leader and made him say, “You know, I need to kill off debate on this one”?

It has to be said that this is a terrible bill. It has to be said that this bill is not what was advertised when the press conference first occurred. What we have before us is not directed toward municipalities.

But I will get into that a bit later. I want to go back to this whole question of time allocation. It is not as though this debate was held up. I would say, in fact, that debate on this bill was slowly winding down. I don’t see this bill as crucial or central to the government’s agenda, because we’re talking about disposition of surpluses that may well not arise. Because we’re not talking about actually dealing in a substantial way with solving the fiscal problem that confronts municipalities in Ontario, you have to ask yourself, what was so crucial about this bill to force it through? Why on earth would you time-allocate a bill the debate of which has slowly been coming to an end?

I have to go back to the suggestion that this reflects an attitude on the part of the government House leader. That attitude has come through very strongly in the changes to the standing orders, something that most folks in the real world out there who may be watching this tonight don’t spend a lot of time thinking about. They don’t wake up at 3 in the morning and think, “Oh, my God, the standing orders at Queen’s Park are being changed. How will I eat my breakfast in the morning? How will my children be able to feed themselves?” Because, in fact, the standing orders don’t seize them.

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But I want to say, because it ties back directly to this whole question of democracy, accountability and closure, that what’s been brought forward by this government, in essentially moving question period to reduce the accountability of the government, reduce the accessibility of ministers to reporters—what this government is doing is further reducing and controlling the information that comes out of Queen’s Park, so that you, voters and citizens in this province, have less knowledge about what’s going on at Queen’s Park, less ability to hold politicians to account, less control and, ultimately, less democracy.

Mr. Hudak was reading a letter from the Queen’s Park press gallery. In fact, that letter read out today made it very clear that the reporters who cover this place know that their ability to get answers, to probe, to put information out into the general public, will be reduced by what this government is doing. That’s entirely consistent with this second-term arrogance that we’re seeing from the government House leader.

I want to say to people that it is crucial that the citizenry and opposition parties are able to hold government to account. No government is all-knowing—one can hope that no government is all-seeing—and they will, without a doubt, setting aside partisan issues, make mistakes from time to time. Let’s set it aside as a partisan issue and just say that you have a bunch of people who are given the responsibility for running this province. From time to time they will make mistakes, and it is our job, those of

us on the opposition benches and those who sit up in the press gallery, to hold them to account when we see things going off the tracks. When the government presses down, squeezes down, makes it difficult for people to get information, makes it difficult for information to get out, then the ability to correct those errors is substantially reduced.

I've been here now for two years and about a month, so not a long history at Queen's Park, but I had the opportunity in question period to watch as the commitment to shutting down coal-fired power in this province unravelled. It was the questions that were put in question period—not the answers, because, frankly, we didn't get much in the way of answers. What we got was some truly inspired Fred Astaire-type dancing, something that everyone should have an opportunity to witness. Frankly, what we got was not answer period but question period, and it was question period that was able to bring out what was really happening.

That's the crucial part about democracy. When people write to me or phone my office and say, "What can be done about this? How can we hold this government to account?" I talk to them about the need to make what the government is doing public, known to the great mass of citizens in this province. That's what's crucial.

I was here last year when we went through the whole slushgate stuff, the whole citizenship and immigration dispensing of sums of money through the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration's office. It was quite extraordinary as we started digging into that story. We were told that what was happening was dispensation of year-end funds. This is a ministry with a budget of \$90 million a year dispensing something—if I remember correctly—around \$30 million. I have to say to you who are watching this, and to you, Speaker, who is patiently listening to this, that when you have a ministry with a budget of \$90 million that has left-over funds at the end of the year of \$30 million, it's right and proper to ask questions: "What is really going on?" And the ability for us, day in and day out, to hammer the government and make sure that that press gallery could hear and that press gallery could start asking their own questions was crucial to making sure that that government was held to account.

I have to say to those who are watching that my first intimation of problems was when I got a call from friends in the Bangladeshi community at Victoria Park and Danforth, saying that they'd seen a press conference with someone who really had not had a history of doing work in the community getting a quarter-million-dollar grant—a bit of a shock. That's a fair amount of cash for a community that has been facing great difficulties.

As that story unfolded, because we had question period, because the press gallery was in a position to put the heat on, the reality is that that broke things open as to what was really going on—the Auditor General was brought in—to the extent that this government is doing everything it can to close down debate and shut down the media agenda. Democracy is not served.

People have to know—you, the public, have to know—how the media canvass can be manipulated and

shaped by a government that has very large resources. It was interesting to me last summer going to a press conference that the Premier gave at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre on climate change. He gave his press conference, there were a bunch of people there talking, a bunch of people commenting, and it got very bad reviews. Later that day, the Premier did another press conference about his money for manufacturing that wiped out all the coverage on the climate change story. It was a bad story, and they squashed it. They realized they weren't getting good coverage, and they squashed it.

I will say this to you right now: The standing orders that are coming forward will be used in the same way. We will have question period in the morning, and if it goes badly, dollars to doughnuts, in the afternoon there will be a substantial announcement made to blot out the coverage from morning question period.

What we're seeing here with time allocation is reflective of that anti-democratic approach that is starting to infect this government, and one that this government should be very leery of.

Having talked about the time allocation and the substantial problems with how this government, frankly, is bringing on themselves criticism that they could have avoided by simply letting this bill go through its normal span of debate—again, I think it's beyond tactics, but at least tactically, the government House leader made a huge miscall on time-allocating this bill. This bill, Bill 35, for those who are interested, this little sheaf of paper, is nothing more than a legislative veil behind which the Liberal Party can keep flowing funds to chosen groups in Ontario at the expense of other groups that are equally in need of government support.

If you live in a municipality or a city in Ontario, you know the difficulties that are faced. You have driven on the potholed roads. You have gone into community buildings that have been in bad shape. You've heard about the bridge that collapsed down in Essex. You've heard from—

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Chatham–Kent–Essex.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Chatham–Kent, thank you—just so that there's a correction of the record. I thank the member.

I have to say as well that the MPP from Timmins–James Bay talked about the deterioration of a bridge in his riding, to the point where there's only one lane left. I talked to John Sewell, a well-known critic of municipal issues in this province, about his experience in going out to talk to regional municipalities in rural Ontario where they don't have the money or the resources to keep the bridge infrastructure in good shape. The member from Timmins–James Bay was right last week when he pressed hard for this government to take on the approach that's being taken on in Quebec, where municipalities with a population of less than 100,000 have their bridge maintenance expenses turned back to the province.

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Hon. James J. Bradley: With Ontario money.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The reality is that Quebec learned the hard way, very brutally, that you cannot neglect infrastructure. Unfortunately, this bill is not going to correct that problem. If you look at this bill, you will find that municipalities are not referenced anywhere in the bill and neither is infrastructure. When the bill was announced, it was announced specifically as designed to address municipal infrastructure shortfalls.

Even if the McGuinty government has promised to share surplus funds from 2007-08 with cash-strapped municipalities, there's a reality that as our economy faces tougher and tougher times, there's less and less likelihood that there will in fact be a surplus available to share. Frankly, even if that's not the case, there's no planable assurance that in fact in future years that surplus will be available for infrastructure. In fact, it's fair to say that this bill is a cruel joke when it comes to Ontario's municipalities.

I've sat on Toronto city council. Many of those in this chamber have sat on city councils. I think a number of them have been mayors. They know what it's like when the time comes to actually set that budget and deal with the fact that they have problems before them that have to be dealt with, that may well be life-threatening, may well be life-and-limb risking, and yet they find themselves completely cash-strapped.

As my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek said in his speech, the shortfall from downloading that municipalities face in this province is around \$3 billion. That is a very large burden for them to carry. If you wonder why your municipality is not maintaining roads, community centres and other infrastructure the way it should, his comments illuminate why, because these expenses have been dumped on them.

I asked the Minister of Transportation just the other day about resumption of 50% sharing of transit operating costs in this province. Transit is crucial to making sure our cities are livable. If we want to clean up the air, if we want to deal with smog, if we want to make sure that people can get to work, if we want to make sure that companies are not held up, not finding their workers and their goods trapped in gridlock, we have to have funding for transit. We have to have funding for transit operations. We don't have that. We have municipalities from Ottawa to Windsor, from Toronto to Thunder Bay, faced with huge financial burdens.

This bill, which is supposed to address that, does not. People should know that this bill uses a formula that will be determined by regulation—we actually don't have the formula before us; we don't get to vote on that in this House—that will allocate any fiscal surplus to eligible recipients.

Now I'm just going to take a moment and read out the definition of "eligible recipients."

"3(1) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations,

"(a) prescribing eligible recipients and classes of eligible recipients for the purposes of this act;

"(b) prescribing the purposes for which payments may be made under this act;

"(c) prescribing the method of and the basis for calculating payments to be made under this act;

"(d) prescribing activities in which the Minister of Finance may engage in furtherance of the purposes of this act;

"(e) prescribing, for the purposes of the definition of 'B' in subsection 2(2), the amount, if any, of the surplus for a fiscal year to be allocated to the reduction of the accumulated deficit shown in the province's consolidated financial statements for the fiscal year."

"'Eligible recipient' means a person or entity, other than an individual but including a partnership whose members may be individuals, that does not carry on activities for the purpose of gain or profit."

Municipalities don't get named. Infrastructure and its repair and maintenance is not identified as a reason for the existence of this legislation. So if you and your municipality today are worried about how it's going to function in future, don't think that this act, these few pages, is actually going to give you the relief that you need, that your community needs, that your city or town or village needs. It isn't there.

What this will do, however, is in future impose some discipline, some order, and thus some cover so that a government like this, this Liberal government, can avoid future slushgate scandals, because in future, all those slushy funds that are rolled out the door will have been sanctioned through this legislation. So everyone will know that at the end of the year, there is potential for this stuff to be there, to be grabbed, and it will all be nice and clean, sparkling, put out on the clothesline. And in the end, the cities and the towns in this province will not have their infrastructure needs dealt with, and we in this Legislature will be hearing from our angry constituents talking about the state of their cities and their towns.

On March 12, the Minister of Finance brought municipal politicians to Queen's Park. He held a press conference and talked about launching this proposed Investing in Ontario Act. Who came? Mississauga Mayor McCallion, the president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, Doug Reycraft. And in that press conference, Finance Minister Duncan clearly stated this act was about using any provincial surplus to help municipalities fund infrastructure such as social housing, roads and transit.

I'll read the press release, because I've given you a bit from the act. So compare and contrast what was said at the press conference.

"Government Targeting Surpluses for Roads, Transit and Social Housing"—that was the headline. It seems to be straightforward to me. I don't know. I learned to read in an Ontario school. The words are straightforward.

"March 12 ... The Ontario government is proposing legislation that would dedicate additional surpluses to Ontario's communities.

"The proposed bill, which would be called the Investing in Ontario Act, would direct a portion of provincial surpluses to municipalities for infrastructure needs, such

as improving roads and bridges, expanding transit and upgrading social housing.”

I don’t know about you, I don’t know about you folks out there who are watching this, but that sounds fairly straightforward to me. I would have thought when I read this act I’d see words like “municipality,” “infrastructure,” “roads,” “transit,” “housing.”

Here are some of the quotes:

“‘The proposed Investing in Ontario Act would strike a balance by ensuring that surpluses would go to both debt reduction and to government priorities,’ said Ontario Finance Minister Dwight Duncan.” Ah, this is a good one: “‘Investing in municipal infrastructure not only addresses the capital needs of our communities, but it also creates more jobs in the short term and prosperity in the long run.’”

Well, my goodness, I think that’s a true statement: investing in municipalities and their infrastructure. It’s unfortunate that this bill does not explicitly do that. In fact, this bill is extraordinarily vague.

What did Mr. Watson have to say?

“‘This proposed legislation is another clear demonstration of our government’s commitment to treating municipalities as true partners in building stronger Ontario communities,’ said Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Jim Watson.”

Minister, I have to ask you: Were you given a copy of this act before you went into this press conference?

Let me read the explanatory note. For those who haven’t read legislation before, for us legislators there’s essentially a Coles Notes version at the beginning. It just takes a few pages and it boils it down. I’ll just read those, because you’ve just heard what was said at the press conference.

“Explanatory Note: The Investing in Ontario Act, 2008 authorizes the Minister of Finance to make payments out of money appropriated by the Legislature to certain persons and entities that do not carry on their activities for the purpose of gain or profit.”

I’ll step aside for a moment. Municipalities could fit into that definition, but they are not expressly targeted as the recipients of these funds.

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“The total payments made under the new act in each fiscal year shall not exceed the lesser of,

“(a) the amount appropriated by the Legislature; and

“(b) the amount that would otherwise be the annual surplus for that fiscal year less the prescribed amount, if any, of that surplus allocated to the reduction of the accumulated deficit.

“The new act authorizes the Minister of Finance to determine the terms and conditions on which payments may be made.

“The Lieutenant Governor in Council is authorized to prescribe by regulation the recipients to whom payments may be made, the purposes for which payments may be made, the method of and basis for calculating the payments, the activities in which the Minister of Finance may engage in furtherance of the purposes of this act and

the amount of the surplus, if any, for a fiscal year that must be allocated to the reduction of the province’s accumulated deficit.

“Complementary amendments are made to the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, 2004, the Ministry of Treasury and Economics Act and the Treasury Board Act, 1991.”

Well, I have to say, having gone through the Coles Notes version, there’s no mention of municipalities, there’s no mention of infrastructure, and there’s no commitment of the government to actually deal with those fundamental problems. So you have to ask: What in fact is this act about? Because it is not as advertised.

I remember once—I’d lived in Toronto for a few years—I read about a vacuum cleaner that was on sale at a shop in the west end at a great price. I took the streetcar down and found out they were out of stock. They did have vacuum cleaners, but they were like 50% more. And, you know, the guy would give me a real deal; he’d take 10 bucks off, so that would be 40% more than what was advertised. I think “bait and switch” is the term, and I think that’s what we have here. We have a vacuum cleaner salesman who has moved on to greater things, who has decided that municipalities and vacuum cleaners are all the same in the end. “We’re going to put forward an act that allows us to do all kinds of interesting things with groups that we have”—what can I say?—“some tender feelings towards, that are not necessarily municipalities or infrastructure,” when in fact there’s a huge need to deal with those issues.

I was in estimates last year with the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. It was interesting to me that that ministry had not thought about how to deal with the impact of climate change on infrastructure. And in fact in Peterborough, twice in this decade, we’ve had the downtown flooded out; in the city of Toronto, we’ve had Finch Avenue West washed out. That’s a big street, folks. For those who haven’t seen it, we’re not talking about a little laneway; we’re talking about a big road. We have had substantial damage, I believe, to the Highland Creek sewage treatment plant from a very large storm. So municipalities that have been struggling for a long time, facing big financial challenges, carrying this burden of a \$3-billion download, face future costs. This bill that is advertised is not going to solve their problem.

You know that many people, many financial analysts and business page writers, talk about the potential for rough times in the Ontario economy. And we all know who is going to carry the bill for that: municipalities that are already cash-strapped. They need substantial, predictable, material assistance to make sure that our cities run well, because if they don’t run well, first of all, our citizens suffer—that frankly should be enough, but I’ll add that the economy of this province is undermined. People don’t like investing in places that are coming unglued. And to the extent that we don’t actually put the money in the infrastructure so that we have a fully functional urban infrastructure wherever we have cities, we

undermine our ability to attract investment and ensure that people are employed.

I have to say, I wouldn't be surprised if there were some who supported this bill. I would say it goes beyond the members of the Liberal Party. I would say there are those who are hopeful that when the roulette wheel stops spinning and the ball finally drops into the groove, perhaps their organization will feel the warmth of the finance minister's smile cast upon them.

This bill will have given the finance minister all the tools and structure that he needs to do that. The municipalities will be standing out in the rain. They will have broken umbrellas, and they will not be happy campers. But some people, some organizations that benefited from largesse last year, a largesse that was investigated by the Auditor General, may well be happy with this bill.

This bill is essentially writing a blank cheque to the finance minister so he can dish out surpluses as he or she should wish. It is not a bill that can be supported by anyone in this Legislature who wants to hold a government to account. Frankly, the time allocation that we are discussing right now is one that is a fundamental error on the part of this government and one they should not have put forward.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm pleased to stand up and speak in support of the time allocation motion and Bill 35, the Investing in Ontario Act. When this bill was introduced in the House sometime in March, I looked at the bill and read it. I listened to the Minister of Finance when he introduced it, the reason and intent behind the whole bill, and I thought to myself: "All my colleagues from both sides of the House are going to support it, because they want to support investment in municipalities. They want to give the ability to the Ministry of Finance, if they have some extra dollars, to invest it back in municipalities, especially when it exceeds \$600 million."

I was shocked and surprised when we came back to the debate. I see members from both parties, NDP and Conservative, standing up and speaking against this bill. I thought that for the first time, with great hope, people would support the municipalities across the province of Ontario.

On this side of the House, as the government, we believe strongly in working together—between municipalities and the province—because we believe strongly that that's the only way we can be prosperous, where we will be able to enhance our ability and progress toward the future, because we believe strongly that with that partnership, we can enable our municipalities to deal with their infrastructure needs: to fix the bridges, the roads, whatever they need.

I know from the past budget that our government, two times, in two different fashions, invested more than \$1 billion in the municipalities. The first time was \$400 million that went across the province of Ontario. It went to all the municipalities. I know our share in London was about \$6 million and some change, to help my city of London fix their roads and their bridges. The second time around, we got the chance to receive \$11 million to be

invested in an innovation park, to prepare that park to welcome the many different companies that want to invest in London.

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I think it was a good initiative. It all came because of our government's idea, philosophy and ideology: to invest in the communities and municipalities and give them the chance to be a full partner with us. This bill came to continue that direction, to invest more in municipalities, because as you know, many colleagues spoke before me, talking about the needs out there in the municipalities for roads, bridges, infrastructure, many different elements. Those municipalities need our support badly. That's why the bill came: to give us the ability to invest whatever extra we might have after we have a surplus of more than \$600 million, to go to the municipalities.

I think it's a very good initiative. It's an important initiative to create a mechanism to enable our Minister of Finance and our government to continue to invest in municipalities. I wonder why the Conservatives and the NDP don't like this investment in municipalities.

Mr. Paul Miller: It's not enough money.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: It's not enough, but it's a good step in the right direction. I hope they change their minds when it comes to voting and come with us to support this bill, because it's about time to move forward and work together to support our municipalities and our government. Thank you for allowing me to speak.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd also like to speak to this time allocation bill this evening. A lot of points have already been covered, but I'll try and elaborate on some that haven't been spoken to.

I had the opportunity in February to attend the Good Roads-ROMA conference here in Toronto where a number of our municipal partners were in attendance. At that time, having the opportunity to speak to a number of the municipal leaders from around southwestern Ontario, a number of them indicated to me in meetings that we had with our Conservative caucus—we had opportunities to meet with those members and one municipal leader said, "It's awful to come here every year and wait for municipal announcements. You feel like a number of salivating dogs waiting to have a bone or morsel tossed to you." I thought about that a lot, and I've talked to some of my colleagues about that since then. That's an awful way for our municipal partners to speak, that they feel that way about themselves, waiting every year for a government that might have the wherewithal or might give some charitable remains, whatever's left. It reminds you of a movie, the Remains of the Day, where they might cast whatever is left over to those municipal partners.

Some of the messages that were in some of the numerous editorials: "The McGuinty Liberals are only trying to legalize slush funds"; "Their practice of year-end spending condemned by the Auditor General every year for skirting normal accountability and control provisions"; "The Minister of Finance wants to share surpluses with municipalities, yet both the words 'municipalities' and

'infrastructure' are conspicuously absent from this bill that he proposed in this House. Instead, it appears that any group, such as 'cricket clubs' or other entities operating not for profit will also be eligible for such funds."

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I see our good member there from St. Catharines.

"Municipalities need stable and predictable long-term funding. If the provincial-municipal funding review had been conducted in a timely manner, such a funding arrangement could have been included in this year's budget. This announcement makes it clear that the McGuinty Liberals have no real interest in paying down the debt and no real interest in helping municipalities."

Mr. Bruce Crozier: The debt that you ran up.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to add that I wasn't here to run up any debt. Now, there are other members who are in this House who helped contribute to that, most of them on that side of the House. Unfortunately, I was not one of those. I would have probably done something different at that time. There were a number of members who were here. However, I wasn't part of that. I would have liked to have been, but I'm here now.

Minister Duncan also suggested that of surpluses of \$800 million or greater, \$600 million of that would go toward debt repayment and the rest would go to municipal infrastructure. Surpluses less than \$800 million would go towards debt repayment entirely. However, the actual act itself gives far greater discretion to cabinet than Duncan's previous comments would indicate. For example, the act authorizes the Minister of Finance to make payments to "eligible recipients." These are defined as "a person or entity, other than an individual but including a partnership whose members may be individuals, that does not carry on activities for gain or profit."

Mississauga Councillor Carolyn Parrish said, "They are playing games with us." She said Mayor McCallion "is willing to take crumbs. I'm not."

The act also authorizes the Minister of Finance to make payments out of money appropriated by the Legislature to persons and entities whose activities are not for the purpose of gain or profit. This act also—

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: You're quoting Carolyn Parrish?

Mr. Robert Bailey: "Where's the dollar? Where's the dollar?"

Anyways, the reality is that municipalities all across Ontario, all 480 of them, need consistent, secure, predictable funding, and they are not getting it through the body of this bill. What they need is for the government to recognize that the true load being borne by the municipalities is over \$3.2 billion of downloaded costs.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Where did that start?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I knew you'd get to that.

The upload they have announced before 2011—Paul Martin, actually. He's the one that cut back funding to the provinces, right? By billions and billions of dollars. But that's a story they don't want to hear.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: David Peterson really started it all. Peterson did it.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yep.

The upload they have announced before 2011 amounts to only some \$900 million. I want you to know that they need the whole \$3.2 billion long before that.

I could go on at great length here. I wanted to read a couple of quotes I had here, if I could just lay my hands on them.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'll give you some of ours.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yeah, give me some of yours over there; I'll use those.

I was looking at a number of the press conferences here. I can't find it now; I'll just go extemporaneously.

I think what we need to do on this side of the House is—when we were talking to this issue, we tried to make plain that we don't like this time allocation issue, because we feel this bill is too important for that. We've tried to raise a number of different issues—the member for Niagara–Glanbrook raised a number of good issues; also the member for Hamilton Centre. A number of other members here today talked about this issue. When this bill comes to committee, we'll make amendments, put them forward, and hopefully the government of the day at that time will accept them.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased this evening to be able to speak in support of Bill 35. Bill 35 is actually a very simple bill. We've spent days debating it, and I do hope that we will get on with approving it quickly; hence the time allocation motion this evening.

The bill is really very simple. As people may know, when the province closes its books at the end of the year, on March 31, it takes a few months before all the calculations are done. Just like when I submit my income tax, the forms I need roll in through January and February, and it's April by the time we all submit; the province is much the same. The last payments get sorted out in the spring, and the final books are prepared for June or July. When we get to those final books, there is often a surplus, and we don't know way in advance how much that surplus going to be.

The current rules require that that surplus all go to paying down the debt. The public probably doesn't realize this, but Ontario actually has a per capita debt ratio that's lower than the federal government's debt ratio. Ontario actually has a very good debt ratio and we will continue to pay down the debt. Bill 35 in fact says that, that we will continue to put part of the surplus—but when there is a larger surplus, we also want to invest in Ontario and we want to invest in Ontario municipalities. There's been a lot of talk here tonight about slush funds. Quite frankly, I'm insulted that we would talk about investing in things like municipalities and possibly universities or other entities like that, as if it was a slush fund.

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I just want to quickly tell you the sorts of investments that we've been making lately. Both in my municipalities and yours, Speaker, because we actually share some of them, so the social housing that is shared by the Speaker

in the chair tonight, and myself: \$1.29 million to repair the infrastructure for social housing.

Out of some of the end-of-year surplus that we already know about, we were able to provide \$1.9 million for roads in Guelph. But, Speaker, in Wellington county, in your part of it, between the county and the individual municipalities, there was almost \$7 million that went to roads and bridges. That was because, unlike what some of the previous speakers have implied, the allocation formula that we used there wasn't strictly per capita. In fact, what we did there, because it was targeted at roads and bridges, we looked at how many kilometres of road, how many bridges there were per individual, per population, and for those municipalities that had more roads for each individual, we gave them more money; hence, your area, which has a slightly lower population than mine, got way more money, because we understand that issue.

In Guelph, in my municipality, we were also able to have a very good announcement where we provided \$5 million from the MIII infrastructure investment to the city of Guelph to repair the old Loretto convent and turn it into a new civic museum.

I am very offended that all of these investments, each and every one of which has an accountability agreement to go with it, would be considered by the opposition parties as slush funds. These are not slush funds. These are investments in Ontario infrastructure. I will be supporting this bill.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I've been listening to the debate, and I have a few comments to make on it. First, I have to say that the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, earlier in the evening, held up Bill 35, and asked if this was a prop. He said, "No, it's not a prop; it's a bill."

But, really, when you read Bill 35, it is a prop. It's a prop or a crutch. It is nothing of substance. It hides the reality of Ontario. It has nothing to do with investing in Ontario. It has much more to do with investing in slush funds, investing in patronage, investing in things that are of no value for the people of Ontario.

I'd like to ask the Speaker for a little bit of an indulgence. I was listening, especially to the House leader earlier this evening, as he spoke introducing this debate for tonight. I've got a book here with a couple of little passages that I think are important and reflect and illustrate clearly what the government House leader was talking about. This little book is written by a fellow named Harry Frankfurt. He's a renowned moral philosopher and a professor of philosophy at Princeton University. And because I'm a little bit new at this, I'll ask for your indulgence, Mr. Speaker.

There's one quote where he says, "When we characterize talk as hot air, we mean that what comes out of the speaker's mouth is only that. It is mere vapor. His speech is empty, without substance or content. His use of language, accordingly, does not contribute to the purpose it purports to serve. No more information is communicated than if the speaker had merely exhaled. There are similarities between hot air and excrement...."

I thought that was really appropriate—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would caution the member, just as I did one of the members previously, about the use of parliamentary language, and I ask him to respect that.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes. I'm not actually sure what is parliamentary language and what is not after today's—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'll remind the member that it's up to the Chair to make that decision, and the members have to respect that if they want to stay here.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I understand, Speaker, and that's why I asked for your indulgence to give me some guidance as I refer to quotes from books.

It's interesting. I guess I can't say what the title of this book is, but it's—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Put it down.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Anyway, we have seen our people in Ontario, at ROMA, at Good Roads, requesting assistance from this government. There's a very significant need for assistance and help for our municipalities. Of course, this bill doesn't mention municipalities; it talks about entities, entities that operate without profit or gain, and as the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and others have said, the same criteria for cricket clubs and slush funds.

We have municipalities throughout this province, places like Merrickville that for years have been requesting assistance from this government for a sewage treatment plant; places like Lanark that has been requesting assistance with their water treatment plants. They get nothing from this Liberal government except stifling debate. Stifling debate is what we get.

When a municipality tries to pull in its belt a little bit to take advantage or to survive the hard times, like Ottawa did announcing a reduction, a cancellation of the crack pipe program, what do the McGuinty Liberals do? They just take a little bit more money and slush it over to their favourite programs.

This stifling of debate is not what the people of Ontario need. We need good, honest, thoughtful debate, and this is not unique or an exception, this debate that we're having here in the House. I saw the same thing last week in debate in this House, where we had a number of people on the government side engage in debate on bills that they had not even read. I learned a long time ago that you cannot debate with somebody who lacks knowledge. That is called ignorance, and this is what we are getting right now in this McGuinty Liberal government: an age of ignorance, no solid debate, and stifle when there are things to be talked about. They move on to their trivial, meaningless fluff bills. That's where they want to spend their time. They don't want to spend time on substantive discussion. They don't want to actually assist and help our municipalities. They just want to legalize, create legislation that they can change by order in council later on about who they will distribute the year-end slush to.

I'm disappointed that so many sensible, reasonable people on the other side of this House cannot see what

they are doing, that they drank the Kool-Aid and gulped it down, swallowed it without thought or interest, and they just blindly follow the lead, but there is no leadership. They just blindly go along.

Interjections.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I think the seals are barking.

I really would like to see the Liberal government stand up. Stand up for the people of Ontario. Tell them that we want to debate, and you're going to do things that are good and valuable and sensible for the people of Ontario. Put the Kool-Aid down, and do what's right for the people of Ontario.

2050

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: It's a privilege to speak on this bill entitled Investing in Ontario.

Before beginning, I'd also like, perhaps on behalf of all members of this Legislature, to compliment the newly elected member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington. I cannot remember when a quotation that was brought forth by a member was an ornament to the member's own remarks in quite the way that it was today, and I would commend him for that.

As you'll know, this bill, if passed, would allow a portion of any unanticipated year-end provincial surpluses to address priority public needs, particularly municipal infrastructure projects, as well as reduce the accumulated deficit. All in all, I think this is part of prudent fiscal management. It also allows the government some wiggle room at the end of the year to allocate and resource and deploy what is, after all, a \$90-billion budget. My honourable colleagues in my own party, opposite, said quite rightly that of course these are measures that any sensible government would do.

Since we took office in 2003, we've been able, through our prudent and measured fiscal approach, to substantially reduce the ratio of the provincial accumulated deficit to the gross domestic product, the type of measure or metric that, for example, bond rating agencies look to when they're rating, in terms of our bond issues, when we go to raise funds on the open market for the financial needs of the people of Ontario.

In 2003, the accumulated deficit was about 25% of the province's GDP. Since then, we've been able to balance the budget that, of course, we inherited from the previous government, which saddled this province and the people with a \$5.6-billion accumulated provincial deficit. We have also, with this prudent, sensible management, been able to make those payments, despite the fact that Ontario's economy is facing a number of challenges, such as the weakening US economy, the high value of the Canadian dollar and increased costs for energy.

But paying down the accumulated deficit is far from being the only method to ensure a prosperous future, not only for our children and for Ontarians from all walks of life, but of course for the overall economy. It is critical for us, now more than ever, to take every opportunity available to us to invest in Ontario.

The McGuinty government understands that communities are engines of economic growth and hotbeds of in-

novation. For that reason, we are building on the progress that we've already made in working with municipalities, as well as making sure that, as I mentioned earlier, we have the opportunities to resource, to deploy the financial wherewithal in different corners, as was mentioned across the floor here, to different entities that may be in need.

The government has made historic investments in municipalities and municipal partnerships, often, by the way, without the support of the opposition parties, which I have to confess—for individuals who purport to support their municipalities up and down the corridors of Ontario—is really puzzling to us here on this side of the floor.

I'd like to remind members of this House what our government has accomplished in this new era of partnership with municipalities. There are a number of different issues to speak to.

For example, we've more than doubled our support to municipal operating budgets. In 2008, this will amount to \$2.2 billion in ongoing operating support to municipalities. This is a stark contrast to the previous regimes that have been in power, who were all about downloading, fragmentation, amalgamation and basically eroding the municipal infrastructure as well as their capacity for financing their own internal needs.

The Ontario municipal partnership fund, something that we've resourced, assists municipalities with their social program costs, including equalization measures. It addresses challenges faced by northern and rural communities, and responds to policing costs in rural communities. In 2008, in the McGuinty Ontario, this fund will transfer \$870 million—41% or \$250 million more than the 2004 transfers under the previous program.

These are not mere numbers; these will have direct effects on the lived experience, on the day-to-day lives of the people of Ontario. For that reason, amongst many others in the remaining 12 pages of material that I have here, I'm very proud to speak in support of this bill. I thank you for this opportunity.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I am rising to speak today about the Investing in Ontario Act that was introduced on March 18. This act will allow Ontario to continue on its road to responsible investment in the province's economy and its infrastructure

The bill approaches investment in a responsible and balanced way. With this bill, Ontario will be able to seize the opportunity to address two issues, municipal infrastructure and accumulated deficit, at the same time. This bill, if passed, would allow a portion of any unanticipated year-end provincial surpluses to both address priority public needs such as municipal infrastructure projects and reduce the accumulated deficit.

During this debate, members of the opposition and the third party have raised their own issues about this bill, but the fact of the matter is that currently, all year-end surpluses go towards debt reduction. Continuing that approach will not directly benefit the people, for example, in my riding of York South-Weston. My constituents welcome investments, but not at the cost of runaway

expenses and irresponsible deficits. A measured fiscal approach is an important value. Our government has reduced the ratio of the provincial accumulated deficit, but it's also a government that is talking, finally talking, once again to its municipal partners.

My riding of York South–Weston, as you know, is in Toronto and that means my constituents are part of a leading city internationally, a city that will serve as a seat of innovation while the province moves into a different kind of economy, a knowledge-based economy. Bill 35 addresses the fact that while the economy changes and while the province deals with the weakening US growth, the high value of the dollar and the high price of oil, while all this is happening, we in Ontario continue to take the opportunity to invest in municipalities. The Investing in Ontario Act, 2008, would help expand our economic advantage and build on our plan to strengthen the economy. The people of York South–Weston want to make sure that we are taking every opportunity available to us to invest in Ontario through investing in our municipalities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Bryant has moved government notice of motion number 61.

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

All those in favour will please say “aye.”

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 2058 to 2108.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be counted by the table staff.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dombrowsky, Leona	Qaadri, Shafiq
Albanese, Laura	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Ramal, Khalil
Arthurs, Wayne	Jaczek, Helena	Rinaldi, Lou
Bradley, James J.	Jeffrey, Linda	Ruprecht, Tony
Brown, Michael A.	Mangat, Amrit	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	Mauro, Bill	Sousa, Charles
Bryant, Michael	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Colle, Mike	Mitchell, Carol	Zimmer, David
Crozier, Bruce	Moridi, Reza	
Dickson, Joe	Pupatello, Sandra	

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be counted by the table staff.

Nays

Bailey, Robert	Hudak, Tim	Murdoch, Bill
Barrett, Toby	Miller, Norm	Tabuns, Peter
Hillier, Randy	Miller, Paul	Wilson, Jim

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 28; the nays are 9.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion carried.

Agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 2110.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Balkissoon, Bas (L)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
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Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (L)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / ministre de la Promotion de la santé
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Brotten, Laurel C. (L)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (L)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (L)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	St. Paul's	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, government House leader / ministre des Affaires autochtones, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (L)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (L)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (L)	Barrie	Minister of Culture, minister responsible for seniors / ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
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Colle, Mike (L)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (L)	Niagara Falls	
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Dhillon, Vic (L)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (L)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (ND)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (L)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (L)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
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Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	

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Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (ND)	Kenora–Rainy River	Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Hardeman, Ernie (PC) Hillier, Randy (PC) Horwath, Andrea (ND)	Oxford Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hoy, Pat (L) Hudak, Tim (PC)	Chatham–Kent–Essex Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (L) Jeffrey, Linda (L) Jones, Sylvia (PC) Klees, Frank (PC) Kormos, Peter (ND)	Oak Ridges–Markham Brampton–Springdale Dufferin–Caledon Newmarket–Aurora Welland	New Democratic Party House leader / leader parlementaire du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Kular, Kuldip (L) Kwinter, Monte (L) Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L) Leal, Jeff (L) Levac, Dave (L) MacLeod, Lisa (PC) Mangat, Amrit (L)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton York Centre / York-Centre Glengarry–Prescott–Russell Peterborough Brant Nepean–Carleton Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
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Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
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