



No. 41

N° 41

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 39^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 7 May 2008

Mercredi 7 mai 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
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111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 7 May 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 7 mai 2008

The House met at 0900.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WEARING OF PINS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I was wondering if I could have the consent of the House to pass these buttons out and let members wear them. They're from the Ontario Electrical League, in support of Ontario's youth.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

INVESTING IN ONTARIO ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 PERMETTANT
D'INVESTIR DANS L'ONTARIO

Mr. Caplan, on behalf of Mr. Duncan, moved third reading of the following bill:

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 / *Projet de loi 35, Loi autorisant le ministre des Finances à faire des versements aux bénéficiaires admissibles sur les crédits affectés par la Législature et modifiant la Loi de 2004 sur la transparence et la responsabilité financières, la Loi sur le ministère du Trésor et de l'Économie et la Loi de 1991 sur le Conseil du Trésor.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Hon. David Caplan: I'm going to be sharing my time with the very capable and able parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, the member for Pickering–Scarborough East, and with the member for Oakville.

This is a very important act, and it's another way this government will be investing, and helping our municipal partners to invest, in infrastructure in the province of Ontario. One of the hallmarks of our government has been the commitment to making these key investments that support the foundation and platform of our economy, and indeed of our society and our communities. This is on the heels of our unprecedented \$30-billion-plus ReNew Ontario plan, the first-ever long-term infrastructure investment plan in this province's history. I can tell you that it has produced incredible results: over 100 hospital pro-

jects; literally thousands of kilometres of highway; bridges have been repaired; and somewhere in the neighbourhood of 8,000 elementary and secondary school projects. This particular legislation, Bill 35, is going to assist our municipalities. In the event that we have surpluses, we now will be sharing those funds with municipalities so that they too can invest in critical public infrastructure.

I hope all members of this House will be supporting this bill. It is of vital importance. It has the support of municipal leadership from one end of this province to the other. I look forward to seeing this become law, if passed by this Legislature, and indeed to seeing these investments where they are critically needed.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'm pleased to rise today in respect to Bill 35. I must say that I just had the opportunity a few minutes ago to have a bit of a meeting with the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association. They treated us here in the building to, in effect, a breakfast caucus meeting, so I won't need my double-double today. But I'd appreciate it if one of the pages would bring water at some point; that would be helpful, thank you very much. I find water to be quite adequate for my purposes here, certainly at this time of the morning, anyway, having already had lots of time to get my coffee into me.

I'm so pleased to be here in the Legislature on the third day of our revised schedule, on this bright spring morning in Ontario. I enjoyed my drive in this morning, as I have each morning, for early meetings and starting our debate a little earlier than we're familiar with. It really hasn't changed our days much; just the time we arrive here. Particularly, this seems to be a finance week. We've had the budget measures bill for third reading debate, and this morning we're having the leadoff on the Investing in Ontario Act, 2008. The week just gets better and better, I think, because there will probably be some more debate in respect to finance as we proceed toward the end of this week.

Let me move, if I could, to some of my comments with respect to Bill 35, the Investing in Ontario Act, 2008. This is extremely good news for municipalities and for the people of Ontario generally. It would allow for the reduction of provincial debt as a structured format in the event that we have surplus situations, and certainly with projections of a balanced budget, one would anticipate that some dollars would go toward our debt. It's going to help municipalities address the very critical capital needs they all find themselves with.

You know, they didn't get into the situation of having this built-up, pent-up demand for municipal infrastructure

renewal in the last three or four years; as a matter of fact, over the last three or four years we've done a tremendous amount to support municipalities with respect to their infrastructure needs. It took them a long time to get there. It really happened during the eight or 10 years prior to that, when municipalities fell into a situation where their capital infrastructure was declining as they desperately tried to maintain a reasonable amount of operating capacity within their municipalities.

There are many of us in this Legislature who come from the municipal sector, either as municipal councillors or from counties, as mayors, as trustees and as chairs of boards, who have worked in the public sector with municipalities during their time outside this place. We certainly know—all of us in this room know—the critical situation municipalities have found themselves in during the past number of years. They are very, very thankful for the work this government has been doing over the past five years in supporting municipalities, particularly as we move forward in continuing to support their infrastructure needs.

0910

With Bill 35, the Investing in Ontario Act, we are proposing that we will invest a portion of any unanticipated surplus for 2007-08 in municipal capital priorities. This is something that's unique around here. This is not, at this point, just setting out a specific dollar value; it's saying, "If we happen to have a particularly good year in the provincial sector, if our revenues, as they come in, exceed our expectations." We never know until much later what the final revenue numbers are going to look like. Thus we're prudent, in our fiscal management, to ensure that we at the very least maintain a balanced budget situation. But anticipating a surplus when things go better than we might anticipate, where we would have a slightly larger surplus, we're going to share that in a very significant way with municipalities to work on their municipal priorities.

We, in this government, have a strong history of prudent fiscal management. It's our intention to continue in that way during the years to come during this mandate and, should the people of Ontario see fit, in a subsequent mandate or mandates, as the case may be. We continue to make the strategic investments in people and communities that will build a better Ontario for all of Ontario's citizens; not for any particular group, but for citizens throughout this province, each and every one of whom depends on the municipalities and on municipal infrastructure for the quality of life opportunities they want to share.

We recognize the pressing need of Ontario's municipal infrastructure. I have already said we didn't get into this situation in the short term. It took a long time for municipalities to find themselves in the place they are, with deteriorating infrastructure along the way. With no disrespect to my friends in various places, I can say to my friend from Peterborough, who came from municipal council there, that I used to tell my own council that if they wanted to see what the road systems in the urban

core of our municipality might look like within 20 or 30 years, they would need to go to Peterborough. Peterborough has a longer history than Pickering, the municipality I came from, and they had longer time and a change in economy, in which they were having trouble, struggling to keep up with the road infrastructure in their downtown core. As a result, it always gave me a local point of comparison to tell my councillors what they might see in the future if there wasn't provincial government support for municipal infrastructure, in particular road infrastructure.

Now they're doing so much better. During the past four or five years, the member for Peterborough has been such a strong advocate for his municipality and for his riding. If you drive there now, you begin to see the significant changes that are occurring in their infrastructure. I know that those of us who aren't quite that far advanced in the context of the length of time the infrastructure has been in place want to ensure that we retain the infrastructure we have, as well as repair, enhance and renew infrastructure in the province of Ontario.

The greater Toronto area alone, just within this small geographic but large population area, has transportation delays within it caused by gridlock that cost an estimated \$2.2 billion per year. That's just the cost to the economy because of delays caused by gridlock in the morning and the afternoon. Every time you take a few minutes off someone's commute or manage to put someone on a transit system, the ultimate impact of that is an enhancement to the economy. It reduces the cost to the economy as a result of that gridlock; it reduces that \$2.2-billion-a-year cost resulting from gridlock.

But there are also environmental costs, and social and health costs associated with gridlock. We only need to see the cars that are parked on the Don Valley Parkway—I think it's called that for a particular reason on some days. As I drive in from the eastern part of the city, when I'm not using the GO system, and travel across the 401, I'm not travelling at 90, 100 or 105 kilometres an hour; I'm traveling at 30, 40 and 50. Many, many cars are effectively parked, and when they're parked, they're just adding to pollution in the air and in the environment.

If I saw the weather report accurately this morning, it's going to be 21 degrees Celsius today. Within a matter of days, we'll probably be at 26 or 27 degrees Celsius. As you drive, particularly now from the extended fringes—it used to be from the suburbs, but now you probably have to drive from Barry's Bay, member from Renfrew, before you can get out of what you might see as a smog day. You may even see it there. I'm not sure; I haven't driven in that community of late, not having gotten much further than Bon Echo Provincial Park. By the time you get there, the air is fairly clear.

But you only drive in from the fringes of the greater Toronto area now and you can see the smog days as they build. So the more opportunity we have to invest in municipal infrastructure, to support public transit and to get the road networks working effectively, it can only help with issues such as smog and the health-related costs that go with that.

Our intention, with our municipal partners, is to transform and upgrade the province's 20th-century infrastructure—and clearly it's still 20th-century; in some cases I might even suggest that it's probably 19th-century. I think we can probably find some of the water systems in our old municipalities and some of the sewer systems that better reflect a 19th-century system than a 20th-century system. But we want to ensure that municipalities can meet the challenges of the 21st century, not merely catch up with the laggard situation they found themselves in, in the dying days of 20th century, the late 1990s, with a provincial government that saw little need to support municipalities but found ways to simply download costs upon them.

Speaker, as you are aware, we have already committed to the largest investment in provincial infrastructure in the past 50 years. ReNew Ontario is an opportunity to see the municipal infrastructure of this province come up to speed, come up to standard, come up to today's current needs within the province of Ontario. We are making, with our municipal partners in all sectors, a very, very significant investment. It's creating jobs, it's creating opportunity in this province and it's creating an infrastructure that we desperately need as we move into—we're moving close to the end of the first decade of the 21st century already. It doesn't take long for a decade to go by, but it takes time to put the necessary infrastructure in place.

A major factor in attracting private investment is the state and quality of available infrastructure. It's not just about the constituents within the province of Ontario; it's not just about their own desires and needs from the standpoint of using the infrastructure. It's about the capacity to create, to encourage, to support and to make Ontario a good place to invest for private investment within this province. I was mentioning this morning that I had the opportunity, with some other members, to have a meeting with the automobile manufacturers' association. Among the issues that they face—we're all familiar with the challenges the automotive sector faces—is the capacity to move their product to its market. It's not just driving it down the road; it's transporting it down the road. When so much of our auto industry is dependent upon export, we need to move those vehicles outside of the province and across the province. To achieve that, we need the road infrastructure network that will help make that occur. The leaders of the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association spoke very highly this morning of the support they've had from government generally in their business environment, but more particularly the announcement just the other day—that was derided by some members of this Legislature; not on our side, Speaker, but some members of this Legislature on the other side derided our decisions, the final decision we've come to, along with other partners both nationally and internationally, for the border crossing and the road network in and through Windsor, that you will be very, very familiar with. The auto industry sees that as a critical element in their continued success in enhancing their opportunity to

move their product effectively down the 401 and into the market that they serve. We're very anxious to see that municipal-provincial-federal infrastructure capacity enhanced and move forward quickly. This is exactly the kind of thing that will make that happen.

To be competitive in the global economy, we have to have the right skills and we have to have state-of-the-art facilities. We're putting our plan into action to help Ontario become a more modern and attractive place to live and do business. That's why this bill is entitled Investing in Ontario, because it allows us to have a more balanced approach to paying down debt while making these critical investments in Ontario.

Let me speak, if I can, a little more specifically about the content of the bill in addition to what it's going to provide to municipalities, to constituents in Ontario, how it supports private sector investment, and ultimately how it assists, whether it's our health or in an environmental context. I want to talk a little bit about some of the detail on a high-order level for the purposes of our discussion this morning.

0920

If the province achieves a surplus position in excess of \$800 million, the first \$600 million of that will go to reduce the provincial debt. We think that's the right thing to do. We want to ensure that we are not only sending a signal but doing the right thing in the context of our accumulated deficit in this province and that we're making commitments on surplus situations first—first—to the accumulated deficit. That has to be a priority. It's what our constituents expect, it's what business expects, and it's what we expect of ourselves. In our own families we expect to pay down our debt. We expect to pay down our mortgages as a priority in our lives. We expect if we bought a vehicle that we will pay that down. We expect that we will put some money away for a critical investment of some sort, whether it's our children's education—we treat that as a debt, in effect. It's a need that's going to be there.

But once we've done that, we want to ensure that there is a capacity as well for municipalities to be able to share in any surplus situation that might occur. This means that if in effect the province were to achieve a surplus situation of \$800 million, a minimum of \$200 million would be spent for municipal spending in additional capital opportunities for municipalities.

If the surplus, though, is less than \$800 million, it goes straight to the debt. There's a point where we need to say, "Does it make sense to distribute a small amount of money to municipalities on a per capita basis, or does it make sense to enhance the payment into the provincial accumulated deficit?" Once we reach that threshold, municipalities could find themselves in a position to share up to \$2 billion of provincial surplus throughout the province both with what we refer to as single-tier or upper-tier municipalities—for example, the city of Toronto, which would be thought of as a single-tier municipality, is the largest and easiest example. For those of us who know regional structures, the Niagara region gov-

ernment would be considered an upper-tier municipality. They would share on a per capita basis in the surplus situation, as would what we refer to as lower-tier municipalities. In an area like where I'm in, with part of my riding being in Toronto, single-tier, and part being in Durham, Pickering being a two-tier structure, the region of Durham would share in some of the surplus, as would the lower-tier municipalities, of which there are eight. So Pickering, Ajax, Whitby and others would all share on a per capita basis any surplus that may arise, anywhere up to \$2 billion shared across the province.

With the 2007-08 surplus, they have the wonderful opportunity in this particular calendar year as they move through their budgetary processes to continue to invest in infrastructure in the province of Ontario. That's not the only investment opportunity they've had because municipalities across this province have already shared in the MIII program, as an example, with some \$450 million that was shared broadly across the province. There were some exclusions—the city of Toronto was one of those—but there are other mechanisms whereby the city of Toronto has had considerable support for public transit. Bill 35, Investing in Ontario Act, is on top of what we've already been doing with our municipal partners both in the past year and during the time that we've had in office.

The municipalities are going to have flexibility to use their funds for their own capital purposes. It's for roads and bridges, it's to expand public transit, it could be to upgrade their social housing stock and it could be for other municipal infrastructure. But it's not going to be a blank cheque to them. There will be checks and balances in place. They will know the funding envelope, based on the formula, once we know the actual fiscal position the province has as a result of public accounts being finalized. There will be checks and balances to ensure that the dollars are being spent for capital infrastructure needs within municipalities.

They are best positioned to be able to identify and choose the priorities that best suit their needs; they know best. As I said before, many of us in this room have come from the municipal sector and we know from that experience that it's at the very local level, on the ground, where the constituents speak to their councillors and to their mayor, that they have their debates in a public forum as we do. The media reports regularly. They're best positioned to establish the priorities that will best meet their needs, not only in the short term, but capital investments are about the longer term, to ensure that they have the stability in their operations that they so desperately want and need.

We will have accountability provisions in place. It will be consistent with the province's new transfer payment directives. There will be report-backs from those municipalities on how the funds were used. We will retain the right to independent verification or audit, and that's an interesting little piece of what we're doing with this. We don't expect to have to use it. We don't anticipate that municipalities will be doing anything save and except investing in that critically necessary infrastructure within

their municipalities. But the province is going to keep the right to do a verification, to do an audit if necessary, to ensure that those dollars that are being expended in municipalities are being expended in the way that we had envisioned within the legislation, the way we envisioned that the surplus dollars could be used to enhance the capital opportunity, the capital position, the capital infrastructure needs of municipalities.

The McGuinty government is ensuring within the legislation that the funding will be distributed equitably. This is not about winners and losers in municipalities; this is about ensuring that all Ontarians and all municipalities have the opportunity to share. To ensure that available funds are distributed in a fair and transparent manner to all municipalities, we're proposing to use a per capita allocation for both upper-tier and single-tier municipalities in the province. That's probably among the easiest ways for the public to be able to identify whether or not they feel their community is getting a fair share of the resources that are there. We all understand, on a per capita basis, if you have 100,000 people in your community, then you have X number of dollars related to that 100,000, against the 12.5 million to 13 million people in the province of Ontario. It's a fairly easy manner for people to identify and do a comparator within a reasonable sense. Large municipalities, then, would have larger dollars coming to them; smaller municipalities would have a smaller number of dollars. One would expect that the capital infrastructure needs would vary based on the size of the municipality, based on its population.

Not only will the upper-tier and the single-tier governments share on a per capita basis, but the lower-tier portion would be distributed on a per capita basis. It obviously needs a formula when you have two tiers of government, but the principles remain the same in the allocation of those dollars. We know in two-tier structures that the upper tier has particular infrastructure needs. They manage the water and sewer systems, as an example. The lower-tier systems have different needs. They have the local road network that is there among their principle responsibilities that need constant upgrading and always, always need investment.

As I said early on, the legislation, as it's presented here for third reading debate today—hopefully, at the end of the day, all members of the Legislature will see the wisdom in ensuring that we support our local, regional and single-tier municipalities, but they'll also see the wisdom in ensuring that we provide a portion of any surplus that may be achieved to pay down the accumulated deficit of the province of Ontario. It makes sense to pay down our debt, so we want to do both: We want to ensure that we have debt reduction and to ensure that we have an opportunity to see investment in what might be considered broadly government priorities. They may not be things we control directly, but municipal infrastructure remains a provincial priority because those infrastructure investments also help to drive business opportunities within the province of Ontario.

You know, sometimes we need to talk a little bit, I think, to frame the debate a bit, in the context of some of

the broader budget measures that we put in place. Because the capacity to be able to even address Bill 35 in any fashion very much depends upon some of the other initiatives that have been undertaken to establish what the value structure might be for municipalities. We have to balance that along with other investments that we made as a province, particularly investments that we made in municipal infrastructure.

In the 2008 budget document—frankly, on a different day, yesterday, we were having third reading debate on the budget measures bill, which over the next while will also come to some conclusion along the way, this being a subset of that, in effect.

0930

Included in that document, in addition to these dollars, which could amount to up to \$2 billion for municipalities if in effect the surplus were that large, we're investing some \$1 billion in new municipal infrastructure in 2007-08. Just in the fall, we announced some \$450 million for the MIII program. That was based on an initial announcement that was made in the fall economic statement but also was built upon financially to build this quantum of some \$450 million for municipal infrastructure. There are municipalities throughout the province of Ontario right now which are currently probably in the process of, if not physically doing some of the work, issuing the tenders that will allow them to do the work on infrastructure investments that will come from the MIII investment.

We're investing some \$400 million in this budget document for municipal roads and bridges in communities outside of Toronto. We hear consistently here in the Legislature, and from our municipal colleagues, about the road structure necessity, about the importance of roads and bridges, about the importance of moving people and goods in small-town and rural Ontario, as I'll refer to it. Sometimes I think outside the city of Toronto, for me, is outside of the greater Toronto area, having a foot in Toronto and a foot in Durham region. I think beyond that, we hear most consistently from folks about the needs of smaller-town Ontario, rural communities, and investments in their roads and bridges as so critical to them. Often those municipalities don't have the fiscal capacity, because of population, sometimes, and simply because they don't have the industry base to be able to maintain, enhance and upgrade those roads and bridges to the extent they want to. That some \$400 million for municipal roads and bridges in those communities outside of Toronto is so critically necessary to them, and this is a very good year for them to be able to undertake that kind of work.

There was \$100 million to rehabilitate municipal social housing, including improving their energy efficiency. As I mentioned early on, among the types of infrastructure capacity needs that municipalities may want to address as a result of the investments from Bill 35 could be the social housing stock. One might even think of this as a down payment of sorts. Although we don't know the quantum of the surplus that might exist under Bill 35, we know the need is there, and \$100 million to work on

social housing stock is important. It's not going to solve all the problems by any means. I think we'll hear from members opposite at some point of quantum of numbers that would be such that we couldn't take all of the money and still repair all of the social housing stock. This is a good investment in that, particularly, I would suggest, including improving their energy efficiency, because we know that existing social housing stock doesn't have the energy efficiency strategy structures in place at this point in time and thus needs to have investments in those areas.

It not only makes for a better living environment, it also reduces the cost of operation, ultimately reduces the cost for those who are occupying the units and builds into their life structure a commitment to and a participation in the energy efficiency needs of this province that we all want to participate in, in one fashion or another: reducing energy consumption and finding alternative means by which to use energy. Those who are renting in a social housing environment in that stock of homes across the province also want the opportunity to participate in that. They can't do that unless there are some incentives in place to do that, and we think this \$100 million in social housing, in part to improve energy efficiency, will go a long way to allow them to feel and know that they are actively participating in the priorities that we are seeing set out.

We're investing, in this budget document—as I said, we're going to talk a little bit about the context—some \$970 million to be invested in capital investments to build and renew places where students learn. We're talking about universities and colleges. We're talking about that infrastructure that's going to provide the physical environs that will provide the next generation of young professionals, those who do the work on the next RIMs of the world, our doctors, our lawyers—maybe even some of our politicians. We have a couple of young people who are summer interns with the finance ministry at this point in time. I know there are a number of summer interns here in the Legislature. I had a chance to chat with two young people yesterday. One is at York University and the other is a Dalhousie graduate, proceeding on to—I'm trying to think of where she's going in the fall. It'll probably come to me. Nonetheless, of both of those young people, one is going to finish their undergraduate work and one is working on a dual master's degree and wants to go into law.

These are very bright young adults, and I was saying that it's really encouraging to see bright young people getting an education and taking an active interest in the political system, in the policy structures of the provincial government. I think it augurs well for the future for us. It's why we need to make these kinds of investments; it's why making a nearly \$1.97-billion investment in the capital infrastructures of colleges and universities is so critically important on a go-forward basis. We can't measure these things over the basis of a year or two; we have to measure them on the basis of a generation or two. We have to take a look at those young people and say, "What are they contributing? What are the expectations that they have? What are their aspirations as young people coming

into adulthood in this province of Ontario, where they want to be, where they want to learn about policy structures, where they want to be professionals? What are they going to be contributing over the next generation here in the province of Ontario?" We have to look at our investments in that way.

We have to look at our investments in roads and bridges in very much the same way. Those are hard infrastructure investments that we drive on and move product on, but we have to look at this other type of infrastructure as well, in the context of what it means to young people in the learning environment they find themselves in.

One of the hallmarks of our government has been public transit. We came to office four and a half years ago, and during that 2003 campaign, we made a commitment to dedicate two cents per litre of gas tax to public transit in the province of Ontario. We fulfilled that commitment early in the mandate. We didn't wait until the end of the mandate; we looked at the fiscal situation, once we moved through that first, messy year of a \$5.6-billion deficit, and by the end of our second full year, we had a balanced budget. We were able to accelerate that commitment of support to municipalities for their transit systems.

Mr. Mike Colle: It's \$310 million a year now.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: The member from Eglinton-Lawrence says that we're at \$310 million per year. I just couldn't recall the numbers; thank you. But this year alone, we're investing almost \$500 million, \$497 million for public transit just in the greater Toronto area and Hamilton for Metrolinx projects and other transit priorities. That's not even taking into account the gas tax revenue itself. That's for Metrolinx. That's to—

Mr. Mike Colle: What is Metrolinx—

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Metrolinx was referred to as the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority. It's a collaborative effort of municipalities, municipal transit systems and GO Transit within the Golden Horseshoe, Hamilton and the greater Toronto area, which are working to expedite transit systems in the province of Ontario—looking at bus rapid transit strategies, looking at means by which GO Transit can be more effective. It's an integration of our transit systems so that they're not stand-alone systems.

The member from Eglinton-Lawrence, being a former Metro Toronto councillor, will know this: One of the big challenges over the years has been the stand-alone operations that we've seen for municipal transit systems, where you couldn't cross boundaries. I can tell you a very quick story. In my time in the mayor's office in Pickering, we had the Pickering Transit system. We didn't even have then the Ajax-Pickering system, whose board the member from Ajax-Pickering sat on with me when we established the Ajax Pickering Transit Authority, which has now become Durham Region Transit, involving not just Ajax and Pickering but Whitby and Oshawa—and the Handi-Trans support systems, special-interest transit, is all rolled into that.

But one of the big challenges is always that cross-boundary activity. Nobody talked to each other. We want-

ed to run a bus into Scarborough and see whether there were enough users to really justify taking a bus from Pickering into Toronto. We determined at that time that the University of Toronto Scarborough campus—which is now in my riding; it's the first time I've had a post-secondary educational institution in my riding, and it's a wonderful institution. I met with some of their senior folks the other day, actually. Nonetheless, we wanted to bus in to see what the ridership capacity would be.

The challenge of the day wasn't getting our buses there; that was okay. We got an okay from the TTC to run our buses in there. What we weren't able to achieve in those early days was the capacity—what we would call the open-door run on the way back. We had to do what we called a closed-door run; i.e., we couldn't pick up a passenger and bring them back to Pickering. So if there was anybody there, we couldn't bring them home. We could take them there, but we couldn't get them home.

0940

Metrolinx, as it's now called—there's been a new structure over the years. The co-operation over a period of time, bringing municipalities together, bringing co-operation among transit systems, means we can do those cross-boundary things where it makes sense, and we get a lot more co-operation in that regard.

Bill 35 and our investment in municipal infrastructure is a critically important part of this budget. We want to share with municipalities the opportunity that if we achieve a surplus situation that's good for the province, that's good to pay down the debt, we want to ensure the municipalities are able to share in that and build on their infrastructure program.

Let me just finish by saying that we're building on the plan we have to strengthen our economy. We're taking every opportunity available to us to invest in our municipalities, as well as invest in the province, in a prudent and responsible way, to ensure that the fiscal management of this province remains strong, and to build on the strength and expertise that exists within each and every municipality to the benefit of every Ontarian.

At this point, I'm going to share my time—I think the minister said I would—with the member for Oakville.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It certainly is a pleasure to join the debate on third reading of Bill 35. Like the previous speaker, the member for Pickering-Scarborough East, I have a long background in local politics. For 18 years, I served on the town of Oakville council, the council for the region of Halton as well. During that period, I was chair of the health and social services committee, child care committee, president of the children's aid society and chair of the budget economy. So I've really seen provincial politics, from all three parties, at the local level over a fairly long period of time, and I've seen different approaches.

If I could sort of typify those approaches over the years, in the 1980s you had Bill Davis and Peterson making a fairly good effort to try to work with municipalities. We moved on to the Rae government, the NDP government. I think it was a good try, but it fell far short. But I

think if you had to look at the darkest period of the relationship between a province and its member municipalities, you'd have to look to the Mike Harris years. Even the member for Wellington-Halton Hills would share some of that sentiment, because I know he—and a very good friend of mine, the now regional chair of the region of Halton—had some things to say, both in public and private, that weren't too complimentary to the Premier of the day. I think they deserve an awful lot of credit for standing up for some of the things that were done during that period.

It was simply bad news for municipalities. When you're trying to provide some of the services, you need to do that. People, the taxpayers of Ontario, expect us to work in a partnership. That's a partnership between the federal government, the provincial government and the local levels of government. Since we've taken office in 2003, I think we've made some great strides in being able to establish that partnership with the local levels of government.

Unfortunately, currently, I can't say the same thing about the federal level of government. As a previous speaker alluded to, there was a meeting held this morning; the auto caucus met with the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association. They simply expressed their support for the approach we were taking towards industry in this province and expressed a certain amount of dissatisfaction with the approach being taken by the federal government.

Bill 35, in my estimation, is a plan to move forward. It gives some confidence to the municipalities that there's a plan in place that starts to repair some of the downloading that was done during the dark years of the previous government. I think it deserves the support of all members of this House. It certainly is a move forward. As I said, there's great support from civic leaders. Mayor McCallion and Mayor Miller have spoken in glowing terms about this initiative. It's something that I think is worthy of support of all members of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Julia Munro: In the time I have available, I just want to comment about Bill 35, because I think a lot of people question the whole legitimacy of having such significant surpluses. Obviously, they're taxpayer dollars. Certainly, creating a budget, as every government is obligated to do, is always a work in progress. What you're suggesting in a budget is, "This is where we intend to spend money. This is where we intend to collect money." Obviously, at the end of the day you hope that it all balances out. What this particular bill proposes to do is provide an option for the government in terms of spending any of the monies that would flow at the end of the year.

I think when you look at the details—much has been made by the government about the fact that this would be a boon to municipalities, yet when you actually look at the bill as it is written, there is no reference made to municipalities. In fact, we are left to look, then—if that's

the intent of the government, how would municipalities respond to this kind of uneven, unstable method of funding when, actually, that's what they need most? I think this bill carries forward from a previous bill that the former government put in place, which was to put any monies towards the debt. Since it's all taxpayers' money, that's where it belongs.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: There's no question about what this bill is. This is a slush fund bill. This is Dalton McGuinty as George Orwell. This is Nineteen Eighty-Four, when the Ministry of Truth said, "Ignorance is strength." Ignorance of what's in this bill is its strength. Because what's in this bill is the licence for the McGuinty government to give money to its friends under cover of law. That's what this bill is about. There is nothing about municipalities in this bill; there is nothing about infrastructure in this bill. In fact, this bill is so egregious that the Auditor General has spoken up loudly. Of course, he has been shut down by McGuinty Orwell, but he spoke out against the bill, saying that this goes against all accounting practice that anyone would recognize as legitimate accounting practice.

So again, it wasn't enough that they were able to give over \$32 million away to friends of the Liberal Party last year. That made the front page of the newspaper. This year they want to do it under cloak of law. So this year, instead of giving \$1 million to a cricket club that asks for \$150,000, and in response to getting \$1 million said they should have asked for \$2 million—instead of that, this year they're going to pass this egregious piece of legislation that's going to allow them to have a legitimate slush fund. Anything over \$600 million, they get to do with what they want. Again, there's nothing in the bill about infrastructure; there's nothing in the bill about municipalities. Despite the spin, despite the Ministry of Truth that is operative across the aisle, despite all of what this government pretends is in the bill and pretends they're trying to do with Bill 35, I would challenge anybody watching at home to actually get to Bill 35, look at what's in the bill, and I double-dare you to find "infrastructure" and "municipality" there. What you will find is Orwell. What you will find is a McGuinty government at their less than truthful best.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm so pleased to join in the debate on the third reading of Bill 35. It is so critical, the investments that we're making in communities right across the province. I only need to look at my own community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore to focus on the importance of the investments in public transit, as one example, a community like Etobicoke-Lakeshore, where many of my constituents commute into the downtown core or beyond for work, going either out to Mississauga or across the city, coming in to downtown to earn their living. We are a community that has four subway stations and three GO train stations. So we really benefit from now the cross-efforts being made to see investment in transit infrastructure across the city and across the province with something like Metrolinx, which my colleague the PA to the Minister of Finance was discussing earlier.

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We recently had a significant investment in the Kipling subway station, as an example. The province came to the table to assist the Kipling subway station to become an interregional hub so that we could have buses coming in from Mississauga, not affecting high-traffic areas in the streets of our community—critical to pull them away from Islington subway station into Kipling subway station, which will now be an interregional hub.

At the time, we also looked well into the future to determine, perhaps with an additional rail line which already exists at Kipling subway station, that we might be able to eventually have a link into the airport from Kipling subway, which is now a link by bus out to the airport. So a community like Etobicoke–Lakeshore, where head offices choose to relocate because their folks can get to work easily and quickly, is of critical importance and has benefited from the investments that are being made in communities.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to have a moment to reply to the speeches brought forward from the government members in support of Bill 35. Of course, you would expect the government members are quite supportive of this bill and talk about its virtues, but certainly our role in opposition is to point out some of the flaws and some of the drawbacks.

This 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, isn't what it appears, I am afraid to say.

The municipal councillors in Wellington–Halton Hills initially were quite pleased to hear of the fact that the Minister of Finance was committing to share a significant portion of future surpluses with the municipal governments for infrastructure when he made his announcement on March 12, but it was only a couple of weeks later that the budget was read in this House. Of course, we found that the surplus the government was anticipating for the coming fiscal year did not approach even closely the \$600-million threshold upon which the money would be triggered. So there was a great deal of disappointment, in our riding certainly, and I would have to say that the government needs to take a fresh look at this issue to ensure that there is predictable, sustainable funding for municipalities in terms of their infrastructure needs.

This is an issue that I've raised for many years in this Legislature, going back to my first term in the Legislature, and I would continue to argue that smaller rural municipalities in particular that lack the tax base of some of our urban communities require a substantial degree of support from the provincial government to ensure that they have a basic infrastructure for their residents. This bill, unfortunately, does not do it. It doesn't do it. And we have to continue to raise it, evidently. I'm very concerned about this issue, and I'll continue to speak against this particular bill because it lacks the integrity that we need from this provincial government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Response?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I want to, obviously, thank the members for York–Simcoe, Parkdale–High Park, Etobicoke–Lakeshore and Wellington–Halton Hills for their comments. I was pleased to hear—I didn't catch whether he was speaking just for himself or for his caucus—that the Progressive Conservatives support the bill, although they're doing their job in opposition to point out what they feel are some of the shortcomings that might exist.

Let me just make two comments in the minute and a half that I have in respect to some of the comments. By the end of this mandate, by 2011, the McGuinty government will have increased the annual operating support to municipalities—that's the stable, predictable funding, the ongoing annual operating support—by over \$1.7 billion. It's an increase of 160% compared to where we were in 2003. That's not if we happen to have a good year and a surplus situation; that's ongoing support to municipalities on an annual basis to exceed \$1.7 billion. Time doesn't allow today to go into the long list. I mentioned in the early part of the debate the gas tax, which is an annual operating support mechanism. There is a long list of those.

I want to take the last 30 seconds to talk briefly about—I mentioned context. Bills alone often have places they have to belong. This one belongs in the budget. Let me speak to page 111 in the budget, for those who haven't had the opportunity to find out where municipalities fit into this play. "The government has introduced the proposed Investing in Ontario Act," Bill 35, "that would permit the use of a portion of unanticipated year-end surpluses" for "needs ... such as municipal infrastructure deficits." It speaks to, "If enacted, the government will use the regulation making authority"—

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

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to see you in the chair on this bright Wednesday morning, and it's a pleasure to take part in the debate.

I just want to start by saying that our critic on this file, the member from Niagara West–Glanbrook, Mr. Tim Hudak, isn't here, but he certainly would like to have an opportunity to say a few things on this as we wrap up, because this is just outrageous. It's outrageous because here's a government that's accumulating more and more debt every year, and they want to not pay it off. They want to leave that debt to your children. To the young pages here: Be cautious. Here's Dalton McGuinty. With this bill, what he's actually doing is not paying off the mortgage, the debt, which means that in the great province that we share, the debt is growing. The debt is growing to almost—I can hardly say the words—\$163 billion. What happens with that is the debt is owed to someone else. It could be China, it could be India, it could be Brazil or it could be the United States; somebody holds that debt. They've loaned it to us on good faith. We have to pay off, every year, the cost of carrying that debt, the

interest. The interest on that debt is about \$10 billion, and growing. If the economy goes a little bit out of control, which it seems to be, the interest rate could go up and the cost of borrowing will go up. I'm so concerned now that they're spending more money on debt servicing, the interest alone, to, in many cases, foreign places, than they are in education. This is your future. That's why I'm so passionately concerned about how they've got this all wrong. It's like being a spoiled child. They want everything today.

Now, I'm going to change the tone a bit. Our member from Niagara West—Glanbrook, Tim Hudak, during the hearings on this bill moved several amendments, all of which were turned down. Unbelievably, they won't listen. They want to have their cake and eat it too. They want to have these year-end slush-fund lottery-style giveaway campaigns to ridings that they're trying to win. That's what has been happening. They have a riding—for instance, it could be Northumberland or Peterborough, and if the member, Jeff Leal or Lou Rinaldi, is in a bit of trouble, they'll dole out some dough, almost, so that they would have a better chance of winning. I'm completely opposed to that manipulative spending of public money, taxpayers' money. I'm completely opposed to it, and we all should be outraged at allowing this minister to intrude into how to distribute the surplus at the end of the year. That's what Bill 35 is about. It gives the minister a lot of powers to do things that—it's the process we have trouble with. We're not opposed to giving money that's surplus to the needs of the people of Ontario, to municipalities to help with hospitals, to help with bridges, to help with recreation centres and things that are important to our health, our economy and the health of the people of Ontario. We're not opposed to that at all.

In fact, I'm going to get a little bit more specific here. I listened with some interest, as I'm the municipal affairs critic—and I have been the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health in the almost 15 years I've been here, and I know the pressures on the government. I know how difficult it is. The economy is collapsing underneath—the Minister of Economic Development and Trade is here this morning, which is good to see. Her riding of Windsor has the highest unemployment rate in Canada. It's tragic. It's almost worse than—and here she is in China, and I think she's going to Paris next week, or something. We want our leaders to be here in the province and trying to defend, at least respect, the people.

When I listen to the member from Pickering—Scarborough East, Mr. Arthurs—he's a fine gentleman; I know him well. I served for a very brief time on the regional government, when he was the mayor of Pickering. He's a very capable person. I'm surprised he's on that side of the floor, and more surprised still that he's not in cabinet. But that's a whole debate for another day. He has been given a speech to read. I don't think he actually believes some of the stuff he's saying; he's just reading it. Because the truth is, he knows as well as the member from Oakville, Mr. Flynn, who was, like myself—many

people here on all sides served at some level of government, municipal or school board or other functions, before we got here, and that experience we bring to the place. I would say this: Always look to the history to teach you about where you are or where you're going. Learn from history.

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Now, what Mr. Flynn said was absolutely incorrect, totally false; it has absolutely no basis in fact. If you want to look to what he said was downloading by Mike Harris—now there's a lot of press, mostly negative, on Mike Harris. But that was, I believe, the impression of the media. But look to what Mike Harris inherited. What he inherited—and I'm not justifying all of the decisions, or any of them, or not justifying them; I'm saying the reality was this: The budget at the time, in 1994-95, when Floyd Laughren was the Treasurer—a nice fellow as well; quite a capable guy, too—was about \$48 billion, the total budget of the province, and the deficit was a little less than \$12 billion. That's 25 cents on every dollar they didn't have. I was chair of the budget locally, in my constituency, at the time, and they had a plan that they sent around to all the municipalities, a big letter from Bob Rae. Bob Rae is now a Liberal; he was NDP. He hasn't made up his mind. He was a Liberal then, as well, which is fine. And I think he's a great guy; there's nothing wrong with that. I hope he gives Stéphane Dion a run for the money, because he will try for the leadership there. But that's a different debate for a different day. Here's the deal, though. He sent a letter out to AMO and ROMA, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association. Every mayor in the province of Ontario got a copy of the letter. The letter said—I remember it. It was called the expenditure reduction plan. I can see it right now back in 1994. Ed Philip was the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Floyd Laughren was Treasurer. The letter said, "Please try to save some money. We're in big trouble here." There was a recession. Ontario's heading down the exact same road.

I worked in the auto sector for 30 years. All the signs are there. I hate to predict it—and these things come, and we will recover; I'm confident of that. Ontario is a great province. Here's the deal, though. The municipalities said, "Are you kidding?" They looked at their budgets and our budget. In the public sector, 85% of all the dollars in the budget are payroll. So if you want to cut the budget, it's people's jobs, it's families that no longer have an income. It's very tough. You're better off to blame Bob Rae or Stephen Harper or Paul Martin—some higher level of government—for this problem that you're in. It couldn't be your own fault, that you had spent more than your income would support. No, they always want to blame some other level of government.

My point is this: No one in 1994 would agree with cutting their budget. So Bob Rae and Ed Philip and Floyd Laughren and Frances Lankin called all the union leaders in to a big meeting here at Queen's Park, and the school leaders as well. Education is very important and it was part of the municipal tax bill—it came from the municipi-

pality but it was by the school boards. They called them all in, and what happened? They all walked out on him. So they implemented the social contract. I don't care which NDP person is here today or was there then or in the future; that's like a brand. The social contract was downloading. They forced every employee of the province of Ontario in school boards, colleges, hospitals, municipalities, all of what they call the MUSH sector—municipalities, universities, schools and hospitals—to take a number of days off to save money. Now, the intent was good. The intent was quite realistic. In fact, the intent was that no one would lose their job. And in fairness to the NDP, that was the choice they made of how to implement this expenditure reduction plan.

The people were just outraged. My wife was a teacher. I had a daughter who was just starting teaching at the time. They were never engaged or emotionally attached to the political decision-making process, but I'll tell you, they sure were then.

It has transformed Ontario. All the public sector is completely vertically integrated now. If you mention cuts or efficiencies or downsizing, the unions just line up like that. They are militant, shoulder to shoulder: "We will not." You hear the drums outside now.

If Dalton wants to save the \$96 billion in our budget, it's payroll. I'm telling you, it's payroll. If he wants to save any money, he's got to make tough decisions, and I don't think he has the fortitude to make tough decisions. Now, I will say this: He can fiddle around with the cosmetic pesticide act, he can fiddle around with the cruelty to animals act, he can fiddle around with the Lord's Prayer, all these tokenistic kinds of pieces. There's no substance to them at all. He's ducking the real issue. However, this bill will give him a bit more play money to dole out at the end of the year to shore up the popular vote. Unfortunately, it's very cynical of me to say that.

Hon. James J. Bradley: So cynical.

Mr. John O'Toole: It is, unfortunately.

Now, what is behind this? What is the second tier? It's the Jim Flaherty approach of being competitive, which is widely criticized in the media.

It isn't Jim Flaherty saying it. Last week in my riding of Durham, I attended a really interesting annual general meeting which Premier McGuinty spoke at. He's a very nice person, don't ever get me wrong, and everybody here wants to do the right thing, but the job is about making tough decisions. Bob Rae found that out when he called the social contract. He didn't want to do that; he had to. The real leadership job here is not about cutting ribbons; it's about putting out fires. That's the job here. Anybody can cut a ribbon. You could, I could, and I'm not in the leadership. McGuinty, his Dwight Duncan and others are.

But here's my point: At the annual general meeting for the Ontario Chamber of Commerce's 96th anniversary—and they did a survey prior to that. In fact, they usually appear before the finance committee. The member for Pickering–Scarborough East would have been part of those meetings, as would Tim Hudak, the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook.

The six top issues given to the government, without any political bias—Greg Sorbara was a fairly decent finance minister, but he's not there any more and I'm concerned that Dwight—he screwed up the electrical file and now he's going to screw up the finance file. But he's got a lot of seniority over there and a lot of connections, so he's got the job.

Here's what their wish list was—this is not Jim Flaherty; this is the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. Their first request: "What are the six top things the Ontario government could do to assist you in the next 24 months?" They said—not some politician; I'm just reading this stuff, but it's important to read what other stakeholders say—to reduce corporate income taxes. It's the very first thing they said. The second thing was to recognize investment in innovation. In fairness, the government did a piece of that. That's the fund that's going to exempt innovative business from corporate tax. Those are businesses that take R and D, academic knowledge and patent information and commercialize it, making rubber into a boat or a car or something like that. The next thing was to refund tax credits for small business; remove the PST for the purchase of equipment and modernization; reduce the red tape on business; and increase training tax credits. Well, I don't think they did very much on any of that. That's the top-six list they asked for.

If you go through and look at this Ontario Chamber of Commerce report—I should say that it was celebrated in Oshawa because that's the home of the auto industry. Sam McLaughlin, the Oshawa area and the whole Durham region is the area that motivates Canada. And these are suffering times. There are lots of families who would like to have some of this year-end surplus themselves. Year-end surplus is actually excess tax revenue. Let's keep it in perspective.

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It was the 80th anniversary for the Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce. Bob Malcolmson and the current and past presidents and all the dignitaries were there. They had a great celebration, but they also had the same list. Surprisingly, they had a very similar list. I'm just going to say there were a number of important observations by the chamber of commerce. Here is just one. I just turned the page at random; it's nothing specific. One specific action that the small businesses of Ontario asked of Dalton McGuinty was this. Now, think of this; think closely about these actions by the leader of the province of Ontario. Just think of these things, how important they are.

During the election, Premier McGuinty was feeling rather chipper one day, cheerful, so he suddenly decided to declare a provincial holiday. Well, who wouldn't like that? Let's call it Family Day. How smarmy. I wonder that he didn't have one of the Smurfs on the stage with him. But anyway, he decided to have the holiday.

This is what one business said. This is from the chamber of commerce, business leaders, people who create jobs and investment and feed their families; their em-

ployees work, and they hopefully reward them. It says that one respondent noted that the family holiday will cost him \$40,000—over her; or it could have been a family that owned a small business, too. There are estimates, and now if you look at the detail, the public sector, whether the police got it off or the union got it off or the fire or the ambulance or the various public sector employees got it off—whatever, it's a drag on the economy. It's actually like putting a hole in a brick wall so the wind can come in. Is it appropriate? I think by giving more people more flexibility, but everybody having a holiday on a given day by decree by the Premier—completely inappropriate.

A lot of them will have holidays: Over 200,000 people are going to be on holidays called layoffs or dismissals. That's a non-solicited holiday, and that's the dilemma in Ontario. The economy is going south if you look at any measurement.

Now, what's Dalton doing that about that? Premier McGuinty; I want to be respectful. During the past couple of weeks, there have been a couple of questions to the Premier and he—I'm going to repeat it, because it seems to me that somehow—

Mr. Ted Arnott: Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I have to interrupt on a point of order. Can you ascertain if there's a quorum in the house?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is a quorum present?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Quorum is present, Speaker.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: In terms of the advice given to the Premier by his own group—now I think this is important to put on the record. Premier McGuinty has commissioned a group, a task force of experts, to give him and his cabinet advice on how to deal with the hemorrhaging economy. I think that's a very wise thing for a leader to do, to seek expert advice.

Who's the expert advice? I think this is worth repeating. Roger Martin, an eminently qualified, respected academic, an economist, and I think he's the dean of the Rotman school of business. Who else is on there? Jim Balsillie, the president and founder of Research In Motion, one of the most successful stories in Canadian industry.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: And he's trying to buy a hockey team; I get that.

There's Tim Dattels, of Newbridge Capital; Lisa de Wilde, TVOntario; David Folk, who's from Jefferson Partners; Dr. Suzanne Fortier, who's with the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council; Gordon Homer, of Gordon J. Homer Advisory Services; David Johnston, University of Waterloo president; Mark Mullins, a respected economist; Tim Penner, Procter and

Gamble, president for Canada; and Daniel Treffer for University of Toronto. These are independent experts who gave advice.

What did they tell the Premier to do, in the climate we're in, with over 200,000 jobs lost? Campbell Soup closed a plant; Dell computers are laying off thousands; the agriculture sector's hemorrhaging; the auto sector is in perilous condition, and Ms. Papatello's over in China trying to bring some Chinese car over here. What was some of their advice?

Rather than listening to me talk, I'm going to read from a report. The title here on this report is Path to the 2020 Prosperity Agenda. You can get it online. On page 45, it says "Motivations." Their advice is, "Pursue smarter taxation." What did they say here? "The incoming government"—meaning that this was in late 2007, prior to the election—"needs to pursue tax reform as a high priority to raise Ontario's competitiveness and prosperity."

That sounds a lot more gently expressed than the expressions by Finance Minister Jim Flaherty. His was interpreted as an attack on Ontario. I think it was a wake-up call. It was a report card on the dismal conditions under Dalton McGuinty.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: The Minister of Transportation's here. But it's a moot point.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm going to page 47—Mr. Speaker, because there's a lot of heckling. This is from the report that cost over a million dollars. To the minister, as well as to the Premier: What does it say on page 47? I just turned the page and it's right here. It says, "Taxation of new business investment is higher in Ontario than nearly all OCED countries...."

Now, was Jim Flaherty wrong? Perhaps it's how he said it, not what he said. Ontario was once the engine of prosperity for Canada, and now it's the caboose. That's what he was saying. That's unfortunate. How do I know it's a caboose? Every economic report is saying it.

What's Premier McGuinty doing? He's got a bill on staying in school and the pesticide act and these little nibbles—these are nuggets. He's going to cancel the "Our Father." That's one of the big discussions: cancelling the "Our Father" in the Legislature. I think there's more important matters that he should be dealing with.

It says, "Structures: Place a premium on creativity and innovation." That is an important observation as well, because the economy is changing. I think I'm going to drive this down to everyday life. I'm a parent with five children. I believe an education is the actual harness, the fuel, for change and taking empowerment in your life. So I'm a huge believer in it. Go to school as long as you can and get skills. Education should train you for hopefully a prosperous future. But then, with prosperity, you get the responsibility. You have social responsibilities as well. So it's not all about how big a car you can get; it's about how much you can contribute back to your country and our community.

I quite honestly feel, in this whole debate—there are several important books out there. They're more or less textbooks as opposed to casual reading. One is called *The World is Flat*, by Thomas Friedman. You should have a look at that book. It's about globalization. It's about the transformation of the global economy through the Internet and Freenet. What it talks about—I thought there was one very clever and quite accurate line in that book; I'm trying to recall it here and generally précis it. What will be done in the new global economy in Canada, what should we prepare for—the young people, the new group of pages here? What it said is that what will be done in Canada—think about this—is what's done here: Get your teeth fixed. There will be dentists, because you can't ship your teeth over to India to get fixed, unless, of course, they're removable. That's what he said: that what will be done here is what's done here, like get your car fixed—technology, technical jobs.

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However, he went on to explain that even in Canada—Bell Canada and even some of the federal departments are call centres. If you call to get a computer fixed or serviced and you call one of the 800 numbers, you're actually speaking to Bangalore, India. Dell computers, Compaq computers, IBM computers, Bell Canada—almost every company is now moving their call centres and service centres to India. Those are jobs that were respectable opportunities for young people, certainly as an opening position.

He went on to say that almost all accounting now is being done in India, in Bangalore. They ship the data over by satellite, they do all the numbers at a lower rate of pay, I gather, and then ship all the data back. They just plug it into a form and file your tax returns. The Liberals love taxes, so probably everybody is thanking Dalton, as well as Paul Martin when he was the—my point being, though, that there is a transformation in the economy. Get ready.

What are we doing? We're out there trying to get Fiat to come over here. They're going to Italy next week, I think, the Minister of Economic Development—they're going to Fiat, but they'll only build about 5,000 cars. I think they're great little cars; I have no problem. But now they're going to bring the Zen car and the Nano car, the one that's about \$2,500. Those are low-end jobs. We want to strengthen the economy of the province and the jobs and the prosperity. What's the plan? I don't see a plan here.

We've got the report from the competitiveness—“Your taxes are out of control,” is what they said, and your red tape, taxes, permits, fees, inspections, where they come on your property and bingo, TSSA give you a fine for 250 bucks just for showing up. You might be an agricultural person with a diesel tank and there might be one drop of diesel fuel on a catching tray and, bingo, you get a fine. If you don't pay it, you have to get a lawyer. I think they're going about this the wrong way.

One thing that I think is very important to the individual and the family is a home, and a home that's afford-

able. Let's call it “shelter” in a general sense. It could be an apartment; it could be a condo; it could be whatever. I think that's fundamental.

I'm in the midst now, as the critic for municipal affairs, of looking at a report. There's a discussion going on in the background that nobody is really following, and they should. It's in the newspaper today. That discussion is about development charges. What are development charges? They used to be called levies. The member from Pickering–Scarborough East as well as Mr. Flynn from Oakville would know that development charges now on a house, a single-family dwelling, are \$30,000. What are you getting for that? That's for the parks and the gazebos and the skateboard parks and the various things that municipalities love to cut the ribbons at. Meanwhile, their bridges are falling down and the roads need to be paved. But these are the fancy things. There's no glamour in repaving a road. No politicians want to be there with the asphalt and the big steamroller. They would sooner be there with the arena and Wayne Gretzky or somebody dropping the puck, that kind of stuff. They've got to get down to business and start taking care of the infrastructure of the province. I get that.

This development charge thing: Let's look at it. If I'm buying a house, I don't realize that \$30,000—the developer puts the pipes in the ground and the park with the nice swings and things, which are nice, and it's \$30,000. But the person buying the house says, “How come these houses are so darned expensive?” They really don't look at it logically, I think. I have a son who's just in the midst of buying a home. He's a lawyer; has a good job. His wife and their little baby are lovely people, but here's the deal, and I try to tell them, but they're not interested. They get a \$200,000 mortgage. The house is \$270,000, something like that. Buried in the mortgage is the \$30,000. If you take the cost of money—currently about 5%—and if we have a hiccup in the economy, there will be a lot of houses with “for sale” signs.

Here's what happens. You stick the \$30,000 on. Do the math. The \$30,000, over 30 years, because it's tacked on at the end, is the last dollar you pay off. So you have all of the \$30,000 for 30 years. That \$30,000, rather an innocuous amount, probably costs you about \$80,000. That's what they're adding on to your costs of shelter. And we talk about affordable housing.

Then you talk about electricity. Stay tuned. They put in your house—Dwight Duncan was the minister—a thing called a smart meter. It's anything but a smart meter.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, look. Mr. Speaker, through you, actually it is a dumb meter, because the smart meter isn't. A smart meter—there are such things, where you can actually phone your cottage or home and turn on your hot water tank or your hot tub or the heating in the house at the cottage. You can phone. That's a smart one, where it's interactive and you can remotely access it. The real issue here is that this is not a smart meter; this is a time-of-use meter. Now, stay tuned for the treachery. They have just, by regulation, changed the cost of

electricity now. If you are doing your dishes at the wrong time, it's a 100% increase in energy. That's what they're doing.

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm reading the standing orders. I refer you to standing order 23. It says, "In debate, a member shall be called to order by the Speaker if he or she ..."

"(b) Directs his or her speech to matters other than,
 "(i) the question under discussion."

I've been listening to the member, Speaker, and I've heard nothing in relation to Bill 35.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I've been listening intently too.

Further debate.

Mr. John O'Toole: Really, what I'm trying to say is what Bill 35 does—it's kind of an innocuous bill. For the viewers, what Bill 35 is doing is giving Dalton McGuinty the privilege to, at the end of the year, take extra cash out and flush it into the economy where the ridings might be in trouble. That's basically what it is.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: It's per capita.

Mr. John O'Toole: Oh, it'll be done per capita, as the parliamentary assistant, the member from Pickering-Scarborough East, Mr. Arthurs, says—and I have great respect for him. My point is, though, the points I'm trying to make—

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm looking at the standing orders. Under section 23, it says, "In debate, a member shall be called to order by the Speaker if he or she ..."

"(h) Makes allegations against another member."

Then I also look to section (i), where it says, "Imputes false or unavowed motives to another member." I believe that the member just did that, and I would ask for your ruling.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): As a ruling on the point of order, I would ask the member to keep in mind the standing orders and not to violate them knowingly.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I want to switch topics here briefly, with your indulgence. They've just switched the standing orders. That's why there's nobody in the House. They changed the standing orders.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: I mean members; there are no members in here. What is the problem with this Legislature?

Mr. Mike Colle: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It is out of order to mention a member's absence, and he is mentioning that—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member, take your seat, please. The member did not refer to any individual's absence, so he did not violate the standing orders.

Further debate.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Speaker. I know they are trying to get me off the base of talking about real content on Bill 35, but you know, the real truth is there's

such apathy now. Because of these standing order changes, you can see there's no quorum of government members. There's no minister here. It's—well, there is. The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Mr. Caplan, is here.

Anyway, I'll stick to Bill 35. In 35, it says that any surplus at the end of a fiscal year, which could be around August or September—they'll find out during the fiscal year if there's any extra money left. That's a whole different debate, and I could go there, because numbers is what I like to do. I spent two or three years as chair of finance in Durham and Clarington, as well as here; I was parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, the same as the member from Ajax-Pickering. So I have respect for that. What I was going to say is, anything over \$600 million, at the end of the fiscal year, they can give out to municipalities. If you look at the bill, it gives the minister a minute opportunity in the regulations, at the discretion of cabinet—ultimately the Premier—to give it out.

1030

Remember in Quebec—I'm sensitive to these things—when Paul Martin got into trouble with the Lottogate scandal or whatever it was called there, about giving money away? This is inappropriate. There have to be very tight, strict rules, not some political manipulation. I don't go with that. I don't care if it's our party or the NDP; you've got to have very strict rules. This is public money. The integrity of all of us in this Legislature is based on doing the right thing for the right reasons at the right time. Failing to do that is failing the people of Ontario.

What is the most pressing issue in the province? I can tell you, having been elected for 25 years. Here's what I hear. There are two issues. First, the economy is going south and gaining speed. It isn't all Dalton's fault but he's got no plan to deal with it. The second issue, the top issue, is health care. And if I subdivide health care, it's seniors, chronic care, mental health and children, whether it's dyslexia or ADHD or autism. These are emotional, often diagnosable and often treatable problems, and the resources simply aren't there. To me, all of these other discussions about building skateboard parks—when we give children the proper health care and the proper diagnosis assessment, then we'll do the right thing. We'll get right to it as soon as we get enough money to build that skateboard park or that walking trail or whatever.

The Minister of Education is here, which is great. I just want to comment for a minute on that. With all due respect, she's trying to implement in education—the surplus in Bill 35 could easily go to some of the programs—

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Again, I would like to remind you that standing order 23(b) directs members to speak to the matter under debate, which is Bill 35. The member has veered quite significantly from the bill. I ask you to rule on that, please.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Well, it's always a matter of opinion, so I'll keep my ears and eyes open.

Further debate.

Mr. John O'Toole: The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal probably should be at cabinet or something like that. There must be some meeting he could go to. He's just interrupting. He doesn't want the people of Ontario to hear the real truth.

I'm just concerned about the people of Ontario getting the real goods. In Bill 35, if there are clear, straightforward rules—I'm waiting for our member from Niagara West—Glanbrook, the critic for municipal affairs. He's excellent and he's so spot-on in his understanding of the issues. In my case, I'm more of a practical person. I like things to be transparent. We use the words "accountable," "accountability." It's not like when Mr. Colle was the Minister of Tourism or whatever and was giving away the money. That lottery-style giveaway to the cricket club was all wrong. It affects all of us. He had to resign. The auditor got into it. And the auditor is not happy with this. The auditor has commented on Bill 35. It's not part of the PSAB rules, the Public Sector Accounting Board rules.

We can't support the bill. We are interested in further discussion to find rules and ways of dealing with the real infrastructure deficit in Ontario.

If, as Mr. Flynn, the member from Oakville, said earlier, Mike Harris downloaded so much, how come Dalton McGuinty, who promised to fix it, hasn't uploaded one thing except ambulance? Now he's got what they call the fiscal service level review, under municipal affairs. That report was supposed to come out in January or February. Now it's delayed until June, and I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that report by a panel of experts—AMO and others; Doug Reycraft and those people—will be introduced during July, when people are at the cottage. And what will they do about it? It's about uploading.

You should know that that bill—I'm the critic, so I have a great deal of history in this sector. That started in 1985. I'm actually preparing a report with two academics, one from York University and one from the University of Toronto, in response to that report. I shouldn't be saying this out loud because I'm here to challenge the minister on doing the right thing. What this report says is that in 1985 the federal government at the time capped the HRDC transfer payments. That's a fact. If you don't know it, you should leave here or resign. The fact is, quite honestly, that precipitated down. At that time, in Ontario, the gas thing was in. Bill 35 fits into this because if they were really interested in responding to the Mike Harris changes that were mandatory, really, they would have uploaded some of the stuff.

Social housing? Have you got any more doctors? Is there any problem in the emergency rooms? They've increased spending by 41%. Ask yourself: Is it any better? Schools are all in deficit; in fact, they're laying off teachers. They're laying off nurses at Brampton Hospital. You look around. We've increased spending. Yes, they've done it more kindly.

Now we're talking about pesticide and all the smarmy stuff about "don't be cruel to animals" and things—who

would be? But the point that I'm really making here is frightening: this touchy-feely, smarmy stuff when the economy is heading south and they're propping it up. What they're doing with Bill 35 is allowing the minister, at the end of the year, to use any surplus—who's keeping track of the numbers here?—to give out, to prop up their popularity.

It's tragic. No wonder people are cynical. You young people, especially the pages here, the newest group of pages—I'm not saying that anyone here is perfect. That includes us and it includes them. Don't be fooled by the press headlines. They're in charge, they have the gold pen to sign the big cheques and the photo ops, but how's your future looking? How's your school? They're closing the pools in Toronto; probably some of you are from Toronto. They're laying teachers off. They're closing schools. There's absolute disarray. In the Ontario prison system, there's disarray there. The Human Rights Commission, you look in the paper today and Barbara Hall is intruding on things that have no responsibility—I can't believe what's going on.

They are in their second term and when they got elected there was one issue in the election. It was something to do with faith-based schools or something. Now they're going to cancel the Lord's Prayer. That's what they're going to do. Now he's going to have hearings on it. The Premier's already said in the clippings he's cancelling it. So what are all the hearings about? It's a waste of money.

Let's get into some serious discussion about the serious challenges.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Exactly. Where is he today? I'm not supposed to say that and I understand that. But we sit here; the standing orders can't keep the people here. The ministers, I don't know where they are. They're getting their picture taken or something. There are a couple of them here. I can't believe it, and there are serious things that are going on.

This bill is going to slip through. Why? Because they're going to force it. In fact, they've time-allocated this bill. They've changed the standing orders so that nobody knows what committees are even meeting. Honest to God, I perhaps have gone on too long. I get so emotional about this, because it is our province. It is our province and I see a dim image on the horizon. When hope starts to fade, I don't know. There's more could be done.

I know our leader in the House, Bob Runciman, is always trying to find the right solution, the balance. Balance is what we need here, a little co-operation. It's a give and take. We can get there. We can get Ontario back on top, but you're going to have to listen to the suggestions from the successful advisers, the prosperity task force. You're going to have to listen to Roger Martin. You're going to have to listen to the chambers of commerce. You're going to have to listen to our opposition member, Tim Hudak, from Niagara West—Glanbrook. You're going to have to listen to the advice. We want to be responsible for good things in Ontario. We're willing

to help, but you don't seem to be prepared to listen and that's the most disheartening message of all. You're going to forge ahead with a flawed plan and take Ontario down the wrong road of tax-and-spend.

You're back again. I can't believe it.

With that, I'm going to take my chair because I'm exhausted from trying.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: See that? They're ignoring me. I've tried to make the points respectfully, but with that—

Mr. Peter Shurman: They didn't ignore you, John. You keep going.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, look, here is the bill. Here's Bill 35 and if you look at the preamble of this bill, I'm going to actually give a real accounting for it. We're all screaming about it, and they say, "Why aren't you talking more about the bill?" The bill is actually one page long. There's the bill right there. What it does is allow the minister to do pretty well what they want. It won't be Dwight Duncan, in fairness, or Ms. Papatello, or the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, who's spending \$30 billion or \$40 billion on I'm not sure what. But the fact is, it gives cabinet and Dalton McGuinty the power, the gold pen, to do whatever they want, and that is a frightening prognosis for Ontario.

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Can you imagine? If there was a by-election or something, there'd probably be an announcement of some of this money, God forbid. I hope there is a by-election soon, because certainly we need more talent in the Legislature.

We moved four or five motions during hearings on this. Mr. Hudak and the members of the finance committee moved four or five amendments, all of which were turned down. These were our opportunity to improve the legislation.

I would only say to you that I have a copy of the budget. Spending is up, taxes are up, and the economy's down. That's the problem. That's what you get when you vote for the Liberals.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently for quite a period of time to the member from Durham. He did, I must admit, stray from time to time from the actual content of the bill, but he did come back towards the end and make a couple of comments that I think are worth repeating.

He was correct: Within the body of the finance committee, there were a number of motions that were made. Probably the chief motion that was made was to hear from the Auditor General, who had sent a very strong letter criticizing the bill and stating that the bill, if not amended, would cause serious implications to him, to his staff, and thus to the Legislature, because he is a servant of the Legislature. He asked to appear in person, and the members of the Liberal Party in committee unanimously voted to exclude him. I did make that motion, and I think that the member from Durham is correct: This is a disservice not only to this bill but to this House, and as a

result, it may be increasingly difficult for the auditor to do his duties under the rules, which are called PSAB.

The member talked about the sad state of the economy and other things. I really don't think I should comment because it's outside the purview of the bill, but the bill itself could have been improved. And the member is absolutely right: The Liberal members in committee unanimously voted down each and every resolution that was made either by the Progressive Conservatives or the New Democrats, thus ensuring its weakness in the end.

I commend the member for at least the part of his speech that was on topic. He did capture in those phrases the gist of what was wrong.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I listened intently, I must say, to not all but a lot of the speech that was just presented by the member from Durham. He's beginning to take on some of the characteristics of the other fine actors in this place who tend to take the stage from time to time. There were some enjoyable moments in his presentation, and I'm glad I was able to be here and listen to part of it, although not all of it.

I still remain surprised at why this particular member continues to minimize the effects of significant investment in infrastructure funding in all sorts of communities across the province of Ontario. I responded yesterday in this context to the communities that I represent, places like Neebing, Oliver Paipoonge, Conmee, the city of Thunder Bay—small communities in northwestern Ontario in the riding that I represent, many of which have incredibly large land masses. Contained in that land mass, supported by very small population bases, are miles and miles of roads, bridges and community centres that these communities do not have the fiscal capacity to maintain. They seriously and very much appreciate these investments in infrastructure that we give them on an ongoing basis, not only in our last budget and through the MIII, but significant investments in infrastructure in previous years. A community like Neebing, with a population of 2,000, 3,000 or 4,000 people, with multiple miles of roads and bridges, \$2 million; Oliver Paipoonge, 4,000 to 5,000 people, miles and miles—or kilometres—of roads, bridges and community centres, \$2 million, \$3 million, \$4 million over the course of the last three or four years from the McGuinty government.

These investments in infrastructure are huge in my area. It's still a mystery to me why the member from Durham for some reason wants to continue to minimize the very positive effect of these investments by our government.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to compliment the member from Durham for really a virtuoso performance in this House this morning. He covered all the details that he wanted to with respect to Bill 35 and put them in a broader context with respect to some of the other issues that are facing this House today. But unfortunately, he ran out of time and was unable to read into the record some of the amendments that our caucus brought forward. They were moved by the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook during the committee review of this Bill 35.

I know that the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook brought forward motions which would have ensured that the bill would only be effective until the end of this fiscal year, March 31, 2009. He also brought forward an amendment which would have had the effect of ensuring that the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs would respect the recommendations and suggestions from the Auditor General.

Of course, the Auditor General, in a highly unusual intervention, wrote a letter to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs commenting on the bill, expressing some serious concerns. Our caucus was interested in having the Auditor General come forward and make a presentation to the committee before the committee disposed of the bill and referred it back to the House. As you know, the Auditor General is an officer of this Legislature who provides independent, neutral advice to the committees and to other aspects of the operations of the government, with an annual report every year identifying and highlighting areas where government spending needs to be drawn to the attention of the public and hopefully corrected so as to ensure that taxpayers are receiving good value for their money. We were quite disappointed when the government members of the committee voted down that request by our party to have the Auditor General come in to the committee and make representation.

Once again, I want to compliment the member from Durham for his fine presentation this morning in this Legislature. We look forward to his two-minute reply.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Members, could you come to order? We're completing some business before we transition to question period.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to add two minutes to the debate here. I listened intently, as other members did, to the member across the way who passed his opinions on the bill. I don't think I agreed with anything that was said.

I think you've got to put this bill in context and go back to the impact of some of the downloading during the years of the Mike Harris and Ernie Eves government. When you think of what happened to our schools, hospitals and highways in this province, things like sports facilities and social services, the impact of the downloading was traumatic on the operations of our communities. Towns and cities simply didn't have the ability to operate in the fashion that we've become accustomed to and provide the services to people in their communities that the people were insisting upon.

Bill 35, in my opinion, provides that plan to move forward. It gives municipalities, it gives the towns and the cities, a plan they can put some faith and some trust in, knowing that funds will flow that will allow these services to be provided in a way I know all Ontarians would like to see. It's a partnership between the provincial level of government and the local level of government.

As I said in my previous comments, it's received great support from civic leaders throughout Ontario. Look at the remarks that were made by Mayor McCallion; look at the remarks from David Miller. I'll quote one: Mayor Hazel McCallion, *Toronto Star*, March 13, 2008. She says, "This is just great. The province has done exactly what we asked them to do." There are not many people in this chamber who would choose to argue with Mayor McCallion. I think she knows about the operation of municipalities in a way that we simply agree with on this side of the House.

The Conservatives seem to have a different attitude to this problem. It's a problem of their own creation, I think. We're coming up with a solution. They provided the downloading; we're providing a solution to that. This bill is worthy of the support of all members.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Durham.

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Mr. John O'Toole: I thank the members for Beaches–East York, Thunder Bay–Atikokan, Wellington–Halton Hills and, more recently, Oakville. I think the key here is that this is creating, at the end of the year, a slush fund. The slush fund can be given out, according to the legislation at this time, at the will of the Premier. I'm happy that the Premier's here, and his finance minister, to know that that's what we think and that's why we can't support it.

The member from Oakville should know, having served on a regional tier of government, that there was outrage during the period after Floyd Laughren and the NDP social contract. When Mike Harris was elected to make significant changes, it was done rather hurriedly because we were hemorrhaging money at the time. The Liberals voted against a lot of that. The problem is, they talk about downloading, but they haven't uploaded anything. The fact is, it's all a plan; it's all words. They're increasing spending. Taxes are up; the economy's down. Get the message. Read the prosperity report; look at what Roger Martin is telling you. You're on the wrong road. You're going in the wrong direction. All of the indicators—200,000 jobs—this is a slush fund by any other name. It's discouraging. No wonder the people are so discouraged in the province.

I know that the Premier is trying to switch the channel. He wants to talk about the Lord's Prayer. He wants to talk about barking dogs. You're on the wrong track. Just take a breath, slow down, try to get some more doctors to come to Ontario, try to fix emergency, and try to stop schools from laying off teachers. Slow down for a minute. The economy's in trouble; you know that. What are you doing? What's the plan? I don't see any plan.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex, in the east members' gallery is the mother of page Adam Russolo, Kari

Viglasky, and Adam's grandparents, John and Barb Viglasky. We welcome them.

On behalf of the member from Davenport, in the east members' gallery, Mr. John Santos, the chair of the international singing contest, as well as the 10 finalists: Andre Carneiro, Kayla De Brito, Emily Ferreira, Nancy Marques, Sandra Nogueira, Clara Santos, Veronica Grewal, Rita Francis, Sandra da Silva and Nevia da Silva.

In the east members' gallery, on behalf of page Arjun Sawhney, Archna Kurichh, his aunt.

As well, on behalf of all members of the House, we'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate Deb Matthews, the Minister of Children and Youth Services, on the occasion of becoming a grandmother. We welcome into the world Isaac Roger Molouba.

ORAL QUESTIONS

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier and it has to do with trade apprenticeship ratios. I'm going to quote from a fact sheet from the Ontario Electrical League, just put out recently:

"Many contractors report turning away young job-seeking Ontarians on a weekly or even daily basis, not because they don't have work but because the government, through its artificially high apprenticeship ratios, does not allow them to hire these young people. The government of Ontario continues to maintain artificial barriers, the highest apprentice-journeymen ratios in Canada, to stop young Ontarians from becoming construction and maintenance electricians."

Premier, I asked you about this issue a few weeks ago. You indicated that you would look into it and take action. What have you done in the interim?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities has been working on this and he'll want to speak to this momentarily, but let me just say the following: The current electrician ratio of 3 to 1 has been in place since 1991. Electrical apprentice registrations, notwithstanding that, have increased by 32% since 2003, which speaks to the effectiveness of our plan. Ratios are set by the provincial advisory committees, made up of employers and employees.

I know that in the response to the supplementary question, the minister will have more to add to this.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: That's a very disappointing response, given the Premier's earlier comments on this issue. He's repeatedly said that there's nothing he can do about manufacturing job losses; in fact, he said that there are more to come.

Changing the apprenticeship ratios won't cost this government a dime. It will help move almost 200,000 people who've lost their jobs under your watch in those sectors that have labour shortages.

Yesterday, the Waterloo Record quoted Diane Gabel of Gabel Electric as saying, "The apprenticeship ratios are totally tying our hands. We can't hire."

Think of what a change in the ratio would do for communities like Listowel, where this lady's business is. They've been devastated by plant closings.

Premier, it's a no-brainer. Here's something real and immediate that you can do to address the job crisis in this province. Why isn't this a top priority for you?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: I'm pleased to stand and talk about our record in terms of apprentices. The member referenced my home community of Waterloo region. I want to inform members that yesterday I had the privilege of going to the Skills Canada-Ontario competition in Waterloo region, which is a program for young people in both high school and college to expose them to apprenticeships. Over 30,000 young people went through this program yesterday to learn about apprenticeships.

Our government made a commitment last term to increase the number of apprenticeships by 25%. This year, new apprenticeship registrations will rise to 26,000. That's 7,000 more new apprenticeships than there were in 2003, and we're on track to increase them by another 25% in the course of this mandate.

The honourable member mentions ratios. He is aware that the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: This process was in place under the former Conservative government under a well-managed and booming economy.

I want to say that the ratio for electricians is 3 to 1; for drywall finishers, it's 3 to 1; for cement masons, it's 4 to 1; for carpenters, it's 4 to 1. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce recently passed a resolution calling on you to address this. No other province has such overall stringent restrictions, and this Premier and his colleagues are in no hurry to change them. Could it be because of the fund-raisers the trade unions have held for the Liberal Party of Ontario? Is this all about payback to unions, at the expense of thousands of unemployed Ontarians who can't pay their mortgages and can't feed their families? Is that what this is all about?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would ask the member to withdraw his comments casting aspersions for reward. I would just ask him to withdraw those comments.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): And for imputing motives: I would appreciate withdrawal of those comments.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Out of respect to you, Chair, I will.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities?

Hon. John Milloy: The member is aware that ratios are regularly examined. I'd like to point out that changes

were made to ratios affecting various trades in both 2005 and 2007. Some examples: brick and stonemasons; architectural glass and metal mechanics; ironworkers, structural and ornamental; and sprinkler and fire protection installers.

I'd also like to point out that I agree with him: This process existed when his government was in office, and not a single ratio was changed under the Conservative watch.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The economy wasn't going down the toilet like it is under this government.

PREMIER'S COMMENTS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Premier, about pronouncements to the press over the last two weeks. Last week, during the announcement on the pesticide ban, you told the media that municipalities would still be free to bring in their own bans. In fact, the bill says the exact opposite, as we now know. The environment minister stood next to you and didn't correct you. In fact, no correction came from either the Premier's office or the environment ministry until a week later, after the press had caught on to the error.

Premier, can you explain how you could be so ill-informed about your government's own legislation? You're good at blaming others. Was it the minister's fault?

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Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're really proud of our new legislation. I want to congratulate the minister for his leadership in this regard. We look forward to having that in place to further protect the health of Ontarians.

To speak to the specific issue raised by the leader of the official opposition, it was my mistake. I take responsibility for that. I was not adequately informed at the time in order to be able to speak to this with the full clarity that I should have been able to when we first launched this initiative. I take responsibility for that.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: If the minister was aware of the contents of the legislation, I think he would've stepped up and corrected it on the spot.

After the pesticide ban debacle, and to try to save face in light of the General Motors job losses, the Premier blurted out that a new auto plant was definitely coming to Ontario, possibly from Fiat.

The reality is that there have been no concrete talks, no commitment from any foreign automaker to bring a new plant to Ontario. The CEO of Fiat was reported saying that the ball is in the Premier's court, meaning he wants to see how many zeroes are going to be on the cheque.

Premier, why would you speak with such certainty on a new auto plant when you have no firm commitment, haven't even started having serious talks and may have jeopardized an opportunity?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll tell you why—

Hon. Michael Bryant: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The first question was on pesticides. The second question was on auto strategy. One does not have anything to do with the other.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Leader of the Opposition, if you could just quickly direct how that related to the first question, please.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: There is a thread in terms of confidence in leadership.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I'm pleased to take the question.

I'll tell you why I'm able to speak with such—

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, you're not; you're not pleased.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think they might have a passing interest in what I have to say.

I tell you why I speak with such confidence on behalf of Ontarians and the future prospects for our economy. When it comes to the auto sector in particular, we are really, really good at making cars. The only place they make a Lexus outside of Japan is in Ontario. GM has chosen to make its first-ever hybrid truck in Ontario. We are really good, and it's the skills of our labour, it's the quality of our workmanship that distinguishes us from any other jurisdiction. So when I say we're about to work as hard as we can to land another plant, I can speak with confidence. I know that, sooner or later, we will land another assembly plant in the province of Ontario. I'd ask my colleagues opposite to join me in expressing that kind of determination and confidence in our workers and in our province.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It's called a rewriting of the facts.

Yesterday morning, when the media asked the Premier about the foot-and-mouth virus spreading across China killing young children, he professed ignorance—totally unaware. This is Emergency Preparedness Week, and this government isn't aware of a possible pandemic in a country hosting the Olympics in a matter of weeks, which will see thousands of Ontarians travelling to China.

Premier, you are clearly ill-informed regarding legislation you're trumpeting. You carelessly blurt out confidential information for short-term political gain and you're not up to speed on a potential health hazard for Ontarians—a very bad week.

Premier, given the difficult challenges this province is currently facing, how can Ontarians have confidence in your leadership?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable friend and colleague has every right to present the case as he has. I don't share that perspective and I don't believe Ontarians do either.

Again, let's revisit this. On the first issue, I take responsibility. I should have been better informed with respect to an initiative, and I wasn't. I accept that.

On the second issue, again, I share the confidence that Ontarians have. Sooner or later we will land more investment in the auto sector in the province of Ontario.

On the third issue, there was an international issue and the member opposite feels that I should somehow be aware of all these issues at the same time. I just don't think Ontarians feel that. I'll tell you one thing: I have every confidence in my ministers and in my caucus. They all have assigned, specific responsibilities. They're well-informed on these issues. The reason I feel so confident to represent the people of Ontario as leader of their government is because I have confidence in my cabinet, I have confidence in my caucus and I have confidence in the people of Ontario.

PLANT CLOSURES

Mr. Howard Hampton: I want to ask the Premier about a London company that was purchased about a year ago by a US corporation. After the purchase, the US corporation gradually reduced the number of workers to less than 50. They moved orders to the US production facilities. Now that they've reduced the workforce to less than 50 workers and the payroll to less than \$2.5 million a year, the US corporation has announced the imminent closure of the plant. The US corporation gets the patents, the technology and the order books of the London company. The workers, some of whom have worked there for over 20 years, under the Employment Standards Act of Ontario, will get nothing, not even severance pay. Does this sound like a fair situation to the Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I understand that the leader of the third party indicated today that he plans to bring forward a private member's bill around this. I haven't seen that bill yet, so it's difficult for me to comment in terms of what's going to be in it. I guess the one thing I would say is that the leader of the third party may want to look at what this government is doing to try to deal with this tougher economy. Our five-point plan invests heavily in our people. I think the best thing we can do for workers across this province is to ensure that they have opportunities, when the unfortunate circumstance comes upon them to be laid off, to be able to retrain and find a job that can assist them in continuing to keep a roof over their head, feed their families and enjoy a good quality of life.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I didn't hear an answer from the Premier. I didn't hear an answer from the minister either. The reality here is this: This American company, under Ontario law, is able to get the patents, the technology and the order books. Under Ontario law, once they reduce the number of workers to under 50, they're under no obligation to pay severance. People who've worked in this facility for 25 years are out on the street—no job and not even severance pay.

My question is to the Premier. I'm going to put forward a private member's bill today that would ensure that workers like these at least get severance pay. Are the

Premier and the McGuinty government prepared to support such a bill, which would speak to the unfairness these workers are facing?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I encourage the member to bring his bill forward. We haven't seen it yet. It hasn't been introduced. Certainly, as with all private members' bills, the members of this Legislature will be interested in having a look at it, and the Legislature will do with his bill what it does with all private members' bills: If it is brought forward for debate, I'm sure there'll be a thorough debate on his bill and his intention.

What I will say is that this government is working extremely hard with regard to putting forward our five-point plan to deal with these tougher economic consequences that we face. We're investing in our people. We're investing in partnerships. We're investing in infrastructure. We're investing in innovation. Our goal is to do all we can to assist workers as they're working through this tougher economic time. The Premier said over and over again—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: We've already seen the McGuinty government block the NDP's Bill 6, which would have guaranteed laid-off workers the severance and back pay owed to them by law.

This situation which happened in London is not unique. Genfast, which was the company of the year in Brantford not many years ago, was acquired by an American company. After they acquired it, they took the technology, the patents and the order books and shut down the company. At Ferranti-Packard in St. Catharines, workers were told there, "You're a productive plant, you're a cost-effective plant, but we're going to shut you down because it's cheaper, easier and quicker to lay off workers in Ontario under the Employment Standards Act than it is in Quebec or some other US jurisdictions."

This is all wrong. So I'm asking the Premier, will you support the private member's bill I'm about to introduce which will ensure that workers cannot be—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

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Hon. Brad Duguid: What I'll ask of the leader of the third party is that he join us in the leadership that we are showing across this country when it comes to going after the federal government to ensure that they strengthen the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to provide greater priorities for workers who do lose their severance pay when a company goes bankrupt. We are leading that charge across this province.

I have letters from my colleagues, fellow Ministers of Labour across Canada, joining us in our effort to urge the federal government to bring forward their wage-earner protection plan, strengthen it by adding severance and termination pay to that bill, and change the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to provide greater priority to those workers who find themselves in the unfortunate circumstance of losing their severance pay because—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, and I remind the member from Hamilton East that he should be in his seat. New question.

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: This question is for the Premier. This government claims that it wants to consult Ontarians about poverty reduction. Meanwhile, it tightly controls participation, imposes its own agenda, keeps dates and times secret from members of this House and uses security guards to keep the poor out.

One organizer of a local consultation about to be held has been ordered not to invite anti-poverty activists by members of the minister's staff. Why does this government refuse to allow low-income citizens and community activists a place in ministerial consultations?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have to tell you that this is an exciting time in the history of Ontario because, for the first time ever, a government has looked at the issue of poverty and has decided that existing levels of poverty are unacceptable. We are preparing a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy with targets, with measures. It is a terrific committee that has been brought together across ministries.

I am out talking to people in communities. I have had wonderful conversations this week with a broad cross-section of people, including members from the Peterborough Coalition Against Poverty and the Northumberland Coalition Against Poverty. I visited a youth shelter in Peterborough.

The consultation is broad. There are many, many ways that a citizen in this province can contribute. I welcome the contribution and I ask all MPPs in the House—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: I think the minister is afraid to answer the real nub of the question, and that is, why are people being excluded? The minister chooses to exclude people who have the most insight into the travails of poverty. For the past three days our office has tried to find out the starting times of future consultations, but her staff either will not return the call or refuse to tell us even when they will begin.

Why won't this minister admit that her closed-door approach is undermining public trust and alienating the very people she claims to want to help?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I find myself both troubled and confused about the position of the party opposite. They are—

Hon. Monique M. Smith: They're confusing.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: They are confusing the facts on this particular issue. The member opposite knows full well, because he has been there, that we have invited members of the public to come in. We have had a broad cross-section of people at the consultations.

The party opposite asked for an increase in social assistance rates. Every time we've introduced an increase in social assistance rates, they've voted against it. The members opposite have asked for an increase in the minimum wage. Every time we have introduced an increase in the minimum wage, they voted against it. They have been asking for increased supports for children living in poverty. When we introduced the most important improvement in supports for children living in poverty, you voted against it. You continue to vote against it.

We are engaged in a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. There are—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: Once again, this minister refuses to answer the question and talks. "Blah, blah, blah."

As a boy growing up in Regent Park, I saw first-hand how poverty ravages the soul and lays waste to the spirit. I saw how people like us were ignored by politicians and others, even the well-meaning, who always ended up speaking for us and about us. We were marginalized and we were never included. This minister should know how people like that feel judged and excluded, and how the poor never feel that they belong. She should know how hurtful her actions are when she tells them to communicate via e-mail and won't talk to them face to face inside the meeting. When will this minister open the process, build trust and involve the very people she claims to care about?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite has his facts wrong, and he knows he has his facts wrong, because he was there. I spent approximately half an hour outside the meetings on both occasions, talking to people. As I said earlier, I invited them in. I've also visited youth shelters, where I sat down and had dinner with kids who are in a youth shelter, to talk to them one on one about what their challenges were; I have visited the Rebound Centre, again a youth organization. The invitation list includes a broad section of people in the community, including some of the people who were protesting outside. You well know that the invitation list includes members of low-income families.

Why do you continue to stand on the sidelines and take potshots at this process? I'm asking you to get engaged in this. For the first time ever, there's an opportunity to make a contribution, and I'm asking you to do it.

TOBACCO CONTROL

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Premier. Premier, it's only fair that anyone who lives or operates a business or other type of activity on land owned by the province should be required to pay rent, as this is land owned by the taxpayers of Ontario, and should certainly not be permitted to endanger children. There have been a lot of different answers given by your ministers on this, so I'd like to ask the Premier today, with respect to the

property on Argyle Street in Caledonia, has there been an eviction notice sent and has it been acted upon?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I say to the member again, in answer to this question, that this is on a right-of-way adjacent to a highway. It's not on the reserve, it's not on the DCE lands; it is something that has caused concern amongst not only Caledonia townfolk and people across this province but also people within the Haudenosaunee Six Nations. I know that the band council chief and council have expressed their concerns about it and have condemned it. There's no question that it is incredibly unhelpful for the relationship between the townfolk, the government and the Haudenosaunee Six Nations. The way to resolve it, as the Premier has said many times, is to negotiate a resolution, and that's what we're trying to do.

Ms. Laurie Scott: On April 29, the minister who just spoke said that the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal had issued an eviction notice to the vendor operating on Argyle Street, on crown land, some weeks ago. He then stated that the notice was sent by a third party. My question would then be to explain why, in your capacity, you think it's acceptable for a third party to send an eviction notice to an illegal operation on government-owned property.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Again, I'm sure the member would like to be a part of the solution and not part of the problem; I know the member would want to be a part of the solution. The solution is going to be through, firstly, improving the relationship in a community that's extremely divided right now. It used to be the case that the communities of Caledonia and Haudenosaunee Six Nations were living together in relative harmony, shopping together in the same stores and going to the same Tim Hortons, and now they've become significantly divided. As a result of that, what we are trying to do is bring the communities back together. It is a 200-year-old dispute between Haudenosaunee Six Nations and the federal government. Ultimately, the province is going to do its job to try and do everything we can to resolve it. I know that the member would want to talk to her federal counterpart, and particularly the MP for that area, to try to get the federal government to make a contribution as well.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée.

Il y a plus d'un an de cela, le ministre nous a promis that he would mandate a minimum standard of care by regulations instead of including it in Bill 140. He then delayed the implementation of minimal standards by appointing Shirlee Sharkey to study the issue. In Saturday's Toronto Star, the minister's press secretary said that the Sharkey report would be completed this week. Has the minister received the report and, if he has, could

he tell us what it says about minimum standards of care in long-term care?

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Hon. George Smitherman: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. I have not received the report but would want members of the House to know that upon receipt of the report, it will be in the public domain and made available for all of us to benefit from it.

I don't agree with the assertion the honourable member makes. It's not a delaying tactic. It's a tactic that's designed to ask someone quite esteemed in health care to give us some advice about best implementation in terms of enhancing training and education standards for those who are providing support in the long-term-care environment. I think the report will be very beneficial, but I'm not certain what advice it's going to offer, particularly around the standards that the honourable member suggests.

I can tell the honourable member that, through our budget projections, we anticipate by the end of the mandate having paid hours of care at 3.25 on a daily basis, a very substantial bit of progress over what we inherited and an appropriate investment given the needs of the vulnerable residents of long-term-care homes.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Back in 2007, everyone who appeared in front of the committee on Bill 140 urged the government to enact a minimum standard of care. At the time, the minister dismissed the idea, saying that a minimum standard of care would treat people like "widgets," I think is the word. He finally bowed to public pressure, but the reality is there is no minimum standard of care in long-term care. Will the minister commit today to implement a minimum standard of care in long-term care?

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member apparently hasn't been too particularly well informed about the way we're going about that. It was through an amendment that was brought forward in the legislative process that brought Ontario back to minimum standards, with one difference: We don't want to have a circumstance where we pretend, or ask long-term-care workers to pretend, that the needs of every resident are identical. We want to make sure there's sufficient flexibility so that the hours of care are not distributed necessarily exactly equally if the needs of one individual are greater than another.

This is the bias we have. Shirlee Sharkey's report will give us good advice around that. I think it's exciting to be back in a situation where we will have these standards in place. They were in place at one time at a much lower level when your party was the government of Ontario, and that party eliminated them.

SCHOOL BOARDS

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: My question is to the Minister of Education. Spending hard-earned tax dollars wisely is at the top of my constituents' priority list. They want to know that they are getting good value for their money

and that funds are being spent prudently and wisely. In no area is this more important than when it comes to their children's education. That's why the steps our government has taken to improve accountability and increase transparency in fiscal management are important to them.

But earlier this year, my constituents were concerned about expenditures at the TCDSB and want to know that public funds are being spent in the best interests of our students. I know the minister appointed an investigator to review these issues and I would ask her to update the House on the status of this investigative report.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've been very clear with board trustees that they're expected to make spending decisions in a transparent and accountable fashion and that I and this government will tolerate no less.

In December 2006, through the Ministry of Education, we put guidelines in place that set a high standard for reporting. In February, because there seemed to be some residual concerns in consultation with the chair of the Toronto Catholic board, I appointed Mr. Hartmann to go into the board and look at some of the expenses, some of the issues. That report has come back to me today. I have received it and I will share copies with the critics opposite.

The blueprint in the report is an excellent one for boards to eliminate inappropriate reimbursements, inappropriate expenses and the use of public dollars for private advantage. I fully expect that the board will be implementing these recommendations. As I have said, I have no patience, nor does this government have any patience, for any behaviours that will undermine public confidence in publicly funded education.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Minister, as you've said, public confidence is key to creating communities that are committed to maintaining and improving publicly funded schools, where 95% of Ontarian students attend.

Questionable expenses erode public confidence, especially in light of the significant investments that our government has made. I would ask the minister what steps she's going to take to ensure that the appropriate checks and balances are in place to allow my constituents to have confidence that their increased investments in public education are being spent prudently and appropriately.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'll be taking immediate action. I expect the board to implement the report's recommendations. I'm writing to the board today to ask them to confirm in writing, by May 21, its plan and timeline for implementing the recommendations. I'm also asking that the board file its amended policies no later than June 30 of this year, and I'll be sending in an auditor to work directly with individual trustees on some of the questionable reimbursements that remain.

On a provincial level, I'm going to be consulting with trustee associations, because I think some of the findings of this report have implications across the province. What I want to do is to strengthen the oversight and accountability practices. It is incumbent upon all elected officials to make sure that allocation of public funds is done in the

most transparent way, in keeping with accepted practices. I will be working with the trustee associations.

As I have said, there is no patience and no tolerance within this government for any practices that will undermine publicly funded education.

ANIMAL PROTECTION LEGISLATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question today is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. As you know, Minister, many Ontarians feel that Bill 50 is badly flawed. Stakeholders are inundating our offices, concerned about flaws in this bill, and they are worried about potential flawed regulations.

Minister, I asked you a question three weeks ago, and on that day you didn't really answer the question. Perhaps you didn't understand it, but I'll ask it again: Will you commit to this House today that during the drafting of regulations relating to Bill 50 you will include representatives from hunting, fishing and agricultural organizations and use their expertise in drafting regulations for Bill 50?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: We're very proud of the process we're using with Bill 50. Before we introduced it for first reading, we had widespread consultation from the stakeholders that the member spoke about, but other stakeholders as well. We look forward to second reading being completed and then we look forward to bringing this bill to committee for extensive consultation.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: It sounds like you're not going to include hunting and fishing and agricultural organizations in the drafting.

Another major flaw in this bill is the inclusion of section 6. Humane societies across Ontario believe that, if enacted, section 6 will strip them of their names. As the Toronto Humane Society says—and that's an institution that's over 120 years old—"It's like losing your name; it's like losing your identity." Minister, will you stand today in this House and commit to either removing or making major amendments to section 6 of Bill 50?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Again, we're very proud of the legislation we introduced. We're even prouder of the process that we're going to use with regard to our intent, our desire and our commitment to have extensive committee hearings for this bill. We want to hear from the stakeholders. We want to hear from those directly involved. We want their opinions and we want their ideas, and certainly the committee will give those opinions and those ideas fair consideration.

ONTARIO MUNICIPAL BOARD

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Ontarians are now being advised not to appeal environmentally destructive planning decisions to the OMB for fear of being sued by very deep-pocketed developers. Why does the McGuinty government sit on its hands while Geranium Corp. slaps

concerned citizens trying to protect the Lake Simcoe environment with \$3.6 million in OMB hearing costs?

Hon. Jim Watson: As the particular matter the member raised is before the OMB, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on that specific case. But I can tell you that the OMB, of course, is authorized to award costs. It does so very rarely and only when someone's conduct is deemed to be clearly unreasonable, frivolous or in bad faith. The ability to award costs is to help ensure that the process is fair for all by discouraging unreasonable conduct.

One of the things I'm proud of that our government has implemented with respect to OMB reforms is the creation of the citizen liaison office. Members may know that citizens can contact the citizen liaison office or visit the OMB website. I'll give you the phone number: It's 1-866-887-8820. It's an opportunity for this citizen liaison office to assist members of the public in terms of issues they have before the OMB. It is additional assistance to individuals appealing before the OMB, and it's something I would hope members of the public would take advantage of.

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Ms. Andrea Horwath: Websites and help phones just don't cut it in this environment. Geranium Corporation's intimidation tactics at the OMB have already resulted in the Concerned Residents of Hillsdale deciding not to appear at the OMB opposing massive Geranium development in their town.

Leaders like Quebec, however, and British Columbia, already have legislation that's aimed at ensuring big-money interests don't use courts to muzzle public participation. When is the McGuinty government going to stop protecting the big developers and introduce OMB reform in this province that ensures local citizens aren't slapped with multi-million-dollar lawsuits when they act to protect their own environment?

Hon. Jim Watson: Again, I can't comment on the specific issue because it is before the OMB. But under my predecessor, the current Minister of the Environment, we undertook probably the most comprehensive reform of the Ontario Municipal Board in the last 25 years. In fact, we have made it better, we've made it fairer and we've made it more transparent. One of the things we've done is encouraged all parties to ensure that decisions and information are brought to the front of the process as opposed to midway through, so it allows individual citizens a fairer chance of having their case heard before the OMB.

We've also instituted, as I've mentioned, the citizen liaison office, we've eliminated the applicant's right of appeal to the OMB when a municipality does not support an application that relates to an urban boundary expansion, and new power for the OMB to dismiss repeat applications without a full hearing.

The fact of the matter is that we have listened to community association groups. I know, as a former city councillor and a mayor myself, I understand—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

NORTHERN ONTARIO HERITAGE FUND

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I have a question for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. My question regards investments by the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. As members of the House know, the McGuinty government is making significant investments in northern communities and businesses through the NOHFC. However, members of this House may not know that the fund actually offers six unique funding programs to create sustainable jobs for northerners and foster economic opportunity across all of northern Ontario. This fund, through such avenues as the emerging technology fund, provides important investment in the future viability of northern communities and businesses. Increasingly, whether it be health care, education, business solutions or social networking, people need to be connected.

Would the minister tell the House, what are your programs doing to achieve this important goal?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I want to thank the member for Algoma-Manitoulin for the question.

Certainly, my colleague is absolutely right: Being connected is hardly an option anymore in today's just-in-time society. That's why I'm so proud of our government's investments through the northern Ontario heritage fund towards developing broadband and cellular coverage throughout the north. Again, complimenting my colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin, he understands full well that in terms of attracting economic investment and maximizing the tourist potential, we need to upgrade our cellular and broadband service. As a result of that, in early 2007, we refocused the emerging technology program, with the goal of making investments to bring broadband Internet and cellular service to all of northern Ontario over the next three years. I'm happy to report that since coming to office in 2003, we've invested more than \$45 million through the NOHFC in 20 telecommunications projects across the north.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: These are very important and significant investments in the riding of Algoma-Manitoulin and across all of northern Ontario. We are all excited to see that the government is initiating a lofty plan and goal—pan-northern in its reach—which will bring cellular and broadband coverage to all of northern Ontario.

I'm confident that these investments will develop capacity that will have a real impact on the way that northerners learn, how our businesses compete and how our people interconnect. This has already proven important in Algoma-Manitoulin through the work we've done on Highway 17, and also through places like Chapleau, which has brought cellular towers to places that never would have had them before.

Minister, I know the NOHFC board has met recently. I would be interested to know what new investments in broadband we are about to see in northern Ontario.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you again for the question. I'm certainly pleased to report to the House that

at our last board meeting a number of important projects were approved. I look forward to announcing those investments in the near future—as well as my colleagues all across the north.

To date, under the McGuinty government, the NOHFC has invested over \$338 million towards more than 1,600 projects in the north. This has leveraged more than \$1 billion in additional investments and will help create or sustain approximately 9,800 jobs. It's important to know that we are investing in every riding right across the north.

I'm talking about such significant investments as the \$1 million for the Discover Abitibi project in Timmins and the \$2 million for the Sioux Lookout downtown revitalization plan. These are great community projects that we're very proud to be a part of. I look forward to continuing this great work as we increase the NOHFC from \$60 million to \$100 million a year, annually.

MOOSE TAGS

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, recently the auditor did a report expressing some strong concerns regarding the moose problem in the province of Ontario. You have initiated a review throughout the province.

The concerns from the initial meetings at the review are that it's more of a sales pitch program than it actually is for gaining input. The concerns from these individuals who have been in attendance at these meetings is that the dialogue has been shut down and directed towards specific programs to come forward. Minister, can you assure us that the review will actually take input, that there will be a report and that that report will be submitted for a total review?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'd like to thank the member from Oshawa for the question. You're absolutely correct. The Auditor General did determine that there were concerns around the moose allocation and the moose program. That program has actually been in place for 28 years, so it was time for it to be reviewed.

Without question, I will assure the member that the consultation that will take place will be meaningful consultation. It will be open and accessible. It will be put in place so that people feel that what they're speaking to and about is taken directly into the concerns that have been expressed around the programs.

I will assure the member that that will occur. Those stakeholders include aboriginals, hunters and anyone else. In addition to that, I'm asking that every member in this House will also receive a copy of that review so that they too can make some comments for input.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I know the minister has a strong concern and will move forward with that to ensure that it's direct input. One of the concerns that has come forward is that by 2010, the intention of the ministry would be to move forward with greater or province-wide calf tag allocation and/or a spike-horn bull allocation.

Minister, can you assure the province that the decisions haven't been made and that you're actually going to

move forward and seriously consider some of the other options that may be potentially put forward? As well, when you're moving forward with this, this year, why don't you use include licensing? When the licences are issued, the tag allocation is issued. Why don't you include a survey at that time, to survey those individuals who will be recipients, to gain further input?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: That's a really good idea. I will take that further. The other is that you cannot make a decision until you have the data. We have to collect good data, and we're just in the process of doing that.

What's challenging, obviously, is ensuring that the data is correct for each of the different wildlife units. Until that data is done, no decision will be made. Until that data is accurate, no decision will be made on any of those allocations. I can assure the member that nothing will occur until the data is in hand.

COMMUNITY CARE ACCESS CENTRES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Minister of Health: The Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Community Care Access Centre is currently restructuring. Its plan means that the local community will lose the walk-in, face-to-face client services that so many of our most vulnerable residents have come to rely upon. What's happened to the promise this government made to deliver health care services as close to home as possible?

Hon. George Smitherman: Home care, which is what CCACs do, is delivered right in the home. I think that the honourable member is trying to make a case for which it's difficult to make one. If care delivered in the home is the ultimate goal—and that's what CCACs do—then I think we can all conclude that they're still fulfilling that mission.

I'm very privileged to be associated with a government that's seeing that mission extend, carry, capture and support about 100,000 additional Ontarians. I assume that from time to time, organizations will take a look at the way they are modeling their service delivery and seek to ensure that it's most effective and most efficient. We're seeking at all times to make sure that we're taking best advantage of resources available from the taxpayers in Ontario. In this case, to the very best of my knowledge, that was the instinct associated with the decision.

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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary. The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: The McGuinty government is treating nurses, like the ones employed by the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant CCAC, as nothing more than pawns in its budget chess game. Consolidating five local intake offices into one in the farthest corner of the CCAC boundary removes nurses from their local accessible community office and hinders their ability to build patient relationships which are vital to improve health outcomes. Why won't this government treat these nurses and their patients with the respect they deserve by saying no to this restructuring process?

Hon. George Smitherman: I think it's noteworthy that the honourable member's bias in his question was about the service delivery model from the employees' standpoint. This is of course an important consideration, but CCACs are primarily in the business of working on behalf of clients with a view towards providing services to them in their own homes. This is the mandate, the mission and the mode of service delivery for home care. CCACs coordinate that, and our government is responsible for making sure that CCACs have more and more resources to expand the quality of their mission.

There's been a realignment in some of the administrative support that coordinates that care. I'm sure that it does create challenges and perhaps some hardship for individuals, and we apologize for it, but the orientation of these community care access centers must at all times be on enhancing access to services for clients, and that's what they're doing.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. David Oraziotti: My question is for the Minister of Labour. As you know, this is North American Occupational Safety and Health Week. The importance of a safe and healthy work environment is an issue of concern for all Ontarians. I know the minister has taken the time to come to Sault Ste. Marie, visit the provincial claims centre and speak with the employees who provide this very important service to workers across Ontario, and I want to thank the minister for that.

Minister, can you elaborate on the steps we have taken to improve the health and safety of workers across Ontario?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Thank you to the member for the question and for hosting me when I did have the opportunity to visit the Soo. I can tell you, I was very inspired in visiting that claims centre. The workers there are very dedicated to building a health and safety culture, not only in Sault Ste. Marie but right through the whole region of that part of our province. I thank the member for his leadership in that region and for helping us to accomplish that.

Indeed, North American Occupational Safety and Health Week began May 4 and runs to May 10. Each year during this week, health and safety advocates and organizations across North America promote awareness of workplace health and safety through local, provincial and national events. I know we see a lot of these weeks in our time. It seems like every week is special in some way, shape or form, but what could be more important than promoting healthy and safe work environments across this province?

Mr. David Oraziotti: The health and safety of all workers in Ontario is something I know our government is committed to further improving. I understand your ministry has hired hundreds of new inspectors and placed a renewed focus on enforcing compliance with the Occupational Health And Safety Act, because no one should have to worry about whether they'll arrive home

safely. Minister, can you explain specifically what you are doing to help reduce workplace injuries in Ontario?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The member is quite right: We have hired 200 additional new occupational health and safety inspectors, which brings it up to a total of 430. We've almost doubled the number of occupational health and safety inspectors. These inspectors are fully trained in the field of ensuring safe work environments. When they go out into the workplace, they are making a difference. In fact, they visited 21,000 workplaces in the last year alone. That's a lot of work being accomplished on our behalf to make our work sites across this province healthier and safer.

What do we accomplish by working with all of our partners in this field? Fifty thousand workers have now been spared the pain and suffering caused by a workplace injury. That is something that benefits the workers and it's something that benefits families, and it contributes about \$5 billion in costs that would have been accrued to our economy.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is for the Minister of Energy. As Minister of Energy, you have directed the Ontario Power Authority to build a natural-gas-powered generating station in northern York region. My constituents want to know, why do you want to build this station in the middle of one of their communities?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Thank you for the question—a very legitimate one. I would say to you and the people of Ontario that we have a very well developed 20-year plan for energy. It starts with conservation, I might say—that's where we always start—doubling renewables and maintaining our nuclear fleet, but one thing we require is periodically some generating power to meet our peaks. This plan is called the IPSP plan, and this particular development you're talking about is included in it. It is clear that the rapidly growing area that you represent in northern York region does require some generation power. It's clearly in our plan.

You are right: We have asked the Ontario Power Authority to secure that power. It is going to be required in your area to make sure we keep the lights on—well, not keep the lights on, but that we have a good supply in your area to meet the needs of your area.

Mrs. Julia Munro: My constituents are concerned that this station will harm the environment. Will you guarantee that any proposal for a new generating station will undergo a full environmental assessment before a single shovel goes into the ground?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Again I, for your constituents, repeat that the need in this particular plan, as I say, is included in Ontario's 20-year plan. By the way, I might add that it's up for public hearings before the Ontario Energy Board, so that there are opportunities for comment on that.

Certainly any plant requires the necessary approvals, including municipal approval on zoning. Our plan will

meet the environmental requirements of the province of Ontario and the zoning requirements of the province of Ontario. As I say, it is part of our integrated power supply program that is required to ensure that we have a reliable and affordable supply of electricity and that it's done, I might say, in the most environmentally sensitive way we possibly can. But it is required in your area to make sure that people can feel confident about the future supply of electricity.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Jared Osidacz's young life was brutally taken two years ago at the hands of his father, a convicted spousal abuser. Instead of a stand-alone inquest into Jared's death, the coroner has decided to join Jared's inquest with the mandatory inquest into the death of his father, who was shot by police in attempting to murder Jared's mother, Julie Craven. Jared's case merits a stand-alone inquest. Why won't the Premier commit to this?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I'm happy that, finally, the inquest has been called. We all have been assured by the chief coroner that there will be an extensive investigation inquest. Hopefully, it will provide some of the answers to Jared's mother and grandmother that will finally give them some closure.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The minister has the power to do the right thing here, and all we're asking is that that get done. He has the ability, vested in him by the Coroners Act, to call any inquest he wants if he thinks it's in the public interest. An inquest into the violent death of yet another child at the hands of a spousal abuser should meet that test of being in the public interest. Instead of merely postponing the joint inquest, which is what's happening now—a postponement of the previously called joint inquest until the fall—why doesn't the minister immediately announce a stand-alone inquest into Jared's death?

1150

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I have every confidence that both the grandfather and the mother will get the answers that they're looking for. The chief coroner certainly wants that to happen as well. As that inquest unfolds, there will be recommendations made that I think we can all learn from. I believe in the process. I would hope that the process, as I said earlier in my first answer, provides some closure and some answers to a mother who's hurting and a grandfather who's hurting.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. In my community of Hamilton, both McMaster University and Mohawk College are experiencing high enrolment rates as a result of their strong track record of success. Ontario

has one of the highest post-secondary enrolment rates in the G8. Post-secondary enrolment is up 25% in Ontario since 2004, with 100,000 more students attending college or university. With more students in our classrooms, what is the government doing to ensure that students are being served in the best facilities and learning environments?

Hon. John Milloy: I want to thank the member for the question. I want to commend her, along with her colleague the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, for their advocacy for post-secondary education in the Hamilton area with its two fine, outstanding institutions: McMaster and Mohawk.

The growing enrolment rates in our post-secondary institutions are a sign that the Reaching Higher plan, the largest investment in 40 years, is working, and I've been very pleased with subsequent investments that have followed on. In our most recent budget, we announced \$970 million over three years towards our post-secondary institutions. In fact, in the community of Hamilton, McMaster University and Mohawk College received over \$26 million already this year to improve, maintain and upgrade their campus facilities so that students have access to safe and modern learning environments. I think we all recognize, as teachers and faculty have, that we have to have outstanding learning environments.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Investing in our students is imperative in Ontario to continue to be a driving economic force. I'm proud to belong to a government that recognizes the importance of ensuring that our students today are the centre of our economic tomorrow.

In this increasingly globalized economy, Ontario is competing with the world, and we need to ensure that we are ready for the challenge. Minister, can you tell me what we are doing today to provide the students of McMaster University and Mohawk College with the opportunities to excel and compete in today's diverse economy?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, I thank the member and acknowledge her advocacy and that of the Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of accompanying the Premier to Mohawk College to announce an investment of nearly \$20 million to support the McMaster-Mohawk bachelor of technology partnership. This investment will expand classroom and lab space for students. Construction is expected to start this year.

Members should learn about the BTech program. The BTech program combines engineering technology with management skills learning in a co-op environment. The graduates of this course provide highly skilled technological and management leadership, and are sought after in the Hamilton area for the outstanding contribution they can make in the workplace. Not only is this a great program, but it's a wonderful example of our community colleges and universities working together to provide the types of workers we need to make sure that the Ontario economy continues to thrive.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to ask all members to welcome a number of guests in the Speaker's gallery today: His Excellency Bruno Rodriguez, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cuba; His Excellency Ernesto Senti, Cuban ambassador to Canada; Mrs. Josefina Vidal, head of the North American division of the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Mr. Laureano Cardoso, Consul General of Cuba in Toronto; and Mr. Noel Quesada, assistant to the first deputy minister.

Welcome to our guests from Cuba today.

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with the Lord's Prayer and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I support this petition.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that concerns fairness for Ontario workers, and specifically employment insurance. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the federal government's employment insurance surplus now stands at \$54 billion; and

"Whereas over 75% of Ontario's unemployed are not eligible for employment insurance because of Ottawa's unfair eligibility rules; and

"Whereas an Ontario worker has to work more weeks to qualify and receives fewer weeks of benefits than other Canadian unemployed workers; and

"Whereas the average Ontario unemployed worker gets \$4,000 less in EI benefits than unemployed workers in other provinces and thus, unemployed are not qualifying for many retraining programs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to press the federal government to reform the employment insurance program and to end this discrimination and unfairness towards Ontario's unemployed workers."

Since I agree with this petition 100%, I am delighted to sign it.

ONTARIO SOCIETY
FOR THE PREVENTION
OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition in respect to issues that are before the Legislature. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Provincial Animal Welfare Act calls forth the Ontario SPCA, a private charity, whose object is to facilitate and provide for the prevention of cruelty to animals and their protection and relief therefrom; and

"Whereas every inspector and agent hired and trained by this private charity has and may exercise any of the powers of a police officer; and

"Whereas this private charity does not answer to the Ombudsman or the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the Ontario SPCA is not subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and no external mechanism of accountability exists; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government refused to investigate the desperate plea of 29 resigned directors demanding that the Ontario SPCA be stripped of police powers; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government proposes sweeping reforms to the Provincial Animal Welfare Act granting further extraordinary powers to the Ontario SPCA, including the power of warrantless entry;

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

"(1) that the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to investigate allegations of abuse of police powers and charter violations by the Ontario SPCA investigators; and

"(2) that the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to explore the need for an external mechanism of accountability for the Ontario SPCA; and

"(3) that the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to ensure that proposed changes to the Provincial Animal Welfare Act do not violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms."

It goes on. I am pleased to sign and support this, and present it to Cali, one of the new pages.

DAVID DUNLAP OBSERVATORY

Mr. Reza Moridi: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the David Dunlap Observatory in Richmond Hill is of historical and heritage significance;

“Whereas the land was donated in trust by the Dunlap family to the University of Toronto in 1935, and the pre-Confederation farmhouse is still standing;

“Whereas the observatory, featuring the largest optical telescope in Canada, has been the site of scientific discoveries; it has been a place of learning not only for students of the University of Toronto, but for the general public as well;

“Whereas the observatory has been recently declared by the University of Toronto as ‘surplus’ to its academic needs, and subject to sale for development;

“Whereas the observatory occupies an incredibly unique and beautiful 180 acres of green space, the largest such space in the town of Richmond Hill, with trees, birds, animals, plants, insects and butterflies in the middle of a rapidly urbanized area;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to protect such a property of such historical, scientific and natural significance” from being used for commercial development.

Mr. Speaker, I present to you today about 300 signatures, which were presented to me during the rally held at Queen’s Park on January 16, and I’ll sign this petition.

1200

LORD’S PRAYER

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition signed by about 150 of my constituents, and it concerns the Lord’s Prayer.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We at St. Andrews in Fergus are very much aware that many churches and individuals have written to your government voicing their concern about the possible exclusion of the Lord’s Prayer from the opening of the daily proceedings.

“Our concern is genuine, not because we wish to impose our Christian beliefs on anyone, nor do we want the government to be seen as the indirect route used to try to try to accomplish this imposition. Rather, we view the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer in the Legislature as public acknowledgment of the Christian principles espoused by those who were the founding fathers of Canada.

“Canada is a relatively young country, settled by people who wanted a country that would treat its citizens in a fair and just manner—principles held by Christians and extended to all who would seek to make Canada their home. The Legislature is the manifestation of these Christian principles, just and fair decisions for the betterment of all citizens.

“The Lord’s Prayer reminds us that we have not forgotten those principles, nor those who shared their wisdom with us.

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

“On behalf of the members and adherents of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, Fergus, whose signatures are attached, we ask that the recitation of the Lord’s

Prayer remain a vital and traditional part of the Ontario Legislature.”

I support this petition and have affixed my signature to it as well.

LORD’S PRAYER

Mr. Kim Craiton: I’m pleased to present this petition on behalf of a number of residents from the riding of Niagara Falls, including Leona Dempsey:

“Whereas the government is proposing to remove the Lord’s Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Ontario Legislature; and

“Whereas the Lord’s Prayer has opened the Legislature each and every day since the 19th century; and

“Whereas the Lord’s Prayer’s message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their ‘daily bread’ and of preserving us from the evils we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

“Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord’s Prayer;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord’s Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature.”

I support the petition, and I’m pleased to sign it.

LORD’S PRAYER

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank the members of Alliston Pentecostal Church for sending me this petition.

“Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord’s Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

“Whereas the Lord’s Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

“Whereas the Lord’s Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord’s Prayer as part of its daily proceedings.”

I agree with this petition, and I’m signing it.

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from the Service Employees International Union and the people of Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma.

“Whereas the Ontario government has continued the practice of competitive bidding for home care services; and

“Whereas the competitive bidding process has increased the privatization of Ontario’s health care

delivery, in direct violation of the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, 2004; and

“Whereas competitive bidding for home care services has decreased both the continuity and quality of care available to home care clients; and

“Whereas home care workers do not enjoy the same employment rights, such as successor rights, as all other Ontario workers have, which deprives them of termination rights, seniority rights and the right to move with their work when their employer agency loses a contract;....”

They petition the Ontario government:

“(1) to immediately stop the competitive bidding for home care services so home care clients can receive the continuity and quality of care they deserve; and

“(2) to extend successor rights under the Labour Relations Act to home care workers to ensure the home care sector is able to retain a workforce that is responsive to clients’ needs.”

I fully support this petition and will affix my name to it and send it with page Joanna.

Mr. John O’Toole: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I’m wondering if there’s a quorum in the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Would the table determine if there’s a quorum?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Quorum is not present.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Quorum is now present.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I have a petition from residents of Ajax–Pickering.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Central East Local Health Integration Network ... board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System’s deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

“Whereas it is important to ensure that the new birthing unit at Centenary hospital, a \$20-million expansion that will see 16 new labour, delivery, recovery and postpartum ... birthing rooms and an additional 21 postpartum rooms added by October 2008, will not cause any decline in the pediatric services currently provided at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

“Whereas, with the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, the largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach \$100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government, it is important to continue to have a complete maternity unit at the Ajax hospital; and

“Whereas it is also imperative for the Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding; and

“Whereas the parents of Ajax and Pickering deserve the right to have their children born in their own community, where they have chosen to live and work;

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

“That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service; and

“That our Ajax-Pickering hospital now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

“That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain its full maternity unit.”

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: A petition headed “Freeze Gas Prices.

“Whereas gasoline prices have increased at alarming rates during the past year; and

“Whereas the high and different gas prices in different areas of Ontario have caused confusion and unfair hardship on hard-working Cambridge families; and

“Whereas the false promises of Premier McGuinty adversely affect the trust between Ontarians and their elected representatives;

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

“(1) That the McGuinty” Liberal “government immediately freeze gas prices for a temporary period until world oil prices moderate; and

“(2) That the” Ontario “McGuinty government immediately initiate a royal commission to investigate the predatory gas prices charged by oil companies operating in Ontario.”

As I agree with this, I’ll affix my signature.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: This petition is in respect to Bill 56, a private member’s bill regarding firearms in vehicles, introduced by the member from Eglinton–Lawrence. There have been a number of petitions accordingly. This one reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

“Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

“Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

“Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver’s licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the

number of crimes involving firearms in our communities.”

As I agree with this petition, I'll affix my signature to it and send it off with page Peter.

ALMA COLLEGE

Mrs. Julia Munro: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas historic Alma College, designed in the High Victorian Gothic style, chartered by an act of Ontario passed March 2, 1877, opened in October 1881, located in the city of St. Thomas, county of Elgin, province of Ontario, has fallen into a dire state of disrepair; and

“Whereas Alma College continues to be threatened with demolition by its current owners despite the efforts of many concerned citizens, alumni and various officials; and

“Whereas a historical plaque commemorating Alma College was unveiled at the college on Thursday, October 28, 1976, by the Ontario Heritage Trust, an agency within the Ministry of Culture and Recreation; and

“Whereas the city of St. Thomas designated Alma College under part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act (bylaw 167-94), in 1994; and

“Whereas recent amendments (2005) to the Ontario Heritage Act allow the Minister of Culture to designate property as being provincially significant;

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

“The Minister of Culture immediately designate Alma College as a building of provincial significance and, in the event of a demolition order being issued for Alma, to immediately intervene by issue of a stop order, and to further identify provincial partnerships and possible funding to protect the existing buildings from further deterioration while financial resources are generated to restore the property to its former glory.”

As I agree with this petition, I have affixed my signature and given it to page Sheilagh.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The time for petitions has expired. This House is now recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1212 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CITY OF OTTAWA

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm proud to be a representative from the city of Ottawa. For a second year in a row, MoneySense magazine has picked Ottawa as the number one city to live in—to live, to work and to invest. All you have to do is stroll along through Dickinson Square, the most historic site in Nepean–Carleton, go shopping in the Byward Market or skate on the Rideau Canal and you'll

understand why Ottawa tops even 154 other communities as the best city to live in, in all of Canada.

We may have long, freezing winters and a very quiet nightlife, particularly in Nepean–Carleton, but we have beautiful parks, great trails, great museums and one of the best hockey teams in all of the world, the Ottawa Senators.

We are also Canada's largest agricultural city. My riding of Nepean–Carleton is home to many of the greatest farms in this great country.

But we also have many young urban and suburban dwellers, whether in Barrhaven, Manotick, Greely, Metcalfe, North Gower, Kars, Osgoode or Edwards.

Ottawa is a bright city. It's one of the world's safest and most beautiful communities in which to live, work, learn and raise a family. The city prides itself on its quality of life, and I am proud that it has been recognized by MoneySense magazine. Ottawa offers a bright future for all, whether you reside in the suburban, rural or urban community.

TOWNSHIP OF WELLESLEY

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I rise today to highlight one of the townships in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga, as well as one of our Kitchener teams.

The riding of Kitchener–Conestoga includes three townships: Woolwich, Wilmot and Wellesley. Today I would like to recognize the township of Wellesley as one of the pillars in the rural component of this riding.

I'd like to thank Mayor Ross Kelterborn and his councillors, Shelley Wagner, Herb Neher, Jim Olender and Paul Hergott, and CAO Susan Duke for their dedication and hard work on behalf of Wellesley township.

With 211 kilometres of roads, 34 bridge structures and just under 28,000 hectares, the township continues to struggle to find support for preserving our precious resources of agricultural land and environmentally sensitive areas. This government's MIII grant of \$2.284 million represents an amount almost equal to the amount the township generates in taxation in one year. To put aside this amount of money to repair the Hawkesville Road would have taken 13 years. This government's continued commitment to our rural Ontario helps preserve the heritage of Wellesley township.

On a second note, on behalf of the constituents of Kitchener–Conestoga, we'd like to show our continued support to the Kitchener Rangers major junior A hockey club for the outstanding achievement by our young athletes. We're proud of their hard work, their commitment, their dedication, their families and their friends.

CORONER'S OFFICE

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I rise today to tell members of this Legislature about a family in my riding and how this government has made a devastating and stressful situation worse. Robert and Wendy Flint of Stittsville lost their 24-year-old son last August 4 in an accidental

overdose. These grieving parents are still waiting for the autopsy report. The regional coroner has been waiting for the toxicology report to be completed in Toronto. Apparently, these tests have finally been done, nine months later, but the Flints have now been told it will take up to two more months before they receive the final report.

The Flint family is understandably having a difficult time dealing with the death of their son, and the wait for the autopsy report is only making things worse. Mr. Flint told me, "It is heartless and totally inconsiderate of a ministry of the government to put such unnecessary strain on families. It's stressful enough losing a child without adding the stress of not being able to find some sort of closure."

I call upon the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services to review the operations of the coroner's office to ensure that no families have to go through the torture of waiting this long for the autopsy report on a loved one.

ALMA COLLEGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I rise to request that the Minister of Culture use part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act to preserve Alma College, in St. Thomas. The Ontario Heritage Act gives the Minister of Culture the power to ensure its ongoing protection through the enactment of provincial heritage designation. She also has a heritage budget that could be used to help develop a solution to the college's long-term existence.

Alma College amply satisfies the criteria set out in Ontario regulation 10/06 for determining cultural heritage value and provincial significance, including its representation of the theme of education in Ontario's history and its reflection of the province's cultural heritage.

I urge the Minister of Culture to use her powers to designate and protect this historic and iconic property before it is too late. I ask her, given the powers she has, if this building is not worth preserving, which building in Ontario is worth preserving?

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr. Mike Colle: I would like to let members of this House and the people of Ontario know about the amazing work being done in my riding of Eglinton–Lawrence and throughout the city of Toronto by the men and women in the police service and their community mobilization partners. I would like to make a special mention of the excellent officers in 32 division, under Inspector John Wallace and 13 division, under Inspector David McLeod, who have developed a program, called the community mobilization program, in partnership with local residents to make communities safe, as a component of what they call the Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy, or TAVIS; in short, to reduce violence and bring neighbours together to keep communities safe.

I'm proud to say that our government invested \$10 million in the TAVIS program to combat crime. In Eglinton–Lawrence and throughout Toronto, community mobilization is a most effective way of bringing people in our neighbourhoods, businesses and government services together with police to combat crime.

I would hope that this House will also support taking away guns from criminals who drive around neighbourhoods with guns in their cars. I would like to thank members for supporting that initiative and supporting the 9,000 men and women in Toronto under Chief William Blair who keep our communities and our schools safe, and make sure Toronto is one of the best places in the world to live, and that the one-percenters do not destroy our good neighbourhoods. Down with the one-percenters

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I rise in the House, on behalf of the PC caucus, to support retaining the Lord's Prayer in the proceedings each day. As a member of the all-party committee looking at the opening proceedings, I'm proud to represent the PC caucus and those who wish to retain the Lord's Prayer. However, it appears that the Premier, in his comments to the media, is determined to remove the Lord's Prayer no matter what the recommendations of the committee are.

Mr. Speaker, you are aware that there was absolutely no movement by any organization, religious or otherwise, to remove the Lord's Prayer from the opening proceedings. At a time when Ontarians face critical family physician shortages, a record number of smog days, over 200,000 lost manufacturing jobs and skyrocketing fuel costs, we as parliamentarians are wasting valuable time and tax dollars opening up a discussion that needs not be discussed. I believe that the Premier wants the discussion to be a diversion from his lack of leadership and the incompetence and unaccountability of his government.

People have constantly reminded me that the Premier is trying to fix something that is absolutely not broken. In a Toronto Sun article today, Antonella Artuso writes, "Thousands of Ontarians have signed petitions and sent online submissions urging Premier Dalton McGuinty to retain the Lord's Prayer, but he has yet to see the light."

The Lord's Prayer is a very important part of our opening proceedings and, being a very inclusive prayer, its traditions date back to Magna Carta and the British parliamentary system. The PC caucus will fight hard to help the Premier see the light, and we on this side of this House will continue to support retaining the Lord's Prayer in the Ontario Legislature.

1510

400-SERIES HIGHWAYS

Mr. Jeff Leal: Every day, over 420,000 people travel Ontario's 400-series highways, making them the busiest highways in the world. With so many cars, it can sometimes be difficult for the Ontario Provincial Police

to catch the speeding and reckless drivers and those who drink and drive.

In order to make it easier to catch these offenders, and in turn to keep their families safe on the road, the OPP is going to be using a new plane to enforce traffic laws. From the plane, the police will be able to see hundreds of vehicles simultaneously. There are now lines painted every 500 meters on major highways to allow officers in the air to measure a vehicle's speed. If they see someone speeding or driving erratically, they can direct their cruisers on the ground to stop the vehicle. By watching the vehicles from above, you can catch drivers who slow down when the police car is nearby.

This initiative is just one more way this government is making our roads safer. Since 2004, this government has brought in many tough measures regarding impaired driving and street racing, including some of the strictest penalties and the highest fines in North America. We know that Ontarians want their roads to be as safe as possible for their families, and we will continue to work with the OPP and community partners to make that happen.

INTERNATIONAL SINGING CONTEST

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Last month, I and 400 guests had the great pleasure to attend the international amateur singing contest put on by John Santos. It was a truly Canadian multicultural event.

What I saw and experienced touched me deeply. The evening's program was designed to showcase the real talent of each performer. Mr. Santos, an accomplished music director, and his wife, Lisa, set the stage for a most supportive backdrop. John's music lifted the spirit of the performers to such heights, which enabled all of them to soar, to give their best and to give of themselves.

The audience too was thus transformed into a supportive and appreciative cast. The rhythmic music—sometimes soft, sometimes powerful, sometimes light—the colourful light and the uplifting, warm, melodious voices produced such a marvellous sound that time was forgotten and people didn't even want to go home. Some shouted, "More, more." It was truly a night to remember.

These finest are Canada's pride and joy. They deserve to be recognized for their enormous talent, and I would be delighted to provide some opportunity so that they could launch their career and bring joy to lives, even to a wider audience here in Ontario.

I'm happy to introduce them to you and the people of Ontario: first-place winner, Andre Carneiro; second-place junior, Kayla de Brito; finalist junior: Emily Ferreira, Nancy Marques and Sandra Nogueira; first-place adult, Veronica Grewal; second place, Sandra da Silva; and finally, the finalists: Rita Francis, Clara Santos and Nevla da Silva. Congratulations to all of them.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I rise today to remind the House just how far this government has come in terms of

long-term care. But before I do that, I'd like to remind my Conservative colleagues of their legacy in long-term care, even though I'm sure they'd sooner forget it. The Conservatives slashed home care, they cut standards in long-term-care homes, and then didn't even bother to inspect them. Under the Conservatives, seniors in long-term-care homes weren't even guaranteed one bath per week. Their model of long-term care is simply one this government does not wish to emulate.

Since 2003, the McGuinty government has invested over \$1 billion in long-term-care facilities, including funding for 6,100 more staff, and 2,300 nurses included in that number. We've passed new legislation that restores the standards in these homes. We've improved home care so that 80,000 more Ontarians are now able to stay at home.

Just like a piece of fabric, it's easy to make cuts, take large pieces out and leave huge holes behind. It's much more challenging to sew that fabric up again and try to make it even better than it was before.

Our government's done a lot; we know there's more to do. Along with our partners in the health care system, we're going to continue to make improvements to help Ontarians in our long-term-care facilities.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BLIND PERSONS' RIGHTS AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES DROITS DES AVEUGLES

Mr. Martiniuk moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 70, An Act to amend the Blind Persons' Rights Act / Projet de loi 70, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les droits des aveugles.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I reintroduce my bill, an amendment to the Blind Persons' Rights Act, for the third time. This bill was first introduced in 2004 and received unanimous second reading the following year.

Currently, the Blind Persons' Rights Act only permits individuals with impaired vision to bring guide dogs to public places. My bill would allow people who are physically disabled, hearing impaired and autistic the right to access places with their guide dog.

I ask all the members of the Legislature to support this bill and allow all physically disabled persons with guide dogs access to public places in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the member.

I'd just remind the members of a message that I delivered. When you are introducing a private member's bill, what you are to read to this chamber is the explanatory note. All other items are part of the debate. So I'd just remind all members that on the introduction of private members' bills, it is the explanatory note.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS
AMENDMENT ACT, 2008
LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI

Mr. Hampton moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 71, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 / Projet de loi 71, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1517 to 1522.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will rise one at a time to be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
Bisson, Gilles
DiNovo, Cheri
Elliott, Christine
Gélinas, France
Hampton, Howard

Horwath, Andrea
Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
Kormos, Peter
Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Paul

O'Toole, John
Prue, Michael
Scott, Laurie
Sterling, Norman W.
Tabuns, Peter

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed will please rise.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 17; the nays are 0.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The leader of the third party for a short introduction.

Mr. Howard Hampton: This bill makes several amendments to the Employment Standards Act, 2000. Subsection 58(1) of the act requires an employer who terminates the employment of 50 or more employees in the same four-week period to give notice of termination for the prescribed period. Notice periods are prescribed in Ontario regulation 288/01, which requires eight weeks' notice if up to 199 employees are being terminated, 12 weeks' notice for 200 to 499 employees, and 16 weeks for 500 or more employees.

This bill provides for increased notice periods: 16, 20 and 24 weeks respectively, building them into the act

itself, and adds the requirement of a mass layoff agreement between labour and management dealing with such matters as retraining and restructuring options. If no mass layoff agreement is reached, a uniform 52-week notice period applies instead of the 16-, 20- and 24-week periods.

Section 64 of the act provides that an employee is entitled to severance pay if he or she has worked for the employer for at least five years and the employer has a payroll of at least \$2.5 million. The bill reduces the qualifying period of employment to one year and the payroll level to \$1 million.

Under section 65 of the act, severance pay is calculated as one week's pay for each year of employment. The bill increases this to two weeks pay for each year of employment.

Subsection 65(5) of the act, which caps severance pay at 26 weeks maximum, is repealed.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. I appreciate the comments, but as I just ruled about reading from the explanatory note, the member read from the explanatory note.

MUNICIPAL RESIDENTIAL
SPRINKLER ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES EXTINCTEURS
AUTOMATIQUES RÉSIDENTIELS
DANS LES MUNICIPALITÉS

Mrs. Jeffrey moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 72, An Act to amend the Building Code Act, 1992, the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 with respect to fire sprinkler systems in new residential buildings / Projet de loi 72, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1992 sur le code du bâtiment, la Loi de 2006 sur la cité de Toronto et la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités à l'égard des extincteurs automatiques dans les nouveaux immeubles d'habitation.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: The bill amends the Building Code Act, 1992, the City of Toronto Act, 2006, and the Municipal Act, 2001, to authorize municipalities to pass bylaws requiring the installation of fire sprinkler systems in new residential buildings. The chief building official shall refuse to issue a building permit if a proposed building does not comply with such a bylaw. The bylaws, which may be passed with respect to residential buildings for which building permit applications are made on or after September 1, 2009, prevail over any act or regulation. Sprinkler systems that are required to be installed by the bylaws must comply with standards specified in the building code.

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT
(CELLULAR PHONES), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT
LE CODE DE LA ROUTE
(TÉLÉPHONES CELLULAIRES)

Mr. O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 73, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of phones and other equipment while a person is driving on certain parts of a highway / Projet de loi 73, Loi modifiant le Code de la route pour interdire l'utilisation de téléphones et d'autres équipements pendant qu'une personne conduit sur certaines sections d'une voie publique.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a statement.

Mr. John O'Toole: As many have said, I've introduced this bill on a number of occasions. This is a slight variation. I'll read the explanatory notes, as per your instructions.

The bill amends the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of cell phones, car phones, pagers, personal assistant devices, portable computers, fax machines and other equipment while a person is driving a motor vehicle in an area proscribed by regulation, including community safety zones within 200 metres of the scene of a motor vehicle accident or apparent motor vehicle accident, or within 100 metres of a school crossing zone. There are exceptions for cases like emergencies, cases of a driver who is not an active driver as defined in regulation, and use of equipment entirely through hands-free features.

1530

The registrar is required to report cases where the use of cell phones, car phones, pagers, data assistants, portable devices, portable computers and other equipment proscribed by regulation made under the act have contributed to the cause of a motor vehicle accident.

Driver's licensing examinations are required to include a portion of testing about the applicant's knowledge of the amendments made by this bill.

I know the Minister of Transportation is making our roads safer and will move ahead with portions of this bill.

JAY LAWRENCE AND BART MACKEY
MEMORIAL ACT (HIGHWAY TRAFFIC
AMENDMENT), 2008

LOI DE 2008 COMMÉMORANT
JAY LAWRENCE ET BART MACKEY
(MODIFICATION DU CODE
DE LA ROUTE)

Mr. Rinaldi moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 74, An Act in memory of Jay Lawrence and Bart Mackey to amend the Highway Traffic Act / Projet de loi

74, Loi modifiant le Code de la route à la mémoire de Jay Lawrence et Bart Mackey.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Basically, the bill prevents people from riding in the backs of pickup trucks on public highways. Most of the jurisdictions in North America have such legislation. Ontario will now be one.

CONSUMER REPORTING
AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES RENSEIGNEMENTS
CONCERNANT LE CONSOMMATEUR

Mr. Ruprecht moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 75, An Act to amend the Consumer Reporting Act / Projet de loi 75, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les renseignements concernant le consommateur.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I trust that the member will deliver a short statement.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Thousands of Ontarians are affected by identity theft. This bill provides that where a consumer reporting agency and any other person, such as a bank, to whom a consumer report has been provided discover that there has been an unlawful disclosure of consumer information or that such information has been stolen or lost, they shall immediately inform the affected consumer.

The bill also provides that a consumer report shall not provide information pertaining to a consumer's address, date of birth, social insurance number, and credit account number that is not in a truncated form, and also that there be no information in the consumer report other than information provided by the information provider, except for a unique identifier number.

This bill provides that consumer reporting agencies shall investigate the disputed information within 30 days and correct, supplement or delete any information found to be unconfirmed, incomplete or inaccurate.

This bill also provides that consumer reporting agencies and other persons may not consider, as a key factor in determining the credit score of the consumer, the fact that a consumer report has been requested. In addition, credit scores and the key factors used to determine them are added to the list of information to be disclosed to a consumer upon request.

Finally, this bill provides that a person who takes adverse action against a consumer on the basis of information contained in a consumer report shall inform the consumer of the action and provide a copy of the report,

including the name and address of the agency that prepared it, and shall notify the consumer of their right to correct incomplete or inaccurate information.

I hope that all members will support this bill because this is a great bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On the issue of introduction of bills, I will inform the House that the Speaker will be reviewing his own ruling.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I wanted you to know that in terms of reading this report, I had one whole page more to read, but I said no, that was enough—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I appreciate the point of order. As I said, the Speaker will be reviewing his ruling.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. David Caplan: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. David Caplan: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 97(b), the following change be made to the ballot list of private members' public business: Mr. Qaadri, Mrs. Sandals and Mr. Oraziotti exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr. Qaadri assumes ballot item 21, Mrs. Sandals assumes ballot item 22, and Mr. Oraziotti assumes ballot item 24, and that, notwithstanding standing order 97(g), the requirement for notice be waived with respect to ballot item 27.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Agreed to.

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent for a member of each party to speak for up to five minutes regarding Sexual Assault Prevention Month, following which a member of each party speak for up to five minutes regarding a tribute to Donald C. MacDonald.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION MONTH

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I rise in the House today to mark May as Sexual Assault Prevention Month in Ontario. Sexual assault is a crime that can affect any woman regardless of age, race or religion. More than one third of Canadian women report having had at least one experience of sexual assault since the age of 16.

The majority of these crimes are committed by someone known to the victim. In 86% of cases reported to the police, the victim knew the accused. They were peers, acquaintances, co-workers or family members.

Because of this, many victims are reluctant to report the crimes to authorities. In fact, less than 10% of sexual assaults are reported to police.

These statistics are staggering. We need to talk about the issue of sexual violence against women and girls. Sexual Assault Prevention Month is a time to raise public awareness of this serious issue and renew our commitment to ending it.

At the outset, I would like to acknowledge the crucial function of sexual assault/rape crisis centres and sexual assault/domestic violence treatment centres in our communities across the province. I applaud all of the dedicated individuals who work tirelessly to assist sexual assault victims and to prevent violence against women and girls.

Our government is committed to preventing not just sexual assault but all types of violence against women. We continue to spend more than \$190 million annually on violence-against-women services across ministries.

The McGuinty government has taken steps to support women in many ways. We increased funding to sexual assault centres to meet increasing operational costs. We now invest \$13 million in 39 sexual assault centres across the province. We've committed \$5 million to a comprehensive strategy to fight Internet sexual abuse and exploitation, including pornography and luring. Amendments have been made to the Liquor Licence Act to address the dangers of date rape drugs.

Eradicating sexual violence requires the changing of attitudes and behaviours on both individual and societal levels. Instilling positive values in our children by teaching them the importance of healthy, equal relations is critical to ending sexual violence. If we encourage gender equality in our children by teaching boys to respect girls and by teaching girls to respect themselves, we will make great progress in eradicating the power imbalance that is at the root of sexual violence.

1540

I would like to take this opportunity to refer everyone to a resource at the Ontario Women's Directorate website. It helps us to talk about sexual violence. The website has information on Sexual Assault Prevention Month, the warning signs of sexual violence, advice on prevention and links to people who can help. It can be found at www.citizenship.gov.on.ca.

This is the 20th year that Ontario has officially observed May as Sexual Assault Prevention Month, and I am proud to say that the Ontario government will be showing its commitment to ending sexual violence by working closely with our community partners to develop a coordinated plan to target sexual violence. Governments, agencies and communities need to continue to work together to help women feel secure in their communities and in their homes. Together we will continue to build a better Ontario for families and for all women.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus to recognize May as Sexual Assault Prevention Month in the province of Ontario. I'm sure that we can all agree that

sexual assault is a horrific crime that not only causes physical harm, but extreme emotional and psychological damage as well. The effects of sexual assault can destroy one's sense of dignity, worth and self-esteem.

This year marks the 20th year that Ontario has officially recognized May as Sexual Assault Prevention Month, and unfortunately this issue remains extremely stigmatized in our society. Because of this stigma, feelings of shame and humiliation or fear of revictimization through the criminal trial process, sexual assault is one of the least reported crimes against both men and women.

Statistics shows that one of every 10 sexual assaults is reported to police. Further to this information, it is estimated that only one in 100 sexual assaults committed by an acquaintance is reported. We must, as a province, make it a priority to create supportive atmospheres in our communities so that these nine in 10 and 99 in 100 remaining victims feel comfortable and anticipate community support when coming forth with reporting this abuse.

This month gives us the opportunity to come together to raise awareness of a topic that is reported to afflict one in four women and one in five men. With this month being Sexual Assault Prevention Month, we must equip the public with awareness of supports that exist for victims who do report assaults to the police. We must come together, both as legislators and as members of our communities, to raise awareness and to take action on this issue.

Sexual assault is a crime that does not discriminate based on race, culture, creed, sex or age. It's estimated that 25% of women and 20% of men will be made victims of sexual assault in their lifetimes. Statistics Canada stated in 2005 that 61% of sexual assaults reported were committed against youth under 17, and that 83% of disabled women will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime. Certainly these numbers depict a frightening story, and I think we can all agree that we can do better and must do better.

It's at this time that I would like to acknowledge the tireless work of centres and agencies in my community that do so much in supporting our members who have had the unfortunate experience of dealing with sexual assault: the Oshawa Durham Rape Crisis Centre, the Durham Region Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Care Centre of the Lakeridge Health Corp., and the Victim Crisis Assistance and Referral Service of Durham Region.

I would also like to commend all of our shelters that house, care for and comfort victims of sexual assault who have nowhere to turn after these traumatizing experiences, including the Denise House, Y's WISH, Bethesda House, the Muslim Welfare Home, and Herizon House.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge Distress Centre Durham and Durham Mental Health Services' crisis services. These crisis lines in Durham region field the calls of those who have been sexually assaulted and offer telephone support and referrals to the aforementioned organizations.

I commend the many groups that work tirelessly to spread awareness and remove the stigma associated with sexual assault. I wish them the best as they move forward with their campaigns this month.

In closing, I'd like to express our thanks to those people who are working every day to help people overcome their experiences with the violent crime of sexual assault. I urge all members of this Legislature to work toward raising awareness this month and every month so that all victims will feel confident in reporting these terrible crimes and will know that their community stands behind them.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's my dubious honour to rise and speak for those who have been silenced. Mr. Speaker, you know that 25 women a year are killed, mostly by their domestic partners, and that is consistent from year to year from 1974 right to the present—nothing changes about that.

Make no mistake about it: This is a war against women. One in two women will be sexually assaulted at some point in her life. So I speak for those who haven't heard yet, those daughters and granddaughters of ours who will be the next victims of sexual assault unless we do something in this House. The silence speaks volumes.

The other night, we heard from Stephen Lewis, a former leader of the Ontario New Democratic Party, about sexual warfare against women in the Congo. But this is sexual warfare too, and it happens right here. It happens at home, and anyone who does not assist women in freeing themselves and their children from a site of sexual warfare is complicit.

You might ask, "How do we do that?"

First of all, we encourage women to free themselves and get transitional housing. Unfortunately, there isn't transitional housing for women who would free themselves from domestic assault. It doesn't exist, and what does is overcrowded, always full or sometimes just not available, depending on where you live.

What else do we do? Most women stay in conditions of abuse because they can't afford to leave. They would be on welfare with their children if they were to try to escape. What we need to do is help women to sustain themselves economically. We don't do that. In this, the government is complicit.

How don't we do that? Number one, we don't have child care in this province. In Quebec, you can get child care for \$7 a day. We don't have a child care program here. That aids and abets violence against women.

We don't have a minimum wage that you can live on—remember, most of the minimum wage earners in this province are women. The minimum wage with this government is below the poverty line. That aids and abets violence against women.

We claw back the national child supplement. That aids and abets violence against women.

Poverty itself is a women's issue, and we're not dealing with it in this House.

One hundred and seventy thousand households wait for affordable housing, and most of those households are

headed by women and have children in them. We're not building affordable housing. That demeans women and aids and abets and contributes to violence.

The vast majority of assaults against women are by those they know or are related to, but we do not educate children, and we could. The Miss G Project calls for women's studies in schools. They've called for this for years, and yet the Ministry of Education does nothing to move that file ahead. That aids and abets violence against women.

We in the New Democratic Party have tried to put forward card-check certification, facilitating unionization for those women who are not unionized. That helps women gain economic independence. Not passing that bill aids and abets violence against women.

To do any less than work with everything in our capacity to end this war against women—this quiet, unacknowledged but ugly war against women in our midst—is to really aid and abet violence against women.

The time for empty rhetoric is over. It's been over for a generation now. It's been over since 1974 and before that. It's been over since our grandmothers' era. Empty rhetoric is just that: empty rhetoric.

The time for action is now. We've outlined how to act; we've outlined how to address the issues that would free women from assault and free women from domestic violence. But we don't do it. In fact, this is the government that jailed Noelle Mowatt—jailed a victim of domestic violence.

Again, I speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, I speak for those who haven't heard yet and I speak for those who would rather forget. They in the McGuinty Liberal government would rather forget, and they clearly haven't heard yet.

DONALD MACDONALD

Mr. Howard Hampton: Donald Cameron MacDonald is one of the great figures of 20th-century Ontario politics. Sadly, he passed away two months ago in early March, at the age of 94.

Donald was the MPP for the riding of York South for almost three decades, from 1955 to 1982, and leader of the CCF and the NDP from 1953 to 1970. He leaves behind a political legacy for which all Ontarians should be thankful.

1550

Donald MacDonald almost single-handedly transformed the ethical standards of Ontario politics. After he was first elected, he was relentless in uncovering corruption and scandal in the governments of the 1950s and early 1960s. He forced governments to clean up their acts, and he created a whole new public expectation of ethical political behaviour.

He took the role of opposition leader very seriously. A Conservative government under Premier Leslie Frost had been used to having things their own comfortable way. And so, when Donald MacDonald began his tireless efforts, they were shaken at his intense and penetrating

scrutiny, which unearthed corruption and scandal and forced ministers of the government to resign. The public's eyes were opened to the good-old-boy style in which Ontario public affairs had been conducted. Public opinion left Premier Frost and his successor, John Robarts, no choice but to bring in higher standards of government practice, higher standards that I would suggest every member of this Legislature has benefited from today, and certainly the public of Ontario has benefited from for many, many years.

Donald moved the issues that were important to ordinary people from the margin to the centre of the Ontario political agenda. He had an encyclopedic knowledge of public affairs and an incredible memory for the names of people and where they worked, what they did and their own personal history. He used his incredible memory and his encyclopedic knowledge of issues to dominate debates and shape legislation as no other opposition leader ever had before.

Donald had grown up on a farm and his first occupation was as a teacher, so agriculture and education were policy fields that he naturally had an understanding of. But as well, he became an expert on hydroelectricity and energy, natural resources and the economy of northern Ontario, and on health. He insisted that public policy reflect the interests of common, ordinary people and that the concerns of farmers and workers be taken seriously. He was respected by opponents and the media for his knowledge, his integrity and his determination, as well as for his legendary stamina.

Donald MacDonald was absolutely tireless. There almost never was a free weekend. For years he handled his own publicity, turned out his own press releases, did his own research, drove his own car—sometimes alone, sometimes with reporters in tow—up and down the province's roads and highways. He organized meetings, sought out candidates, planned strategy, sold memberships in the CCF and the NDP. Physically very strong and full of energy, he was a leader that others complained they couldn't keep up with.

Donald, by any measure, was an incredible individual. He has left all of Ontario with a legacy. He came to what was then the CCF in 1946 and served as education and publicity director in Ottawa. This was after service in the navy during the Second World War. Later, he was national treasurer and organizer for the CCF, and in 1953 he won the leadership of the Ontario CCF. For the next two years, he led the CCF from outside the Legislature.

In the 1955 election, he was elected MPP for York South, a seat he held for the next 27 years. I remember that I sat with him last winter in the by-election in York South-Weston. Paul Ferreira, as we know, won that by-election, and it was a very close by-election. I remember that he called Paul over to him as the results were coming in and said, "Paul, I held this riding for 27 years. Never did I have such a result that was this close."

With a caucus of only three members to start with, Donald MacDonald became the CCF critic for 18 different government departments. He handled them all, and

people who knew of his work understood that he could handle it all. He led the transformation of the provincial CCF into the New Democratic Party. His leadership succeeded in putting the New Democratic Party on a solid, permanent foundation. In the 1967 election, the NDP jumped from eight to 20 seats and from 16% to 26% of the provincial vote. From that base, which had taken him 12 years to build, the party rose to the official opposition and eventually to government.

I knew Donald personally. My grandfather owned a community general store in a rural area. When I was eight or nine years old, I used to go to the store and pump gas; it was part of my job for my grandfather. I remember Donald MacDonald coming into my grampa's store and asking my grampa if he could make a financial contribution to what was then the CCF and about to become the NDP. My grandfather was a very big man as well. Of course, I was quite small, and I remember looking up at these two very big men, both very powerful, very tall. My grandfather was, besides the storekeeper, the reeve of the rural municipality, and the post office was in the store. So he was very well-known. I remember sitting and listening to them talk about politics and about what needed to be done.

One of the most amazing things about Donald is, even just before he died he would say to me, "There's that steelworker in Atikokan; there's that railroader in Rainy River; there's that railroader in Kenora; there's that wonderful teacher in Fort Frances who has done so much in terms of special education. What's her name again?" He just had an incredible memory for people that I think most of us in politics would have been very envious of.

After the 1967 election, many people thought, "Gee, here's a guy who's led the party to this new frontier; he should be set." But unfortunately, there were some within the New Democratic Party who thought that the NDP needed new leadership. So, after 15 years as leader of the CCF and NDP, Donald stepped down to make room for a new generation, and Stephen Lewis became leader of the NDP.

When Donald retired from the Legislature in 1982, he certainly didn't retire from public life. He became one of the first chairs of the Ontario Election Finances Commission. For many years, he was president of York Community Services, the province's first community health centre, which he had been a prime mover in establishing, and later was president of the Learning Enrichment Foundation. He taught political science at York and Ryerson universities, edited a textbook on Ontario politics and wrote his memoirs: *The Happy Warrior*. He was awarded the Order of Canada and the Order of Ontario.

One thing that I know Donald would want me to say is that he could not have done anything without his wife, Simone. They had three children, who, through most of their period of growing up, recognized that their father was on the road, that their father was doing some very important work, which meant that Simone was primarily responsible for paying the bills in the house, keeping

everything pointed in the right direction and, most of all, looking after Sandi, Joy and Brian. Simone is a truly remarkable woman. She herself is 94 years old and continues to live, with her family's support, in the Toronto home that she and Donald shared for 45 years.

Donald MacDonald's career is a testament to principle, to conviction and to hard work. As I said earlier, he leaves a legacy that has benefited every one of us in this Legislature and a legacy that has benefited anyone who is lucky enough to live in Ontario. Donald MacDonald is someone who I believe we can all be quite proud of and someone that we all owe a debt to.

1600

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you for the opportunity this afternoon to pay tribute to Donald MacDonald, a wonderful parliamentarian that I had the privilege to serve with in this Legislature. Norm Sterling and I—upon this occasion we're allowed to use names—served with him from 1977 to 1982. Bob Runciman, the leader of the official opposition at the present time, served with him for a period of time, along with Tony Ruprecht. I think that's the four of us in the Legislature who would have served with him at a particular point in time.

I must say, coming into the Legislature at that time, there were people I would call icons. I'll concentrate on the New Democratic Party today, because Donald MacDonald was the leader of the New Democratic Party. I see Michael Cassidy, one of the former leaders of the New Democratic Party and a member for Ottawa, is in the Legislature with us today, no doubt to pay tribute to Donald a little later on at Hart House, where there will be an official gathering to remember him and pay tribute to him.

But it was a different era at that time in the Legislature. Things were always better in years gone by to those who have been around for a while; perhaps those who have a different perspective may not agree. But there were members of the Legislature who, when they got up to speak in the Legislature, you left your office to hear them speak. One of the reasons was that there were no television sets to watch then, so you had what was called a squawk box, which was a box which gave you the speech itself but not the visual to go with it.

So when you knew a certain person was going to speak, you would come to the Legislature at that time to hear them. Among those, I think of people such as Andrew Brewin; Fred Young was certainly another individual; Stephen Lewis, quite obviously, was one; and Jim Renwick. These were people who, when they delivered a speech, people actually listened. There was real substance to the speeches. They were articulate, eloquent and compelling in the arguments that they made, even if one didn't agree with the arguments that were being shared with members of the House, because it was essentially only members of the House at that time. There was no television and no direct radio of what was happening.

We were fortunate to have Donald MacDonald in the House. I looked at the *Globe and Mail* obituary, and—I

wouldn't call it the lead; I guess I would call it the title—it reads as follows: “Ontario NDP leader turned province into a three-party political system; a politician who was remarkably deficient in ego, he took over with a caucus so small that he held 18 portfolios, yet ‘was never, ever, set back.’ He put cause before ambition and twice stepped aside for others,” which of course is difficult to do in the political realm when we have seats within the Legislature and a person would like to enter the Legislature as a new leader, and even to step down as a leader. I think there's a recognition that one has made some significant progress, and in 1967, when the NDP went from two seats to 20 seats, that would have been seen as significant progress. When it came time to move aside, he was prepared to move aside as the leader and allow Stephen Lewis to take over at that time, who was, again, an articulate and compelling speaker and a distinguished parliamentarian in this House.

So there was that lack of ego, I think, and there was reason for ego, by the way, because he was a very bright individual, a compelling speaker, as I've mentioned, and one who did a lot of spadework in order to prepare himself for the House and for the various public speeches that he made. Yet he was prepared, on an occasion, to step down as leader, and then step down in 1982 so that the new leader of the New Democratic Party at that time, Bob Rae, whom he had recruited from the federal House to come to the province, became the leader of the New Democratic Party. Again, he actually gave up his seat of some 26 years to allow Mr. Rae to assume that position.

I remember as well, when he was with the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in 1953, when he became leader in 1953. In the 1950s, the days of McCarthyism in the US, there were many who, if they were on the left at all, were presumed to be closet Communists of some kind. It took a little extra gumption and courage to be a member of a party which was seen in that light by some in the media and elsewhere, so he deserves credit for that.

There were two individuals who were writing at that time—and it makes it easier, in terms of your research, when you can refer to the dean of the Legislature in terms of the press gallery: Eric Dowd. I thought that his lead, when he was writing his column on Donald MacDonald, was most appropriate. He said, “The most underrated politician in Ontario in 50 years has died—still without being given the recognition he deserves.”

He goes on to talk about his contribution and says that he “was much more. MacDonald took over when the party had only two of 90 seats in the Legislature and gave it a voice that was missing and for a time led an opposition party that pound for pound was the most effective in memory.”

He goes on to say, “MacDonald served as an MPP without bitterness under Lewis and his successor as leader, Michael Cassidy, until 1982, when he showed rare unselfishness.” That's where he makes reference to relinquishing his seat so that Bob Rae could run for that seat.

Jim Coyle, who was back with us in the Legislature today covering for the Toronto Star, was knowledgeable

of that era and wrote something rather significant when he said:

“His death snips another of the dwindling ties to an era when Ontario politics was played at a very different pace, to a notably different code.

“MacDonald's prime was passed in a world of oratory, not sound bites; legwork rather than image; the Legislature a pre-TV gentlemen's club in which lapses in sobriety, not uncommon of an evening sitting, might be observed but never noted.”

He goes on to mention, “Still, his frequent allegations of scandal occasionally did get under the skin of then-Premier Leslie Frost”—even though he was liked by Leslie Frost. We will all like this reference, particularly those of you from rural areas: He once accused him, using rural imagery, the currency of the day in the Legislature, of “chittering like a pig”

“To the Young Turks on the left,” Mr. Coyle notes, “he was a bit right-wing, old hat and had” perhaps “a loser's image.”

But to those who had served with him in the Legislature, to those who remembered what a pioneer he was for the CCF in Ontario and the New Democratic Party—because he was part of the group that brought the New Democratic Party out of the CCF and essentially made it quite popular within the urban setting.

Des Morton said of him that he had the “ability to discover triumph in adversity.” So, even when the NDP went down in seats, there always seemed to be a moral victory. It reminds me of certain sources of news who always see the NDP as having a moral victory even when they don't win. But Donald MacDonald did see that. He was the happy warrior. He would come down to the legislative dining room and sit at any table, because he was the head of the election finances commission—and recommended and saw implemented some really good changes that helped Ontario politics, as the present leader of the New Democratic Party has mentioned, to elevate the degree of ethics within the realm of politics in Ontario.

He'll be remembered fondly. He will be remembered as a friend to many. He'll be remembered as one who could have taken a different path in life and been entirely successful. He could have made a lot more money and perhaps had a lot more prestige if he had chosen a different vocation. He chose politics, and Ontario is the better for it.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'm pleased, on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, to offer a few comments in recognition of the passing and the remarkable life of Donald C. MacDonald.

As the Minister of Transportation indicated, I'm one of only four members currently serving in this place who had the opportunity to serve with Mr. MacDonald, although it was a rather brief opportunity to get to know him—about one year, really—before he gave up his seat for Mr. Rae. But I obviously did have the opportunity to meet with him and talk to him. As a follower of pro-

vincial politics, I had known of him for some years before getting elected.

1610

He certainly was a force to be reckoned with and someone who had great respect across the lines of all three parties in this province. As you've heard from previous speakers, he was personally a noble figure, as Mr. Hampton suggested, a tall man, a distinguished looking gentleman, very genial, very approachable, very friendly and very warm—genuinely warm, I think, even with folks who were sitting on the other side of the aisle.

This place, as the Minister of Transportation indicated, was quite a bit different in those days. Why it has become what it has over the years, you can attribute to all sorts of things. We didn't have television in those days, and I think that perhaps has been a factor. But even if we had had television broadcasts of the proceedings back then, I don't think it would have changed the approach of Donald C. MacDonald.

During my brief opportunity to observe him, sitting as a government backbencher at the time, he approached issues, questions and debates in this place in a very deliberate, calm and reasoned way, and never got into the kinds of things that I suspect most of us have been guilty of in this place over the past 10 or 15 years. Giving up his seat to Mr. Rae, after almost 27 years of service, I can relate to to some degree. I have just served a little over 27 years, and some folks have been suggesting that I might give up my seat as well. But I want to assure you that that's not about to happen.

If you look at Mr. MacDonald's history of service, not only to this place but to his country in World War II as a member of the Royal Canadian Navy—he had a significant career outside of politics as well, as a teacher and a journalist, before he became actively involved in politics. We've heard about all the significant impacts he had on this place, on the transformation of the CCF into the NDP, and his approach. I was reading a comment about his election, after two years without a seat. He very quickly became known as one of the most vocal members of the Legislature. He fought for issues such as prison reform and universal public health care, and emphasized pragmatism over doctrinaire socialism as he tried to appeal to voters as a moderate reformer. I was very impressed with his approach to issues that I know the NDP cares about deeply today, as many of us do.

A long and distinguished career, and a great contribution to his party, his province and his country.

On behalf of the official opposition, I want to extend our sincere condolences to his wife and family members.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask members and our guests to please rise as we observe a moment of silence in remembrance of the former member.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the honourable members for participating in this tribute. I will see that copies of the Hansard are transmitted to the family on behalf of all of us.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to welcome to the Legislature today Mr. Michael Cassidy, who served in

the 29th, 30th, 31st and 32nd Parliaments for the riding of Ottawa Centre.

Welcome to Queen's Park today.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES AND INTERIM APPROPRIATION ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES ET L'AFFECTATION ANTICIPÉE DE CRÉDITS

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 6, 2008, on the motion for third reading of Bill 44, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters / Projet de loi 44, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise today to talk about Bill 44, the Budget Measures and Interim Appropriation Act, 2008. As members of this Legislature will know, and I hope some of those who may be watching on TV will find out, this is an omnibus bill and it comes by once every year. It is an accompanying bill with the budget. This omnibus bill, though—

Hon. David Caplan: It's ominous.

Mr. Michael Prue: Ominous. Yes, some would say it's an ominous bill.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: Perhaps, if the honourable minister would listen long enough, he may understand why certain aspects of this bill are also quite ominous in their nature.

The bill itself touches on 20 pieces of legislation, and it is a replacement of Bill 24, which was the bill that followed the fall economic statement.

Before I delve into what is contained in this bill, it is important to talk about what was contained in the budget, because the two are companion pieces and you cannot understand one without understanding the other. Before I go into the various measures that are undertaken in Bill 44, I want to touch briefly on the budget bill and why some of the measures may have found necessity in this particular bill.

First of all, the budget itself: We have had time now over the last few weeks to stop and reflect and to think about the budget that was passed. When budget day comes, it is the usual sort of stampede of Liberal members and the finance minister standing up there and talking about the wonders of what is contained within the bill, and trying to tell us all the appropriate measures that have been taken on a whole broad range of issues, and how they're going to affect the economy, and how only

their government could come up with such a scheme, and how the people are going to be so happy. Invariably, the next day in the newspapers and on television that night and on the radios, you will hear little snippets of the budget, and almost everything that is contained within that budget will be what the finance minister said, or the highlights, and what he or she has been trying to prove.

That happened in this budget, as it happens in every other budget, but the reality is that in the couple of days to a week that follow, it's time for the opposition to start looking at the fine print. It's time for us to start looking at what is contained in the budget that did not meet the highlights, that was not part of the half-hour or so speech of the finance minister on that particular day, that was not part of the scrum that took place outside, and to start looking at what in fact was contained within the budget and to make some thoughtful and careful analysis of whether or not the budget is meeting its much-ballyhooed trumpeting.

I have had an opportunity over these months to look at what the finance minister was trying to say, what he has planned for Ontario, and to take a good, hard look at whether we are going in the direction that Ontarians might reasonably expect us to go.

There are things in the budget, I'm sure—people are going to stand up and say, "This is a great item," and people are going to say, in terms of the elderly, to stay in their homes, that there is a little bit of money in the budget that may assist them at some future time, or that the schools got a little bit of extra money, or that there was a bit more money for the hospitals, or that there was money put here or there. But overall the budget, to me, even until this day, is quite a disappointment.

The government was able to find some \$5 billion of revenue and spent about the same \$5 billion in additional programs. But within the body of that \$5 billion there was very little of an imaginative note. There was very little that was done that would change Ontario in a way that I think people were hungry for change.

1620

We've just gone through an election last October. I know that all parties, including my own, had a list of plans and things they wanted to do, great changes they were going to do in the province during a four-year period. Some of those plans were to have been implemented right away; some of them were going to have to wait. But in this very timid budget there was very little that was new, very little that was novel, very little that is going to change the way of life of the people of Ontario.

I looked down through the list of what people were expecting in terms of change. The first was a promise that cities were going to be helped oh so much more than in the past. Cities, I recognize, get two cents of the gas tax—that was courtesy of the last Parliament—but cities were asking for much more than that. Cities were asking for an aggressive program to upload the download, and there have been, and continue to be, only the most modest efforts contained within this budget or by this government at all.

Cities have been asking for additional funding and additional powers to undertake necessary structural changes. The cities in Ontario are underfunded by billions upon billions of dollars in terms of keeping up the infrastructure, everything from roads and sewers to schools and community centres to libraries and police forces. They were looking for some considerable amounts of money, and those moneys were not contained within the budget.

Right around budget day the finance minister, sensing that perhaps he had underplayed the city aspect, came up with another bill, Bill 35, and to much ballyhoo he walked into this House and into the press room downstairs and brought with him the venerable Hazel McCallion, my friend the mayor of Mississauga; the finance chair from the city of Toronto, Shelley Carroll; and Doug Reycraft from AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, who all had wonderful things to say about Bill 35 and how the government was going to spend money.

Some might have been forgiven by looking at a budget bill that had very little money for cities because here was a plan to put it in a different perspective. We were going to do this by way of Bill 35, and the cities were going to do all right because they were supposed to share any surplus above \$600 million that was available this year and, if I remember what the finance minister had to say that day, each and every year into the foreseeable future.

We had an opportunity to address that. I remember addressing the media and I remember coming into this House and talking about how the cities were not going to get what was being promised. They needed long-term sustainable funding, which a budget could have done; they weren't getting that. They needed the upload of the downloaded programs, which was not contained within the body of this budget, and a firm commitment from the government that merely putting them at the end of a process to see if there were any additional revenues at the end of the year would never match.

You can imagine my surprise and chagrin, after having heard the minister talk about those things in the budget and what was contained therein and in Bill 35, when we actually saw a copy of Bill 35 a few days later. The bill nowhere contains the word "municipality." The bill nowhere contains the word "infrastructure." The bill nowhere gives an opportunity for municipalities to accept additional funds, save and except through regulation and only in the first year.

You have to understand that the municipalities are now completely deflated. They know that although there may be a small amount of monies this year, as the economy continues to worsen they also know that it's unlikely the monies will flow to them in future or subsequent years.

The bill, which is still before debate in this Legislature and is just about finished third reading at this point and will be subject to debate maybe later this week or next week, allows the government carte blanche to give the monies to anybody at all they want. So I have to state that

in terms of this budget and in terms of Bill 44, which accompanies it, there is nothing or next to nothing in terms of cities.

We looked at the failure of poverty in the election. To much ballyhoo, the Premier promised that he was going to tackle the problem of poverty. He said that he was going to set up commissions and studies, he was going to look into poverty and he was going to eradicate poverty by at least 25% in the next five years. There were many people out there who believed that this was possible, and more so even believed that this government and this Premier were good for their word and would end up doing it. You can imagine the surprise of many, many of those people in terms of this budget and in terms of Bill 44, that they now read that there is almost nothing contained in terms of poverty.

As we analyzed what was in the budget and the finance minister stood up to boldly announce that there was going to be a 2% increase in the welfare rates in this province, it was only upon subsequent study that we found out that the 2% would not even take effect until late this year and possibly even next year. We were able to discover that this promise that had been made to help the poor, in terms of—the poorest of the poor, those who need to subsist on either Ontario Works or on ODSP, were being shortchanged again.

But there was still more. The Premier and the finance minister and others have stood up in this House and said they're going off to study it. We know what has happened over the course of the last few days: The study may be taking place, but it is a closed study. It is a study that does not allow the poor to have any implementation, to have any say, to attend the meetings at all. It is a study in which MPPs who are not on the government side of the of the House have, to date, been locked out. It is a study that shows virtually no promise.

There is nothing whatsoever in this budget that builds new affordable housing. When we pressed further and asked the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing how many affordable units have been built in the last four and a half years since the Liberals were elected, he came back with the magnificent total of 468 affordable units that are presently occupied. This is in a province that has hundreds of thousands of people on a waiting list, and Toronto alone has 175,000 families on a waiting list for affordable housing.

There was some money for upkeep for existing structures, \$100,000, which the government of course said was absolutely wonderful. It does not meet even the standards that are required in the city of Toronto, which lobbied effectively and earnestly and with a great deal of passion for some \$300 million a year over the next 10 years in order to get the housing that exists in the city of Toronto up to code. The small amount of money that has been put in this budget (a) not to build any housing, and (b) not to do the improvements that are necessary, was a huge disappointment.

I looked at the failure too of business and job losses. One has to look at the economy to see that we are in very

real trouble in terms of job losses in this province. I listened to the government, and they talk about the hundreds or millions or trillions of jobs that they have created, and they state so with huge abandon. Every day I hear some new enormous figure of jobs that have been created, but they are always very reluctant to talk about the jobs that have been lost. We know what is happening in the province of Ontario in terms of the economic downturn. We know what is happening to ordinary people outside of Toronto and even some inside of Toronto as the manufacturing base declines. We have heard story upon story of losses in our community and the devastating impact that that has in smaller towns.

We know in northern Ontario, when a mine shuts down or a pulp mill shuts down, then usually the town shuts down with it. But even here in southern Ontario, in places like Listowel, when Campbell Soup announces they're closing and 500 jobs are gone, that is devastating to that community. In Smiths Falls, when the Hershey plant announced that they're taking the whole thing back south of the border, that is devastating to the people in that community.

1630

We know that in the auto sector there have been layoffs in factory after factory that make ancillary parts. We know that even General Motors, Ford and Chrysler have not been immune, and that some 200,000 people are out of work who would not have been or would not have expected to be out of work just four years ago when this government was first elected. There has been a complete failure to deal with that within the budget, a complete failure to have a coherent and consistent policy.

They can throw some money around. I remember the Minister of Innovation standing up here, oh so very proud of having spent some \$30 million to bring a pharmaceutical manufacturer here to Canada. I don't begrudge what he did. I'm not saying it was wrong or that I might not have done the same thing, trying to bring a pharmaceutical manufacturer to Canada. But the reality is that some \$30 million were spent and we secured 30 jobs.

I put the question on that day when I had to comment. We have lost 200,000 jobs; we have gained 30 jobs. He only now has 199,970 to go until he's even again. That's the reality, and this government didn't deal with it. And when you stand up and you say, "Shouldn't the budget contain some measures that are going to help? Shouldn't there be a manufacturing investment tax credit?", you get hooted and hollered down. When you say, "Shouldn't we have a Buy Ontario policy?", you get hooted and hollered down, even though what we are suggesting is nothing different than what backbench Liberals have been suggesting for a long time. When we talk about part of the reason for the job losses being electricity prices, we get hooted and hollered down as well, for talking about having a manufacturing rate level. So I was very disappointed in all that talk about business.

The government did say—and some might think it's a good idea; I think it's probably a wasted opportunity—that they have cut capital and corporate taxes. I'm sure

that they had many people within the capital and corporate sector thinking that this was a really good idea, and I'm sure they lobbied really hard and were very pleased with how the government reacted in that way, that corporate taxes were going to go down.

I have no objection to corporate taxes going down, provided that when they go down they stimulate the economy. But who are we stimulating when we reduce those taxes? It's not the poor manufacturers, because very few of them would have been eligible for some of the taxes that have been reduced; it is the banks and the insurance companies and the oil companies who are all entitled to this money too.

When I walk out onto the street and I explain this to people, and I say, "Are you proud of the fact that we've just given the big oil companies a tax writedown?" they stare at me in disbelief as they're pumping gas into their cars at \$1.23 or \$1.25 a litre here in Toronto and \$1.35 and \$1.40 and \$1.45 in northern Ontario. They stare at me in disbelief that this government thinks that that's a good thing. Or the banks: When you put your card into one of the automatic tellers that charges you 25 cents or 50 cents or \$1 or \$2 for literally every transaction you do, and when corporate bank profits are into the billions of dollars each quarter, they are really surprised that this capital tax goes to them as well.

We believe in the NDP that if you're having job losses in particular sectors, you should target the sectors that need the money and not give it holus-bolus to everyone, particularly those industries that are doing very nicely without it, thank you. But this government failed to take any action on that within the budget as well.

There was also a real failure of this government—I have known the Minister of Education for a long time. We were colleagues fighting the amalgamation of the city of Toronto when that was imposed mercilessly upon the citizens of our municipality all those years ago. I have watched, from this side of the House, her rapid rise through the ranks to become the Minister of Education. But I have to state that this budget was a disappointment because this government promised to fix the funding formula, a funding formula which Liberals said was broken even as it was being first introduced in the province and which they continue to say is broken but do nothing to fix at all.

There was nothing in the budget that will help small schools to survive, rural communities to keep their schools or places like Toronto to keep their school pools. Some people may say, "Oh, Toronto just wants to keep their swimming pools. Why should Toronto get something we don't have?"

The reality is that every community is different, and if we could fix the funding formula there would be the wherewithal across this province to assist our education. The towns would not have to lose schools. The Catholic school board would not be making announcements like they're making today to shut down their kindergarten program, that we could pay a decent wage to people who are transporting their kids around in buses, and that a

place like Toronto could keep its pools. None of this was in the budget, and nothing of this is contained within Bill 44, the companion piece.

In the period—and this is what is upsetting to me in terms of this bill and why I'm standing here today. Most economists, and Warren Buffett in particular, will tell you that the North American economy is about to go into decline. The telltale signs are all there. In the last quarter, Ontario was at 0.1% of an increase; 0.1% less, and we would be in recession—and we would—and that would be at least three months of economic decline and we would be in recession. We are skirting very close to that level. Whether we go below or not—I'm not a soothsayer—I cannot tell you, but I'm very worried that we may. This budget did not address what needed to be addressed to keep Ontario whole.

When I opened up the paper today in the financial section—it may surprise some members opposite and some of my Conservative friends to note that this New Democrat reads the business section first in the morning. I read it first to see how our economy is going, whether the stocks are up or down. I do own some stocks, but they're part of an RRSP, and I couldn't tell you for the life of me which ones I own. So I don't go to the detail of the page, but I do like to look to see how the market is reacting. I like to read the pages to see what kinds of takeovers, what kinds of companies are closing down, what kinds of workers may be out of a job, what kinds of government initiatives are creating wealth or not creating wealth, the state of our dollar—because that's a very high factor on some of the closures, and some of the difficulties some manufacturers, although not all manufacturers, might have. As I read that today, there was a very large and good article about the housing market and the decline in Ontario—and in Canada, but particularly in Ontario.

The number of resale homes has declined substantially over last year. Although the cost of the homes is remaining hard and fairly solid, the number of homes that are on the market and the number being sold are reducing very rapidly, and it is now starting to look somewhat like it is happening south of the border. This is one of the first telltale signs of a market in decline and further warns me, and I think others, that something needs to be done.

We have already talked in part about the 200,000 job losses, and they continue. The government sometimes pours good money after bad. I'm thinking here in terms of Dell, which said, "We will train a whole bunch of people," and the government gave over \$11 million. After a few months of training those people, they all found themselves out on the street. The only thing that was sure and certain was that Dell kept all those \$11-million trained people and then put them out on the street, so the government gained very little in the long-term. There are other examples like that as well.

I am also worried that the government is overly rosy in its forecast of how and where they think this economy is headed during the balance of this year. They are talking about a 1.5% to 2% increase in gross domestic product

and taxation and everything that goes with it. Yet we know, quite frankly, that we're at 0.1% in the last quarter and we only have to look south of the border to see what may happen to us in the months and years ahead. If you go down to the United States—and I've only been down there once in the last few months—to talk to Americans who are subject to the subprime, and you look at the number of houses that are boarded up in border cities, and at people who no longer can afford the homes, where the properties have been escheated to the city or the county; when you look at all of those vacant houses and talk to people about the value of the homes, which at one point were selling for \$300,000 and \$400,000 and \$500,000, which are now selling for only a fraction of that, at the number of people who have been forced to walk away from their residence because their house is now worth less than at the time they purchased it—all of that is happening, and yet this government seems oblivious that we may be on that same roller coaster.

1640

I look at what happened with Bear Stearns, one of the largest investment banks in the entire world—the fourth-largest one in the United States alone—and how it went, in one day, from being worth hundreds of millions or billions of dollars down to \$2 a share. It doesn't take very long for those kinds of things to happen.

I look at the American balance of payments, and I am constantly amazed that that country continues to exist. Our chief trading partner is running a deficit, from the Iraq war alone, of about \$5 billion a week. They are trillions of dollars in the hole, they have virtually no way of paying off debts, and the job losses and the market that is going with them are abysmal to watch.

Into all of this, Mr. Speaker, we now have a budget and Bill 44—I'm glad you gave me some latitude and let me get to it; I wanted to draw a picture of where we are and what this bill is going to do. This bill is an interim appropriation act. And if all it was doing was interim appropriation, I would vote for it—that might surprise some members opposite.

Having been a mayor and having been in politics for 20 years, I know that this Legislature, like every political body—just like a city, just like a school board, just like the country—has to pay its bills. An appropriation act simply allows the government to pay its bills as taxes are being collected. If this was an appropriation act, whether I agreed with the budget or not, whether I thought there was going to be money at the end—I would have to trust the economists who advised the government that things are rosier than I believe they are—I would allow an appropriation. There is no way we can allow the government of Ontario, or any government, to grind itself into the dirt with no money.

So here we have the appropriation portion. It's not going to be split off, but if it were, I guarantee you that at least this New Democrat would stand up and vote for it, because I understand the necessity of doing so.

But what else is contained in the bill besides interim appropriation? A whole number of factors, and I want to

talk about some that I agree with, just so that members opposite will maybe stand up and take notice for a minute.

I think that what the government has done around the entertainment tax credit is a very good thing. I think it's a very good thing that this government is taking the time, spending the money and recognizing the value of the entertainment industry in this province—particularly in my city of Toronto, but also in Hamilton and elsewhere, where films are starting to be made—taking money and investing in films to be made in this country.

We have a wealth of talent from people who are actors, directors, filmmakers and producers, and they need to be rewarded. We need to do everything possible to keep those industries alive and well in Ontario. So I commend the government for the particular section of the bill that allows for that kind of money to go to the entertainment tax credit.

I'm not sure whether I commend them in the same way, but certainly someone, somewhere took a great big deep breath when they were trying to do away with the labour-sponsored investment funds, which were supposed to be completely phased out. I know that the former finance minister, Mr. Sorbara, said they weren't necessary anymore and that he was phasing them out. But the government obviously took a look and found that the phase-out and the rapidity with which they proposed to do it were going to cause grievous and sustained harm in this province. Someone took a really good look at it and said, "We're not going to do that." They have extended the labour-sponsored investment funds for another year, while they take a sober second look.

I would suggest that the members in the government take that look pretty fast. To lose such an institution as this is to lose a whole pool of capital that we may desperately need, particularly if times get a little tougher, a whole amount of capital that, in the past, went into things like the BlackBerry, which I can see some members reading as they walk along. We all know that Research In Motion got some of their funds to start up from labour-sponsored investment funds, which were not generally available from other sources, and we need to keep that fund alive. We need to keep it operating. I am asking the government, if you are taking that sober second look, to really take a look at whether what you planned to do, and phase it out in the first place, was the right thing.

Giving a hiatus of one year I'm not going to say is a bad thing. I did say it was a bad thing a year ago or two years ago when it was being phased out, but I do think it's a good thing that somebody has recognized the mistake of the former finance minister.

Now to go on to a couple of things that I don't think are quite as good that are contained within Bill 44. The first one—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, I think I'm going to be fair. The first one is balance. The first one is MPAC, the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. that looks after our

assessments. For over two years, since the—Mr. Marin is the—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Ombudsman.

Mr. Michael Prue: Ombudsman. Thank you.

The Ombudsman came down with a scathing report about MPAC and its practices and this government, and he made a number of recommendations.

To their credit, MPAC, on the day the report came out, said they were going to implement each and every one of the recommendations that Mr. Marin had made for which they had authority and power. But there were four left over which they could not implement because it was the sole prerogative of the Legislature and the government of Ontario to implement, that they could not themselves do without government aid.

I remember thinking that two of them in particular would not take all that much for government to do. The first one was to reverse the onus, and the second one was to provide information so that a person appealing their assessment might have the full knowledge of the law and how the process was used to come to a determination as to the value of their house. I remember standing in this House week after week asking questions of the finance minister, asking members during question period, making speeches that I couldn't understand this government. When the Ombudsman had spoken so clearly and so eloquently about the changes that needed to be made, and particularly those two which were the prerogative of the House, the government refused to take any action.

So you can imagine my surprise when I opened Bill 44 and found within its four walls, within the body of Bill 44, those exact provisions. I don't know whether anyone's talked about this before, but they are actually contained there. The government, very quietly, after two years of badgering, has turned around and done what the Ombudsman said should be done. So if this portion passes, and I hope this portion passes—as I said, there are good things in this bill as well as bad ones—then ordinary citizens will have the onus reversed. That means it won't be up to them to prove that MPAC is wrong or that the assessor is wrong on their house. It will be up to the assessor to prove they're right. The citizen can start from the proposition that they're wrong, and they will now have to prove they are right. After all, they have the army behind them. They have the accountants, the planners, the money, the lawyers, the computer program and the expertise. They should have to prove that they are, in fact, right in that assessment. So I welcome what's there.

The second thing I welcome is the fact that they now have to give out the information. But what I don't like, having given kudos to the government on these two parts, is that they are virtually nowhere when it comes to property value assessment. There is nothing contained within the body of this act which should make anyone in Ontario feel comfortable.

We all know what's going to happen in approximately September or October of this year, the same thing that happens every year. People say, "What is the scariest

event in October?" Some people might think it's Halloween. But no, the scariest thing that happens each and every October is when you get your assessment, when you open up that assessment and it says that your house, which last year was worth \$300,000, is now worth \$700,000. People open that and they stare in disbelief. That's what's going to happen, you see, because the Liberals were very smart and very cagey before the last election.

Interjection: Not smart, just cagey.

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Mr. Michael Prue: Cagey. My colleague corrected me: not smart, but cagey. Absolutely cagey, I give credit for that, because they looked and they thought, "This is going to be a political hot potato that we don't want in the next election." So they froze the assessments until after the election. Now everything is being studied, and in September it's going to be implemented, and the Liberals have this rollout of a four-year plan. Everybody is going to be whacked—not one year, not two years, not three years, but four years, and then they're going to go back into the thing again. They're hoping against hope that people will think that this little portion of the bill where they can appeal and where the reverse onus is going to do something—but they are sadly mistaken.

Every time we in the opposition stand up—the Conservatives with their plan of a 5% cap, and our plan of freezing until time of sale once a house has been purchased—we get laughed down. But I'll tell you, the Liberals won't be laughing very hard when it comes to next September. They won't be laughing very hard when people are seeing the virtual loss of their properties. We've already seen what's going to happen in some jurisdictions. We've already seen the preliminary analysis of what's going to happen in the city of Toronto, and how the downtown core is going to have to pay a lot more in terms of property tax because of assessment increases, whereas the inner suburbs and the outer suburbs are going to probably pay less.

We already know that in small-town Ontario, which have lakes and rivers around them, where people have summer and seasonal properties, those properties are going to escalate in value far more than small-town Ontario. The people who own those properties are going to get whacked out of all proportion to the services that they get and they pay for.

It has always been an anomaly to me that we charge the same house taxes for a person who has a seasonal property and may use it for two or three months of the year as somebody who lives there full-time. If you think that's strange, and I do—you live in a cottage, and you don't get any garbage pickup because they don't pick up for two or three months during the year, unless they pick up all the time, or they don't pick it up at all, so you have to take it to the local dump. You usually have to pay per bag to take it in there. Your kids don't go to those schools because they come back to the city or the town, but you pay the same property taxes for the schools. You pay the same property taxes for services like water and

sewage that you probably don't have at your cottage or seasonal property. In the end, there it is, and this government has done absolutely nothing in this bill or in its budget to remedy that. You're simply waiting until September, and I think you're going to see the storm clouds gather pretty fast.

In terms of the environment, I have to state that the budget and this document contain almost nothing that would make an environmentalist happy. The environment is a totally forgotten issue. I saw with amusement that the government planned to reduce the tax on bicycles that were less than \$1,000. That's probably a good thing; I don't mind. I think people should get bicycles and I don't mind that the government wants to reduce the sales tax for bicycles. But I went into a really good bicycle shop on Augusta; I didn't just go to Canadian Tire or to Sears or someplace like that to see how much bicycles are because I do see those ads and I know that bicycles are generally \$200, \$300, \$400—that's what bicycles are. I went into a very good bicycle shop on Augusta to look at the higher-end ones. They had over 400 bicycles for sale—

Mr. John Yakabuski: And not one of them under \$1,000.

Mr. Michael Prue: No: Literally every one was under \$1,000. So I was somewhat heartened to see that that was done, and somewhat puzzled by the Conservative motion, which wanted to raise bicycles to \$2,000, in committee. I still remain puzzled about that because, even going into the highest-end bicycle shop in the downtown area on Augusta, they don't even stock a single bicycle above \$999. I asked the man, and he showed me the most expensive one they had.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You can buy \$10,000 bikes.

Mr. Michael Prue: My colleague is telling me that you can buy \$10,000 bikes, but this is all that the government seems intent on doing. That's the entire budgetary measure towards the environment that is found in Bill 44 or in the budget itself.

I think that Keith Stewart said it best. I would like to quote him. Keith Stewart of the World Wildlife Fund—and probably all members of the Legislature know Dr. Stewart—had the following comment to make, which I think encapsulated it perfectly and brilliantly after the budget was introduced:

“Premier Dalton McGuinty said climate change was a defining issue of our generation ... and in the budget speech, the climate announcement was a continuation of a sales tax exemption for bicycles and Energy Star appliances.”

Really, a budget that could have done so much did absolutely or almost absolutely nothing. When I contrast this to what is happening in other jurisdictions and I look at what is happening in British Columbia, whether you agree with them or not, at least there is a government with some political guts, a government that's willing to stick its neck out with a carbon tax. They really went whole hog. Whether you agree with it or not, they were willing—

Hon. Jim Watson: Is that NDP policy?

Mr. Michael Prue: No, no, you don't have any policy. What I'm saying is, you have no policy, and other ones who have some guts like that are willing to stick their neck out on a limb. But I see this government being more than willing to do things by half measures and the only thing they can talk about is reducing the sales tax on a bicycle. If that's your entire environmental policy, then the government itself should be ashamed.

I looked at what else is in this bill, like the stuff around the LCBO. This seemed to me to be kind of bizarre, and I couldn't understand the whole government's policy around forcing the Ontario licence corporation and the LCBO to finance capital expenditures rather than funding capital expenditures through current revenues, which is what they have done ever since those organizations were established. It took a while, and I had to do some research and have some people explain to me what the purport of all this was, why the government would take this action. And it's quite clear why they took the action. They are loading up additional costs on the LCBO and the OLG so that the money will flow directly to the government, so that the government's revenues can look better than they actually are and the LCBO's and the OLG's revenues will look worse than they are, so that they have to pay to borrow money which they heretofore had from their own revenues. They're going to have to go out and borrow it, and the government is not going to have to go out and borrow money that it needs; it's going to take it from the OLG and the LCBO. It's a pretty neat accounting trick, but that in fact is all it is.

So if you look at this budget measure and you look at Bill 44, you think, “Why is the government doing this?” It became apparent to me, after some research and some study, that it is only to allow an easier cash flow to the government in times of need and to force these two corporations, which before were able to make capital expenditures from within the monies they were bringing in, be they ticket sales or liquor or wine sales, to have to get it from a bank and pay the 5% or 10% or whatever the mortgage that will be required of them.

You have the whole problem in here about buying in Ontario. The government has almost no plan to buy in Ontario, and this is pretty sad. I talked about this very briefly at the start of my speech. There is, or would have been, an opportunity for this government to institute a plan to buy Ontario products; to make sure that markets remain stable enough for people to keep their jobs; to make sure that places like Thunder Bay would continue to produce railway and subway cars; to make sure that industries that were suffering, like our automobile industries, would not suffer if we bought made-in-Ontario products for use by this government; to make sure that ordinary citizens and corporations and the like kept their jobs and kept jobs flowing in Ontario. None of that is contained within the body of the budget.

I think the government has lost a golden opportunity. I talked at great length about the worsening economy for a reason, because this may in fact be the only good,

sustainable budget that this government is able to produce in its term. If the economy in the United States continues to decline, if our own economy is dragged down with it, then all of the plans that this government has announced, all of the things that they said they were going to do will be nearly impossible. Given the timidity of this budget, given the fact that none of the major goals that were set out in the last campaign, from poverty reduction to increasing jobs to helping cities, have been accomplished—none of that has been accomplished in this budget; none of that has been accomplished in this bill—I have to worry about what is going to happen if there are not sustained increases in revenue in the next fiscal year.

1700

I think this government is in trouble. I think they're not willing to talk about it yet, but the days and weeks and months that ensue will surely prove that point. If the government is serious, they'll start to take some very drastic and necessary actions now. But they seem content to coast along while people lose their jobs, coast along while cities slowly go bankrupt and see all their infrastructure laid waste, coast along while people might lose their homes if we don't resolve the taxation issue around MPAC, coast along in all the other things that are happening for our businesses, for poverty, for school closures, for pools and all the other things that are crying out in need. There wasn't money in this budget, and I despair whether there will be any money in future budgets.

I hope the US economy rebounds, and I hope ours rebounds with it. I do not want to be pessimistic at all, but one can only read the warning signs with a great deal of alarm. This government is not looking at those warning signs. This government is not prepared, and this budget has not and will not sustain the province of Ontario if things start to go south.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'm pleased to have a few minutes this afternoon to speak on Bill 44, the budget bill, as we go through third reading.

One of the very innovative things in this budget that I think is going to be very important to the future of Ontario is the whole notion of taking research and development that is done right here in Ontario—and this goes for research right across Canada—to the next stage of commercialization and turning it into solid, good-paying jobs for the citizens of Ontario. Those companies will have the opportunity to have a tax holiday of some 10 years.

Let me relate that measure very locally, in Peterborough. Over this last weekend, the International Consortium of Anti-Virals, which is a not-for-profit drug development organization dedicated to the discovery and development of anti-viral therapies, had their sixth annual meeting in Peterborough. This is an international group of scientists who were at Trent University in

Peterborough. Their mandate is to start developing new second-generation drugs for HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, Lassa fever, yellow fever, Ebola and other infectious diseases that we certainly have read about and have seen very visually through the media. One of the things they looked at in their discussion was how this 10-year corporate tax exemption will help get these medicines to market. In fact, the goal of the International Consortium of Anti-Virals is to deliver to market every five years one drug that is affordable, effective and accessible to all patients in need.

I heard the member for Beaches–East York indicate that there was nothing novel in this budget. Well, here's a good example of an international consortium that's looking at a provision in our budget of March 2008 that will potentially allow us to have new drugs come into the market every five years. Ontario is an excellent place to foster that kind of development.

Just today, in the business section of the *Globe and Mail*, *Research in Motion*, which is now an international company for the production and research into the BlackBerry—I might add that Jim Balsillie, one of the founders, is a Peterborough-born and -raised resident who went on to the University of Waterloo. He talked again about the tax exemption and tax environment here in Ontario that is going to allow his company to continue to prosper, to foster new research and development. He looks at the tax structure that we introduced in Ontario in our budget in March to foster that kind of development, which I think is a very positive thing to keep adding jobs here in Ontario, the kinds of jobs that are going to be in place for generation upon generation, keeping Ontario as a leading jurisdiction for research and development into key areas, which we all think are very important to sustain a high-wage economy—those jobs that help pay for social programs and our health care benefits in the province of Ontario. So I'm very pleased that that's part of a very novel approach that was in our budget.

Let me talk about cities and towns. Mr. Speaker, like you, I have a background in municipal politics, and I go back to the days of 1997-98. I remember that all my colleagues gathered in Ottawa for the annual AMO meeting, and I remember the Premier of the day, Mr. Harris, came in and gave a very interesting speech. I was at the back of the room. He articulated very clearly how this revenue-neutral download of services was going to happen. It came from David Crombie's review of the Who Does What committee. I've always said that after this was done in 1997, it was the who-got-done-in committee, and I can tell you it was municipalities in Ontario that got done in by that supposed exchange of services that we were told was revenue-neutral.

When we got the privilege of forming government in 2003, we started the upload of some of these services that were downloaded. We're the government of uploading, and I'll give you some concrete examples. First of all, we have land ambulance. We are now back to the original 50-50 proposition for funding in the province of Ontario. Public health: We're well on the road to providing the

province of Ontario 100% funding in public health—the kinds of things that municipalities have been asking for.

In my own community of Peterborough, we made the commitment to upload ODSP, a drug benefit cost. For the municipality that is a savings of \$1.3 million for their 2008 budget, and for the county of Peterborough, \$300,000. Under the leadership of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who's in the House this afternoon—I know he wants to hear my remarks when it comes to municipalities—a former mayor of Ottawa himself, one of the most successful mayors of Ottawa during his time there. He certainly made a commitment to us all that the review panel in the next number of months will conclude their work, and will have a framework agreement in place to keep moving and accelerate the commitment we've made to get those services and costs back to the province, where they belong, and finally give our struggling property taxpayers, who were overburdened by that download in 1997-98, some relief.

Also in this budget—I've had a lot of calls from senior citizens about the new property tax grant that we're bringing in. Those are individuals, some of them veterans of the Second World War and the Korean War, the kinds of people who helped to build our communities and who deserve some relief, and we are the government that's helping them out with our new system of property tax grants that they'll be receiving.

A number of other things: I want to talk about the leadership of my colleague the member from Oakville. He took us this morning to have breakfast with the Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association of Canada, a very diverse group representing Ford, Chrysler, General Motors and the various parts manufacturers that are part of this very vital sector of Ontario's economy. It was an interesting discussion for over an hour, when they certainly commended us, our government, on the elimination of the capital tax, the investment in the Next Generation of Jobs Fund and other ways we've come to support the auto industry in the province of Ontario. To be frank, they also gave us some further suggestions on how, for future budgets or future initiatives that we might take, to secure that industry's future in the province of Ontario.

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There were a number of members there this morning, and I want to thank the member from Oakville, who has been the chair of the auto caucus over the last four and a half years. He takes the opportunity to put these sessions together so that they can provide us with a very frank assessment of our budget measures, particularly for the auto sector.

I want to also talk about skills to jobs, the new \$1.5-billion, three-year investment in new skills. In my riding of Peterborough we know that in order to succeed one has to keep upgrading their knowledge and their skills to match the kinds of jobs that are going to be available in the marketplace. This is an investment of some \$1.5 billion over three years to make that happen. Along with the Next Generation of Jobs Fund, there has been a

number of strategic announcements over the last number of weeks in communities right across Ontario to take advantage of that fund, and we recognize that.

We certainly don't have our heads buried in the sand. We know that there are some economic challenges south of the border. The subprime mortgage fiasco was a good example of not having proper oversight of American financial institutions. But we know that that spilled over into the other sectors of the United States economy, and as our largest trading partner, it certainly has an impact on economic activity in this province.

We're prepared to move ahead with the challenges that are in front of us. It's certainly the leadership of the Premier to get a fair deal from Ottawa.

I heard the other day from the official finance critic from the official opposition. I just want to go back to that for a moment, because I think people listening this evening should understand this issue of Ontario perhaps moving to a have-not status. It did happen a number of years ago, from 1977 to 1982, because a rapid appreciation of oil at that particular time skewed the equalization formula. The equalization formula is fairly complex, but I think it might be helpful if we had a seminar around here and perhaps bring in Don Drummond from TD Bank—he's a senior economist with a great reputation—to really explain how the equalization formula works in Canada based on non-resource revenue and resource revenue. From 1977 to 1982, with rapid appreciation of oil, Ontario technically was in a have-not status. The government of the day could've qualified for \$100 million under equalization payments. Then they changed the formula so Ontario wouldn't qualify.

If you read Mr. Drummond's exposé on this whole issue, he said that potentially, in 2011-12, Ontario technically might qualify for equalization because of the rapid appreciation in the price of oil, today at \$122 a barrel. In three years' time, we can only speculate where it might be. What that does is throw the whole formula of the equation for equalization out of kilter, and Ontario may, technically, qualify at that time. He clearly identified that it wasn't the Ontario economy, that it's not the income per capita of the Ontario economy. It's because of the rapid appreciation of a resource—a barrel of oil—in other provinces that are part of the equalization formula.

We're continually proud of the Premier who wants to get a reasonable deal from Ottawa. We send \$20 billion out of this province to support, on a fiscal capacity basis, to make sure that all provinces have equal access to services that have a standard, a benchmark, right across the country. We know by commission that it's always been Ontario's role to participate and to make sure that other people have the same level of services that we do.

There are a number of other things that I'll take the opportunity to talk about. The MIII program: Municipalities across the province of Ontario were provided a framework of \$450 million, a real opportunity for them to nominate a project from their municipality, and a few weeks ago we made the announcements on these pro-

grams. When you look at the number of projects, certainly in my community we're replacing a bridge. In other parts of the riding, I know that in the community of North Kawartha we're actually investing \$9 million to build a new arena—the kinds of things that these municipalities have been waiting for for many, many years, these local projects that make so much of a difference in these local economies.

The other thing we're doing through the Ministry of Research and Innovation is to make key investments in those areas, in the bioeconomy, health research and other creative industries, including the digital media industry, to provide the opportunity to make sure that Ontario is a very competitive jurisdiction in which to invest.

I'll just touch upon manufacturing for a moment. There are a number of key initiatives in our budget. We're proposing to eliminate the capital tax retroactively to January 1, 2007, for businesses primarily engaged in manufacturing resource activities. Again, that's something that was touched upon by the Ontario auto parts manufacturing group this morning. We're also proposing to extend and accelerate the capital cost allowance for manufacturing and processing machinery and equipment investments made before the year 2012. We're also providing \$25 million to the Yves Landry Foundation, a former president of Chrysler Canada, to support employer-based training in the manufacturing sector to improve productivity and competitiveness for small and medium-sized Ontario manufacturers. Another \$25 million goes to the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters for a program to help manufacturers improve productivity and reduce waste.

We're certainly very aggressive on that front, but there are two strategies we want to employ here. Some have said that tax cuts are going to work and that's the only track we should be following. In fact, Mr. Speaker, when you take the time to read the budget, and I know you have, we essentially outlined a five-point program, or two tracks: key investments in areas of the Ontario economy, and a selected and strategic number of tax cuts.

We know that tax cuts alone don't provide fiscal stability. We know that the previous government towards the end of that term—I recognize that they had SARS and a number of other catastrophes that they had to deal with, but they were certainly banking a lot on tax cuts, and we know there was a rather large \$5.6-billion deficit that was left in their hands, even though that was always denied during the campaign of 2003. We had to bring in Erik Peters, the former Auditor General of the province of Ontario, to do a special audit to confirm that, indeed, the books were not as they were presented in the election of 2003 and in fact there was that \$5.6-billion hidden deficit.

Our last three budgets have been balanced—very important. But those budgets and the strategies contained in those budgets will allow investing in key areas of our economy that we all know are so important to us.

The 2008 budget also invests again in publicly funded education. We know that's the great economic equalizer.

We'll continue to fund the two families of our public education systems in the province of Ontario, and we've made unprecedented investment in those areas of public education.

We've also embarked on, in our colleges and universities, a physical investment to renew much of their plant and equipment that has been aging over the years. I know that's well received in my community. I meet with the president of Trent University, Bonnie Patterson, frequently, and the president of Fleming College, Tony Tilly. They've certainly been very appreciative of those capital grants we've provided them with to renew their capital facilities.

1720

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that this Friday at 10 a.m. in Peterborough we'll be cutting the ribbon on our brand new hospital. This is a hospital that was an initiative of our government in 2004. I'm pleased to say that my colleague the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care—the former Minister of Finance is here. He helped fund that new hospital in Peterborough. At 10 a.m. on Friday, we're going to be cutting the ribbon at the new hospital in Peterborough.

I'll certainly look forward to being there with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the warden of Peterborough county and the mayor of Peterborough. We've been looking forward over the last three years, as this magnificent building has taken shape. When it's fully operational, as we ramp up the beds, almost 500 beds will be available there. It will take the place of two old hospitals that certainly served the community very well over the last 80 years, but we are looking forward to this new hospital. It'll certainly be a great day in Peterborough this Friday.

I'll also put in a plug that His Royal Highness Prince Andrew will also be visiting Peterborough on Friday, at the Canadian Canoe Museum, so many people like myself who are monarchists at heart will have the opportunity to meet the prince at the same time.

I digressed there for a moment. I'll get back to the budget, Bill 44.

One of the other things that certainly was brought to my attention over the last number of years was the business education tax, particularly for medium and small business owners in my community. It's been very well received that we'll be removing that tax over the next number of years, but particularly helpful for my colleagues who represent ridings in northern Ontario—like the member from Sudbury and the Minister for Community Safety and Correctional Services—in that in northern Ontario we're accelerating the removal of that business education tax to give them a hand. But certainly important in those—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I am looking for the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, who will tell us what's actually going on in the budget. It's one of those omnibus bills, as you know, that you can't put it past—a

cautionary note here, with all due respect. There'll be several poison pills in this bill. This is the problem with it. There are certain parts, you know, when they're looking at the depreciation allowances, capital cost allowances—those are things we support. We'd encourage them to go further; the tax holiday. But there are certain things in there that we would refer to as poison pills. It's troubling, the nefarious ways that they insert these little things that we want, and yet they want things that we can't simply tolerate, like increased red tape, increased regulations, more inspectors, this nanny state stuff that we're opposed to. This is what small business has been telling us for the last decade or longer.

I was at the Ontario Chamber of Commerce this week. You had a five-point plan, and I understand that. They have a six-point plan. Do you know what it is? Cut taxes, cut red tape, improve training allowances—these are the things that small businesses are telling you. In fact, the prosperity committee that reported to you said the same thing. Ontario is not competitive. It's not just Jim Flaherty. It's the chamber of commerce. It's the Competition Bureau.

I know this budget is important. In fact, more important is Bill 35, though, the little slush fund—how to get rid of the surplus in the dark of night. Those things trouble me. We're talking about openness and transparency and accountability. None of it is here, and that is scary.

In fact, I know the member from Peterborough means well. If he was a real gentleman, he'd invite me to the opening of the hospital because Gary Stewart was the one who got that committed—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

Mr. John O'Toole: Gary Stewart, the former member, did more—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Member, please take your seat.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to the minister—I mean the member—from Peterborough. Maybe he should be a minister, anyway. I listened intently to what he had to say, and there was one particular part of his speech that intrigued me. That was the part where he talked about a former government of Ontario that downloaded a whole lot of stuff to municipalities. When I listened to him, I thought that, historically, what he's saying about the download is absolutely accurate, and it's absolutely historically accurate that most of the municipalities have never really recovered from the additional financial burden, which they were singularly incapable of paying.

But then, as I listened to the rest of his speech, I kept saying, "He's identified the problem. What are he and his government going to do about it?" There really wasn't any answer or commitment to pull themselves out of it. Recognizing the problem, there was nothing in there about starting to upload, and there was certainly nothing in this budget that causes anyone a hope that things are

going to be uploaded. I know what the Premier promised, that ODSP and some of the related costs will be uploaded within this term of government, but this budget did nothing even to start along that path. So it means it's going to have to take place more rapidly in subsequent years when finances are not that good.

Perhaps my friend from Peterborough might, in his two minutes at the end, explain how his government, which did absolutely nothing to assist municipalities in this budget, is going to truncate and do all of that in the three years that are left in the mandate and in the last three budgets. Certainly he was capable of identifying the problem; he just was not too forthright in terms of how he was going to solve the problem, which admittedly was started by a previous government but for which his government has done very little in the last five years.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased to rise to support the budget bill. One of the things I want to talk about is, for a riding like Huron-Bruce, what this represents. I can tell you that this represents a significant investment in a very rural riding. Certainly the member from Peterborough explained it, the pinky swear about the downloading and how it was to be revenue-neutral. We know that simply was not the case, specifically in rural communities—the damage it did.

I know the money that was received through the roads and bridges and the MIII—what a difference it is going to make in the riding of Huron-Bruce. When we think about the rebuilding of new waterlines in Walkerton, new bridges—we can get our products going down the road—this is what the dollars represent for the people of Huron-Bruce.

So it certainly is with pleasure that I rise to support such important initiatives that are reflective of what the people want, what the people need, so that together we can move forward with a very firm understanding of the work that needs to be done. And, yes, I have to say that there have been challenges, and there will continue to be, but we know that the path to success is paved by solid investments in our communities, and that is what makes a strong Ontario. When I see a budget bill like this coming forward, I know that this is what will help the people of Ontario, by working together, and the recognition of solid investments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Member from Peterborough, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I certainly appreciate the comments from the members for Durham, Beaches-East York and Huron-Bruce.

I think from time to time, you've got to take off the partisan hat for a moment. If you really look at some of the objective things we've done in the downloading—and I've talked to my former municipal colleagues. Those are men and women, many of whom went through the downloading in 1997-98, who certainly recognize the initial steps that we've made in terms of the upload. I mentioned them in my remarks today: public health; land ambulance; and now the ODSP drug benefit, which has a

real impact in freeing up resources at the municipal level and taking those costs back to the province, where they belong.

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We've been in an issue. We all know that municipalities are looking at the issue of court security and whether that cost should be uploaded back to the province of Ontario. In my community, the city of Peterborough, that's a million-dollar burden on the property taxpayers for the city of Peterborough. Through the work we are doing through the panel, it's been a very—as I understand, because I've talked to representatives that have been on the panel, such as Doug Reycraft, and certainly these are the kinds of issues that are being discussed to uplift an additional basket of costs that were downloaded in 1997-98, that never should have been put on the property taxpayer to begin with. But you've got to make a start. This government has made a start, a very progressive start. And we will continue on that track to uplift some of those costs from municipalities. It's very important because property tax, as we know, is a regressive form of taxation not based on income, and some of these costs have been a real burden. So we are in the process of the government being uploaders, not downloaders.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join the debate this afternoon on Bill 44, the budget bill. I'm just going to touch briefly on what the member opposite from Peterborough said about the partisan hats and the downloading, and this and that. They always talk about the downloading, but they don't talk about the fact that the education costs were uploaded. They don't want to give any credit where credit is due. They don't want to talk about the study that was out last week where Ontario schools are doing better. What did they give credit to? The curriculum changes that were made by the Harris government in Ontario schools to bring up the standards. What has this government done since it's been elected? It's actually lowered those standards. It lowered those standards. We're going backwards again under this government in our education standards. They talk about the partisan hats, but believe me, they wear them better than anybody.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Oh, John, you're delusional.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That was an independent review, I say to the member for Huron-Bruce—not my opinion. They gave credit to those curriculum changes that were brought in by the previous government.

This economy is clearly in trouble, and this government either doesn't want to admit it or doesn't want to take any responsibility for it. Or it's a combination of both.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: What do you recommend, John?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, the member from—I don't know what it is. It used to be Glengarry-Prescott-Russell.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Still is.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, the names have changed since the last election.

Mr. Michael Prue: Only to protect the innocent.

Mr. John Yakabuski: “Only to protect the innocent,” my friend from Beaches–East York says.

The member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell says, “What would you recommend?” It's a good question, because back in 2005 my colleague Ted Arnott—what is it, Waterloo–Wellington?

Mr. Ted Arnott: At that time Waterloo–Wellington; now Wellington–Halton Hills.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Wellington–Halton Hills now.

He actually brought a motion or a resolution to this House to put this government on notice, to ask them to convene a symposium to look at the competitiveness of our manufacturing sector in this province so that we could actually be ahead of the game. He knew enough to see it coming, but apparently those prognosticators on the other side did not see it coming. And they did nothing, absolutely nothing, with that resolution, which maybe—I'm not going to say that would have solved all of the problems, but just maybe, if they'd actually had a plan, if they'd actually had a strategy, we might have been better prepared for what is happening today in Ontario's economy.

On one hand, the Premier says, “Steel yourselves; this too shall pass,” and on the other hand, he says, “There's more to come.” You never know what you're going to get with Premier McGuinty. I think he intentionally wants to be somewhat enigmatic about it because he really doesn't want someone to be able to put a glove on him. So his messages change from day to day. He tries to deflect things, like he brings in legislation such as the—

Mrs. Julia Munro: Trans fats.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —trans fats, Bill 8, and the pesticide bill, Bill 64, and the upgrading of the cruelty-to-animals legislation, trying to deflect attention from what the real problems in Ontario are. You know, you get from one day—and stuff comes out of the blue. Stuff comes out of the blue, like over at the MaRS last week, just out of the blue, “We're getting a new car plant in Ontario.” Well, you think they'd have convened a press conference or done something, have some big announcement: “We're getting a car plant.” You would expect that if the Premier of the province is going to make a statement like that, he'd have some kind of evidence, something to back it up—nothing. No negotiations, no talks, no nothing; just, “Please get off my back. You're asking tough questions. I've got to throw something in: ‘We're getting a new car plant.’”

Mr. Ted Arnott: He's going to make a side trip to Italy, though.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, yes, he's going to make a side trip to Italy, he'll probably make one to China—although he didn't know about the virus going around in China, so now he may change his mind.

Mr. Ted Arnott: He doesn't have time to read the papers.

Mr. John Yakabuski: He wasn't able to read the papers, didn't know what was going on with the pesticide legislation. But somehow he came to the conclusion that we're getting a car plant in Ontario.

It's those kinds of statements where I think people really start to ask themselves, "Is he serious about the problems we're facing in the economy or is he just serious about protecting those 71 jobs on the other side of the House?" If he was serious, he wouldn't be so cavalier in making those kinds of announcements with nothing to back them up. Why would you say we're getting a car plant and have nothing at all to back it up?

The reason he was being questioned about that was that just a couple of days before, GM announced they were shutting down one shift at the car plant in Oshawa, sending about 800 or 900 workers on to the unemployment line. So you have to wonder about the auto strategy of this government. They pride themselves on bringing jobs to Ontario, but every time we turn around, we see that jobs are being lost in our auto sector, which is a key barometer of the health of our economy and which also determines the health of the economy to a large degree.

The other part of the economy that is a key barometer, and my friend from Beaches—East York touched on it, is the real estate market. That's showing some real signs of weakening in Toronto, that key large market, where housing sales are down in consecutive months and there's some real concern that that's a harbinger of things to come.

In the past few months we've had layoff after layoff. I think it must be over 200,000 jobs now since 2004, under this tax-and-spend regime, with no sign of relief to come because they don't have an economic plan. You'd think what we'd be debating in this House these days is an economic stimulus plan to actually do something about what's happening here. When the federal Minister of Finance cajoled this provincial government and tried to encourage them to bring in some kinds of tax relief measures, the Minister of Finance said, "We can't do that. The budget's already written." That was his comment. The budget was already written, yet in the budget they brought in the \$190-million capital tax reduction retroactive to 2007. We can't deal with tax reduction, he said, because the budget's written, but then they actually brought in that tax reduction. So who is being a little duplicitous here? If you've already written the budget, how did you come up with that tax reduction? You didn't want to have direct corporate tax cuts because that would have looked like you were taking your direction from the Minister of Finance in Ottawa, but you knew you had to do something to send some kind of message to the manufacturing sector in this province that you were actually paying some attention.

Unfortunately it's not enough, as we continue to see that jobs have bled. Just in the last couple of weeks: 500 jobs in Listowel, at the Campbell Soup plant, where for 48 years that plant's been in business producing food for Ontarians' tables, and now those people who worked

there are going to be looking for scraps themselves because they're going to be out of work, and that's a shame here in the province of Ontario; 48 years, and Campbell's will be gone.

Some of the things that I think this government could be doing to help municipalities, particularly rural municipalities that they turned their back on last week, when I had my gas tax bill turned down by the Liberal government—they came in and voted. They were whipped in to vote. In fact, I can tell you there were members of the government side who supported that bill. No changes were made to the bill, by the way. They supported that bill on a previous second reading and it passed in this Legislature. It failed to get any further because the election was called and Parliament was dissolved. They supported it in the past, but last week, on Thursday, they either came in and voted against it or they absented themselves from the vote. In fact, there were members who came in for one of the votes and left for the other one because they didn't want to be on record as voting against the bill. In principle, I believe, they support it, but I guarantee you, the Premier's office made it clear to them, "Don't go in there and support that bill, or else." Of course, the cabinet wasn't going to support it. Backbenchers, if they ever want to have a chance of getting inside that cabinet room, better do as the Premier's office tells them. That's what happened to that gas tax bill. That would have addressed some of the things that municipalities are talking about.

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I'm looking forward to the municipal fiscal service delivery review that we're told is coming in June. I hope that's not delayed again, because it's been delayed much longer than it should have been. We are looking forward to that to see what kind of measures are taken to help municipalities in the province of Ontario, but I'm not going to hold my breath until that report gets here either, because I do believe that probably like everything else this government promises, it will be late if at all coming. But that gas tax bill would have addressed some of those concerns of municipalities that are looking for sustainability and predictability in respect to funding from the provincial government.

The other thing I want to talk about is another horse that the Premier gets on: "Do you know there's \$20 billion more being taken out of this province than is being put back into it by the federal government?" On the surface that argument may have some appeal, but let's drill down to the real details of that. If the Premier believes that's how it should be, that if Ontario puts X number of dollars into the federation, then it should get X number of dollars out, there's no need for a federal government whatsoever. The provinces should just collect all the money and keep it. But that money that he's talking about is not Ontario's money. It belongs to the people of Ontario. It's their taxes, their corporate taxes, not the government's. The government needs more money. The government is spending \$96 billion. It doesn't have a revenue problem; it's got a spending problem. It likes to

spend money on all kinds of things that some people would find questionable and others might even find objectionable. But that money belongs to the taxpayers of Ontario, both corporately and individually; it is not the province's. If you extrapolate that argument a little farther, then you would say, quite simply, if the tax is collected in Toronto or Windsor or Ottawa, then those people should just collect it. Or let's take it to the nth degree and say, "Everybody, just hang on to your money. There's no need for government." That's the kind of logic that the Premier is trying to put out there as being saleable when he talks about that \$20 billion. That is not the province of Ontario's money. In fact, if they got hold of it, they'd only spend it in some unworthy way; I'm quite certain of that. It is not the province of Ontario's money; it is the taxpayers' money. But he dropped that argument this week, probably because some economist told him that it doesn't really hold water.

Speaking of economists—and the member for Peterborough was talking about the lowering of taxes not being the only solution—Roger Martin, whom this government paid \$1 million to do a study, came back saying that what we need to do in order to increase revenue in the province of Ontario is reduce the general tax rates, because it's the general tax rates that are discouraging business from either staying in Ontario or establishing in Ontario. His position was that we would actually increase

the amount of revenue from taxation by lowering those tax rates. But the McGuinty government doesn't see it that way. They like high tax rates. They like to make sure that they're getting their cut off the top. They don't want a strong economy to increase the amount of taxation and the amount of revenue that the province would see coming in. No, they want to get their cut off the top, so the best way for them to do it is to make sure the rates are high. In fact, they're the highest rates anywhere in Canada. They're hurting our economy by discouraging people from investing here.

In fact, in Alberta they've moved to eliminate the health tax, which is going to make that province even more attractive from the point of view of dollars being kept in the pockets of individuals and corporations. They're not going to be paying the tax either as an individual or a corporation, because Alberta has come to realize that they need to make sure that their people have more disposable income. That, in turn, will get invested into that province, and manufacturers will invest there.

I do believe my time is up, Mr. Speaker. So thank you very much, and we'll catch you another day.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It being 5:45 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 9 o'clock on Thursday, May 8.

The House adjourned at 1745.

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