



ISSN 1181-6465

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario
Second Session, 38th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario
Deuxième session, 38^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Wednesday 18 October 2006

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Mercredi 18 octobre 2006

**Standing committee on
estimates**

Ministry of Training,
Colleges and Universities

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère de la Formation et des
Collèges et Universités

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Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
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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

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Wednesday 18 October 2006

Mercredi 18 octobre 2006

The committee met at 1557 in room 151.

MINISTRY OF TRAINING, COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): We'll call the meeting together. I'd like to welcome the Honourable Chris Bentley, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, to the estimates committee. We are here today for consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, for a total of seven and a half hours. We will commence with vote 3001. We will begin with a 30-minute statement by the minister, 30 minutes for the official opposition and 30 minutes for the third party, then the minister will have 30 minutes for reply. The remaining time will be apportioned equally among the three parties.

Minister, feel free to proceed.

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and committee members. I'm pleased to be here on behalf of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to talk about our 2006-07 estimates. I know these investments will affect the quality of and access to post-secondary education for years to come.

Many challenges that our economy faces in the first decade of the 21st century include: an aging workforce; the need to integrate newcomers with international work experience; the pace of technological change; and intensifying competition from emerging economies.

The McGuinty government believes that the key to Ontario's prosperity lies in our people. The best jobs and most investment go to the places with the best-educated, most highly skilled workforce. We must nurture that culture. We must cultivate the next generation of critical, innovative thinkers. We must have informed leaders who will lead the province in the future. Investing in the education and skills of our people today leads to increased prosperity and an improved quality of life for us all.

With all of this in mind, last year our government introduced our Reaching Higher plan. This \$6.2-billion investment in post-secondary education and skills training is the most significant multi-year investment in Ontario's higher education system in 40 years. It expands the view of post-secondary education from the traditional classroom learning in colleges and universities to encompass apprenticeships and other forms of enhanced skills.

Reaching Higher is our strategy for becoming the leader in learning, with important commitments to access, accountability and quality. Our commitment to this strategy is underlined by the historic investments we're making to build the high-quality post-secondary system our province deserves and needs.

Our commitment to building an integrated training and employment system is just as strong. We're training more apprentices. We're bringing together the Ontario government's programs and services to work hand in hand with programs, people and resources from the federal government. At the end of the day, what people care about, whether they're workers, whether they're those unemployed looking for work, whether they're businesses looking for skilled, trained workers, people looking for any type of training—what they really care about is how to get it. They're not interested in jurisdiction. They're interested in how to get it and simplifying the system. This is our approach for an expanded, highly skilled workforce.

The people of Ontario deserve to have the best post-secondary education system and the best training system in Canada. Our province's future depends on it.

Today I would like to share with you some of the progress we've made under the Reaching Higher plan and look ahead to our plans for the coming year.

If I could turn first to colleges and universities, by 2009-10, the McGuinty government will have provided an additional \$1.2 billion in annual operating grants to colleges and universities, or 35% more than the base in 2004-05.

Now, what does this money mean? It means that after years of underfunding, our government is investing in the system to rebuild not just post-secondary education but to rebuild that necessary relationship and glue between government, our businesses, our labour, the people of Ontario.

How far have we come? The evidence is there to be seen. There are almost 86,000 more post-secondary students attending this September than in 2002-03. That is a 5% participation rate increase, a 21% increase in real numbers.

We're doubling our investment in student aid. We've invested to modernize and repair buildings. We've established the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to monitor quality and access. We're improving access to quality post-secondary education for underrepresented

groups and for those for whom distance poses a real challenge.

We're increasing first-year undergraduate medical enrolment by 23%. This includes the introduction of 104 new first-year medical school spaces between 2005-06 and 2008-09, and 56 new first-year spaces at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, which was opened in 2005-06.

This is the beginning, and we have more to do. We want every student in Ontario to have access to the best post-secondary education in Canada.

In the post-secondary sector, our Reaching Higher plan is built on three pillars: accessibility, accountability and quality.

Let me address accessibility first. Our government believes that access to post-secondary education should be driven by the ability to learn, not the ability to pay. That's why we've made significant investments in income- or need-based aid. Targeting aid to those who need it most is essential. We're increasing our investments in such spending. Over a five-year period, from 2004-05 to 2009-10, we're doubling our investment in student aid, and this includes major new investments in grants.

The McGuinty government invested almost \$200 million more to improve student assistance in 2005-06, to promote access and opportunity for low- and middle-income students. OSAP, the Ontario student assistance program, has been improved to promote access and opportunity for low- and middle-income students. In 2006-07, our improvements will benefit 145,000 students by, for example, expanding upfront grants. In 2006-07, our government is expanding access to grant eligibility to include students from families with incomes of up to about \$75,000. That translates to about twice as many grants as in 2005-06, with a total of 60,000 students expected to receive these access grants. The upfront tuition grants that used to be in existence in the province of Ontario were eliminated in about 1993. We started restoring them two years ago, with 32,000 students eligible. This year, it is 60,000.

We're also updating eligibility for student assistance by, for example, updating the book and supply allowance, which hadn't been updated in almost 20 years. Not only will students be able to access more student assistance—it's risen from \$9,300 to \$11,900 for a single student—they'll be able to do this without an increase in their annual maximum repayable debt. For example, if you borrow \$7,500 through the OSAP program, you only have to repay \$7,000 of it. The other \$500 is automatically a grant. We've maintained the debt ceiling even though we've increased the amount of aid that students are eligible for by about 30%.

As announced in November, the McGuinty government has also created the Ontario trust for student support to help enhance post-secondary access. The government is making \$50 million available every year to match private and corporate cash donations that are collected and used by colleges and universities to set up

endowment funds. The interest from these endowment funds provides bursaries for students in need, and this source of support supplements the upfront grants and the other student assistance available and, of course, the other institutional aid that's available.

In addition to making sure students have the support they need to attend a post-secondary institution, we have created a sustainable, predictable, regulated tuition framework. For every extra \$3 invested by the province, students are contributing one extra dollar. No institution may raise fees without participating in our new student access guarantee.

Let me just touch on that again. When we brought in the new tuition framework, we really recognized that everybody has to participate but, first and foremost, we need the government and the people of Ontario to invest more in post-secondary education. After making the investment and outlining it for the future, we asked students for a contribution. So the bottom line is that over the course of the plan, for every extra tuition dollar we're asking of students, we're asking the people of Ontario to invest an extra \$3 in post-secondary education. That contrasts with the past, when the previous government, for every extra tuition dollar asked of students, took money out of the system; and the government before that, for every extra tuition dollar asked of students, put in 90 cents.

What's the student access guarantee? It formally enshrines the commitment to accessibility. It says that institutions cannot raise their fees unless they participate in the student access guarantee. It will ensure that no qualified Ontario student will be prevented from attending our publicly funded colleges and universities because of a lack of financial support programs. Students in need must have access to the resources they need for their tuition, books and mandatory fees.

One way we're promoting access is by working with institutions to increase enrolment, of course. This is part of our multi-year agreements, and I'll have more to say about those in a moment. I spoke about the enrolment increases: 86,000 more students this September than in 2002-03.

What about the access and opportunity strategy? Financing is not the only barrier to a post-secondary education. Some students may be diverted from realizing their dreams for other reasons. That's why, last year, the government committed \$10 million, rising to \$55 million by 2009-10, to help colleges and universities reach out to four key groups: francophones, people with disabilities, aboriginal students and first-generation students; that is, the first generation in their family to attend a post-secondary institution. The statistics are clear that if one of your parents went on to a post-secondary institution, you're two and a half times more likely to go on than if one of them didn't.

We've established advisory committees to help meet the needs of each community, to give us good front-line advice on how to increase participation and success in post-secondary institutions by people from these groups.

Through research, expansion of existing services and innovative pilot projects, we're providing better access and opportunity for groups traditionally under-represented in the post-secondary system.

This year, we're investing \$5 million in programs run by colleges, universities and community organizations that will help potential first-generation students. These partners will encourage young people to pursue post-secondary education and apprenticeships by offering valuable information and advice, but they do more than that. They essentially provide a wraparound service, recognizing that students can face a number of challenges, not just financial, and that as those challenges arise, if they enrol in a post-secondary program, the challenges have to be addressed immediately; otherwise, the student is at great risk of not completing.

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Location should not bar education. As we announced at the end of August, our government is investing \$65.3 million in 2006-07, an increase of \$20 million over just two years ago, to help small, northern and rural colleges provide high-quality programs in their communities. This way, students do not have to leave their communities to get a high-quality post-secondary education. These investments are expected to result in higher educational achievement, greater participation and improvements in academic retention, enrolment and graduation.

Meanwhile, our most remote communities have been ably served for many years by the Contact North/Contact Nord system. It was established in the late 1980s by the Peterson government. It was serving approximately 67 communities. This year, we made a \$1.5-million investment to fund e-learning access centres in at least 20 new communities. In addition, the funding is enhancing the service in 12 additional northern communities so they can participate in the Contact North/Contact Nord video-conference network. Last year, Contact North helped deliver close to 13,000 course registrations in 589 credit courses. It offers courses from all of the northern colleges and universities, so from one location you can participate in them all.

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario will help us improve quality. It's the second pillar of our Reaching Higher plan. Making post-secondary education more accessible must be matched by a commitment to quality. It means more resources, more student time, more faculty, more innovative research.

The McGuinty government is committed to quality improvement and innovation and to making sure students' experiences are rewarding and successful. Already this year, we have announced operating grants that are about \$700 million more than the 2004-05 base levels for colleges and universities, which will help to improve staffing, purchase additional educational resources and technology and improve student support services.

In 2005, legislation was passed creating the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to ensure continued improvement of the post-secondary education system. This council will monitor and report on perform-

ance. It will also monitor and make recommendations on the student access guarantee I spoke about a few moments ago. It will undertake research on quality, participation and access and advise government on the best way to measure performance and institutional collaboration. It is an arm's-length agency and it will provide good research-based advice.

In May, I announced the nomination of the Honourable Frank Iacobucci, former justice of the Supreme Court of Canada and past interim president of the University of Toronto, as chair of HEQCO.

HEQCO is an independent body. Our government will make sure that work undertaken by it does not duplicate that of the ministry. We encourage all of our post-secondary education partners to support the council in its endeavours to ensure that our students have access to the best-quality post-secondary education.

The third pillar of the Reaching Higher plan is accountability. The McGuinty government is promoting accountability through multi-year agreements with Ontario's publicly funded colleges and universities. During the three years covered by these agreements, total post-secondary education operating grants will rise to \$4.3 billion by 2008-09, an increase of \$1 billion per year since the introduction of the Reaching Higher plan. The increase means we're sending \$4 billion to colleges and universities this year, the highest amount ever. Because these are multi-year agreements, they give colleges and universities the stability they need to plan for the coming years and to produce results.

But these are agreements with a difference. They set targets for individual institutions for improving student access to education and the quality of the student experience. The agreements establish system-wide goals for improvements and specific results for each institution, such as:

- higher overall enrolment;
- hiring new faculty;
- increasing student and faculty interaction;
- improving the learning experience and teaching excellence, including better library resources, lab equipment and information technology; and
- helping more students succeed at college and university so that they stay in school and graduate.

These agreements are, of course, evolving. This is the first time it's happened. They will evolve over time, but what's important is the signal we're sending. The people of Ontario are investing in colleges, universities and post-secondary education. We want to make sure that investment gets the results the people of Ontario expect and, indeed, the students expect.

Once we have increased access to post-secondary and to undergraduate post-secondary education, let's turn now to graduate education.

We, of course, have the double-cohort students, a large number of students going through who will be looking for graduate opportunities. We also have the needs of an emerging economy which requires more highly trained researchers, more highly trained workers,

and much more knowledgeable and creative workers than ever before, so we need more M.A.s and Ph.D.s. We have to go beyond the needs of the double cohort. That's why our government is allocating new spaces and funding to each university to expand graduate studies in education by 12,000 full-time students by 2007-08 and 14,000 by 2009-10. The investments required to support this will total \$220 million annually by 2009-10. This represents a 55% increase in graduate spaces over 2002-03.

Our plan is to build a foundation for innovation and research to ensure we can compete successfully in the global marketplace. By expanding graduate education, we develop the science and technology professionals and the innovative thinkers and researchers who will drive our economic competitiveness for the future.

I want to touch for a moment on the private career colleges legislation. The private career colleges legislation hadn't been amended in approximately 30 years, but of course, many private career colleges had been established, the number of students had increased, and the needs, demands and expectations of the marketplace had substantially changed.

The Ontario government proclaimed legislation this fall, September 18, to ensure protection for students attending private career colleges after the Legislature had passed the new Private Career Colleges Act. They play a key role in providing education and training as part of post-secondary education in Ontario.

The new Private Career Colleges Act, 2005, will protect students against financial loss, make sure their training can continue and provide more confidence that their training will prepare them for the workplace. These are very significant advances in legislation which will provide improvements in quality and significant protection for the students.

If I could turn now to skills and prosperity, we're committed to developing the most highly trained workforce in North America. We need to do that in order to ensure that the needs of businesses and the future of the economy are met and secure.

Last November, I signed two historic agreements on behalf of the government of Ontario. I signed them with the federal government: the labour market development agreement and the labour market partnership agreement. These two agreements strengthen our plan to transform training in the province of Ontario. We were the last province to be able to sign the labour market development agreement.

They enable the ministry to expand programs and labour market services in Ontario and deliver them in an efficient, streamlined manner. There will be more access to apprenticeships, more help for job seekers and more guidance for employers who want to train and build a skilled workforce.

In the 2004 budget, the McGuinty government announced that it will build an integrated training and employment system. Through this system, employers and job seekers can connect with the labour market, training

programs and services provided by the Ontario government by phone, online or in person.

Employers and job seekers will be able to access or be referred to the services they need by the first government office or community-based organization they contact, eliminating frustrating running around and costly delays. It's essential, as I said before, that the system be more user-friendly.

Apprenticeship: For many people, our integrated training and employment system will be the conduit that connects them with apprenticeship.

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We have the largest apprenticeship system in Canada. More than 70,000 apprentices are currently undergoing training in Ontario at various stages. That's the entire population of Sarnia. We have more than 20,000 employers employing these apprentices. Sixty-six classroom training providers, including 24 colleges of applied arts and technology, provide in-school training to more than 26,000 people every year.

But as high as these numbers sound, they aren't as high as we need them to be. Canada is facing a skills shortage. According to the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, 25,000 workers are needed immediately, and we'll need an estimated one million workers by 2020. That's from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce in September 2005.

We know that a skills-focused education pays off. Carpenters, plumbers and machinists can earn \$30 an hour, plus benefits and more. Building a skilled workforce is one of the main elements of the McGuinty government's economic plan. We've committed to increasing the number of new apprenticeship registrations to 26,000 annually by 2007-08. I'm pleased to be able to report that we're firmly on our way to reaching that goal. In the 2005-06 year, 21,489, to be exact, registered in apprenticeship training, a number that exceeded the year's target. The number of new apprenticeship registrations received by the end of August 2006 puts the province on track to meet its target of 23,500 registrations in 2006-07, and to meet our annual registration goal of 26,000 in 2007-08. To continue our progress, the McGuinty government will invest more than \$100 million in apprenticeship-related programming in 2006-07.

Here's a rundown on where we are with our suite of initiatives.

We've got the Ontario youth apprenticeship program, which encourages high school students to stay in school while learning a skilled trade. They can earn credits and learn the trade at the same time. In 2006-07, we are investing \$8.25 million in OYAP, giving more than 20,000 students the opportunity to begin their knowledge of a trade.

The pre-apprenticeship training program provides individuals—such as youth, aboriginal people, women and other under-represented groups—the opportunity to upgrade trade-related skills so they can be eligible for an apprenticeship.

In July, we announced funding to support pre-apprenticeship training programs such as those through the James Bay Employment and Training Board, which prepare workers for work in the De Beers diamond mine.

There is much more. Since 2004, the government has invested \$33.2 million in more than 2,500 co-op diploma apprenticeship spots, which give you not only the start of a trade but also a college diploma at the same time.

Classroom instruction is an essential part of the apprentice's training. This year, Ontario's \$31-million investment will help more than 27,000 apprentices undertake the classroom portion of their training at 24 community colleges and 39 training centres.

We respect the important role that employers play in the apprenticeship system. We know that training apprentices is an investment, but we need more employers training apprentices. To encourage more, we have the apprenticeship training tax credit, a \$95-million program that provides employers of apprentices with \$5,000 a year—up to \$15,000 over three years—if they hire and train an apprentice in a designated trade. It is a substantial encouragement to train. The Ministry of Finance, which administers the program, is collecting data on the number of claims made under the tax credit.

If I could just touch on a couple of other areas, we have the Job Connect program, which brings in and connects job seekers, or those who seek an improvement in employment status, with everything from counselling to academic upgrading to apprenticeship opportunities to employment opportunities. It's an essential program. We've expanded it. It serves almost 200,000 people every year, adults and young people. We've put another \$10 million into it for 2006-07, which brings the total to \$127 million.

As I say, these services are essential. They also connect Ontarians to other services such as bridge training programs for the internationally trained, language assessment and training, apprenticeship training, and even high school and post-secondary training programs.

Literacy has been in the news a lot lately. We are at substantial investments in literacy: \$69 million for this year, including \$10 million in academic upgrading, which will ensure that 4,000 students are able to improve and increase their academic standing so that they can go on to better opportunities.

In short, knowledge and skills: These are the drivers for the economy of the future. These are the drivers that will ensure that Ontarians have the broadest range of opportunities that individuals may wish for. Collectively, these are the drivers that will ensure that the province of Ontario can reach its potential.

Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Tim Hudak): Minister, thank you very much for the presentation. Deputy, thank you very much for your attendance as well.

Following our rotation model, the official opposition is batting first. Mr. Wilson, you have 30 minutes.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: Before you proceed, I didn't introduce my deputy.

The Chair: Please go ahead.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: Philip Steenkamp, Deputy Minister.

The Chair: Welcome, Deputy. Any opening comments by yourself?

Mr. Philip Steenkamp: No.

The Chair: Mr. Wilson.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): It's a dig from last year, I think.

Thank you, Minister and Deputy, for appearing today.

I'm just going to start by reading from a document. I'll read it into the record, and then you can comment on it, Minister, with respect to the \$6.2-billion commitment. It's entitled "Funding Background." It will take me a few minutes to read it into the record here.

"Reaching Higher: By the Numbers"

It's by Scott Courtice of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. He writes:

"Ontario budget day 2005 was an important occasion for post-secondary education, with the government announcing a \$6.2-billion cumulative investment spread over six years, the largest multi-year commitment to post-secondary education in over 40 years. Post-secondary stakeholders—OUSA included—were ecstatic, and had high hopes that the long period of government disinterest and retrenchment had finally come to an end.

"The government followed the budget announcement with a media blitz to sell the benefits of their higher-education investment to a health-care-obsessed public. The communications exercise was large in scale, with over 40 announcements and counting, since the budget.

"During a seemingly endless bombardment of media releases and announcements, I began asking myself two troubling questions: In all the hype, has the government convinced the public that the crisis in higher education is over, when so much remains to be done? And, in doing so, have they inadvertently reduced public support for future investments in higher education?"

"Thus, in an effort to peer behind the hype and restore clarity, I felt it was time to provide a quick by-the-numbers refresher of the details and likely impact of the government's Reaching Higher plan for higher education.

"First, a look at the commitment as explained in the government's budget papers"—and then he provides a chart under this, which I'll provide to Hansard later, which combines 2005 and 2006, and he uses up-to-date budget figures from your own budget documents. He puts as a note to this chart—it does accumulate to a total in three categories: student financial assistance, operating grants to colleges and universities, and training and apprenticeship. By the year 2010, which is three years after your mandate, it does add up to \$6.202 billion.

Here are his notes:

"It is important to note several things:

"(a) The \$6.2-billion investment is the total cumulative investment, not an absolute increase over spending in 2004-05. Thus, in 2009-10 the government will have increased total annual spending by \$1.6 billion over 2004-05; many students and members of the general public I've spoken with have been left with the incorrect

impression that total government spending will have increased by \$6.2 billion.”

So you may want to comment on that.

There’s a little more here. His second note:

“(b) The final two years of the investment, 2008-09 and 2009-10, stretch beyond the current government’s mandate, and these ‘beyond mandate’ commitments represent close to 50% of the total cumulative investment. Thus, the government is able to take credit now for spending commitments they may not get a chance to make later. To be fair, universities and students have been asking for predictable, long-term funding commitments—but the investment is only as predictable as the outcome of the October 2007 election result.

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“To get a better understanding of the impact of ‘Reaching Higher,’ the investment must be placed in the broader context of enrolment growth, tuition fee increases, inflation and the share of operating grants targeted to universities. The Council of Ontario Universities recently released a chart that includes these elements”—and the chart is called “Government Investments: University Share, Enrolment Growth, Tuition, and Inflation.” The notes to this chart say, “This chart demonstrates that when inflation, enrolment growth, tuition and the university sector’s share of the funding are factored into the equation, funding per basic income unit will actually decrease slightly over the course of the investment.”

“How can this be,” he continues. “Two factors come into play:

“(a) The government has committed to increase enrolment by 14,000 students by 2009-10. While enrolment growth is laudable—additional enrolment will allow more Ontarians access to a university education—it will account for the majority of new operating funding, making it difficult for universities to increase student-to-faculty ratios”—which I believe I read recently are as high as 35 to 1 at the U of T and, on average, about 24 to 1—“or other measures associated with improving quality.

“(b) Almost 25% of new funding has been dedicated to student financial assistance. Again, a very positive investment on the surface. Unfortunately, increased enrolment will also increase demand for student assistance. Thus, much of this investment will fill that demand, and will not likely increase the amount of assistance available per student. Matters could be made even worse if Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation funding, set to run out in 2009-10, is not replaced by the federal government.

“A detached look at the numbers reveals that the public should not be left with the impression that all is well with higher education.”

I’ll just get you to comment. Obviously this I think young fellow, Scott Courtice, in crunching your own numbers, is a little skeptical that this matches the impression you’ve left out there that you’re spending \$6.2 billion more above 2004-05.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: Thank you very much. There was a lot in that question, so let me target a few points and comment on them.

First of all, the \$6.2 billion is the largest investment—a 35% increase in funding over five years. By any measure, it’s a substantial amount of money. It’s a necessary investment. It follows approximately 12 years when there wasn’t an increase in funding in the system. The system has a lot of needs, and I think everybody has recognized that even with the \$6.2 billion in investment, there are others that still need to come to the table, such as the federal government, to make sure that we have the strongest possible post-secondary education and skills training system.

I make no apology for the fact that it’s a five-year program. University programs don’t start and stop on a dime. It takes time to hire faculty. It takes time to develop programs. It takes time to improve quality to where you want it to be. In fact, one of the things universities and colleges have been saying for years is that they want more predictability of funding, in a positive direction, so that they can appropriately develop and enhance their programming. That’s what we provided. Through our multi-year agreement process, we’re actually not only asking for commitments from the institutions but we are ensuring that governments themselves maintain the commitments.

Sure, it goes beyond the mandate, and I’d be interested to know whether the other parties are going to cancel the proposed investments. I’m very proud of the fact that this Reaching Higher plan contains a doubling of the student aid budget. From about 1993 on, the student aid budget was not increased, until we did, first, a little bit in 2004, and then much more fully in 2005. In fact, it decreased in a number of different areas, such as the elimination in 1993 of the upfront tuition grants. So when student aid did not increase but tuition did increase substantially, it meant that student aid was not available as it needed to be for the students who needed the money. I’m very proud of the increase in that investment.

The fact of the matter is that there are not only more students in the system today, but every student is a funded student, and that was not the history in the past. In fact, the Rae review noted that there were many “unfunded” students in the system. Institutions had taken on students, but those students had not been matched with government funding. So we are reversing that process. We’re making sure that every student is a funded student and, of course, that will improve and increase the quality of education generally.

Just in terms of percentage and other increases, I understand that people like to bring several factors to the fore, and I’ve quite clearly said we need the federal government to fully engage in the post-secondary area and start investing in post-secondary education and training, start investing in the future of this province and the country.

But just by way of contrast, for approximately the eight or nine years before we became the government, college and university budgets saw a cumulative increase of approximately 8.2% or 8.3%. That was cumulative. Over five years we’re increasing the operating budget

35%. That's a substantial increase, a necessary increase. It will make significant advances in quality and access for the people of Ontario, and I'm proud to have been part of a government that brought that approach in.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you. Don't you think it's a bit dishonest, though, to go out there with TV ads and that and say it's \$6.2 billion when 50% of that you may not even be around to deliver on? What this young lad points out is that you're actually spending less than \$250 million per year.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I agree with the young lad.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: In fact, from the very beginning—

Mr. Wilson: He's probably your researcher, for all I know.

Interjections.

The Chair: Allow the minister to answer the question.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: In fact, from the very beginning we've said that the Reaching Higher plan is a multi-year investment plan—\$6.2 billion over five years. We've said that from the beginning. That was in the very budget, in the very speech. If you're complaining that it's not enough, I'm glad we're having that conversation, because it's the biggest investment in 40 years and it contrasts well with what happened in the years before, but it is absolutely accurate. We put out in the budget exactly how the money was flowing. If you go back to the 2005 budget, there's a chart right in the budget, as I recall, that showed you every year's investment by the lines.

I'm quite proud of that, and I'm quite proud of the fact that our government was prepared to say not simply, "Oh, for this year we're going to give you more money and then we'll play hide-and-seek next year." I'm quite proud of the fact that our government stepped out when we did not have a lot of loose cash sitting around and said, "We're going to invest in post-secondary education for five years to make sure that we have the strong system we absolutely need."

Mr. Marchese: Come recession or otherwise.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): The social contract.

The Chair: We're not in the House here, guys. Settle down.

Mr. Wilson: You mentioned, Minister, the federal government, and certainly in discussions about the fiscal imbalance Premier McGuinty says that Ontario universities and colleges still receive the lowest per capita funding in Canada. But if the federal government doesn't give you more money, will universities and colleges continue to get the lowest funding in the country?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: I hope that the question is not based on knowledge that you have about the federal government's intentions. I think the people of Ontario would be surprised and shocked if they thought that the—

Mr. Wilson: I have no knowledge about the federal government's intentions. I'm not even a member of the federal party.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: If the government of Canada was sitting on a \$13.1-billion surplus and was not going to

devote some significant part of that to the people of Ontario to invest in post-secondary education and skills training—in fact, there is reason for some hope because the current Prime Minister, Prime Minister Harper, during the last federal election campaign had agreed to fulfill the terms of the McGuinty-Martin agreement for additional investment in post-secondary education and skills training, although we haven't received the money yet.

I think it's essential to the future prosperity of this province that we need the federal government, whatever the political stripe, at the table to invest more in post-secondary education and skills training. It was the unanimous position of the Council of the Federation—all of the provincial and territorial governments—in August 2005 that they needed to do that. The Premier attended a post-secondary summit in Quebec City in I think it was October 2005 with Premier Charest. Premier McGuinty hosted a summit in Ottawa in January and February of 2006, again with Premier Charest, to draw attention to and focus on the fact that we need the federal government to participate fully in post-secondary education and skills training. The Ontario government stepped up. We've put our money on the table. We've outlined it, as everybody says, for five years. Everybody knows the investment we're making there that we're not making in other areas. But what we do need now is the federal government to come forward and just—

I just want to add one other thing. You mentioned in your previous question the university per student funding. Actually, in 2003-04 it was \$7,020 per student, and it rises to \$8,095 per student in 2007-08. So it actually goes up. I was just handed this, so I thought I'd throw it in.

1640

Mr. Wilson: On that, I was on the board of governors of the University of Toronto at one time and I've always been curious in terms of if you happen to know—and if you don't know this, just get back to me. I would be interested to know over the last 20 years, if we could go back that far, year by year, what the student ratio—I don't know how you put it, but you used to say that for every \$1 a student put in, the government put in \$7. I think that was for arts and science, when I was going to school 25 years ago. I had hair then.

Can you get those figures? Because you allude to it in new funding, \$3 versus \$1 in the past, and 90 cents in the NDP days. Just overall, I wonder what students are putting in. The ratio's different, obviously, when you get into the professions, in medical school and that. But it would be interesting to know. When we were in government, we tried to keep the ratio relatively steady; now, mind you, that means tuitions go up. We did deregulate some, but in regular arts and science and that, we thought we were keeping the ratio of what I and my family have to contribute for me to go to school versus what the taxpayer puts in.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: So you're asking about the ratio of student participation in the funding versus the government participation in the funding?

Mr. Wilson: Yes. Whatever way you want to express that.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: I indicated that over the previous governments before ours, for eight and a half years before we got in, for every extra dollar they asked of students in tuition, the government actually took out 15 cents, so that would decrease the ratio—

Mr. Wilson: It's not the extra dollar, it's—yeah, it would decrease the ratio, but generally what are they, though, in terms of complete dollars, not the increase or decrease?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: We'll take a look at that, sure.

Mr. Wilson: I'm just curious, because I've talked to student groups and I'm under the impression that they're putting in just as much as they did, that the ratio hasn't changed much over the years. But I don't know. So maybe we'll find out by—

Hon. Mr. Bentley: As I say, the Conservative government was taking 15 cents out for every extra dollar, so that would decrease the ratio. The NDP were putting in 90 cents for every extra dollar, so that would harm the ratio, but not very much. We're putting in—the people of Ontario are putting in an extra \$3 for every extra dollar that the students—

Mr. Wilson: But tuition fees are also going up.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: I agree. That's part of the process. During that eight and a half years previous to us coming in, tuition fees went up anywhere from 150% for undergrad programs to multiples of six, seven and eight times for professional programs, because of the various deregulation or expanded regulation approaches that the government of the day had to tuition. And what is—

Mr. Wilson: Have you rolled back any of those that you opposed through those years?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: I'll come to that in a sec, but what is particularly noteworthy about that is that at the time that the tuition fees were skyrocketing—or going up a lot; however you want to express it—student aid didn't increase. The government student aid program didn't increase.

Mr. Wilson: I can't believe that. I was in cabinet for the entire eight years, and it seemed to me we were doling out more and more increases in student aid.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: The student was entitled to \$9,300 in I think 1993-94; that didn't change until we changed it to \$11,900 in 2005-06. Your student aid budget went up for a couple of years and then went down.

Mr. Wilson: So you're doing an average over the eight years?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: What I'm referring to is the amount of student aid that an individual student was entitled to. That never moved.

Mr. Wilson: But is that total including the student aid that we required universities, for the first time, to tie to their increased tuitions?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: To do a set-aside. You had the set-aside program.

Mr. Wilson: Which you should include in your calculation, because it was all tax dollars.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: No, I'm not sure those are tax dollars, a set-aside program that the institution manages. What we're talking about here is a governmental aid program that appears in the estimates.

Mr. Wilson: But it was all considered one package for us. We asked the universities—which, by the way, wanted to deregulate some of these professional colleges. We asked them and they said, "Fine. If you're going to do that, you have to tie 35% of your increases to more student aid," and the whole package of student aid, I believe, went up.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: The irony of that, of course, is that it places even more pressure on the tuitions and the students who were essentially funding post-secondary education during those eight and a half years, that they would pay more and more, because the government wasn't participating. I understand that we can come up with some of the ratio information.

Mr. Wilson: Okay. I have one question in terms of continuing on these funding lines, but this past summer you had a hand-picked arbitrator who announced an award for college faculty that was more generous than the amounts provided in provincial funding. Are you addressing that problem?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: I'm not sure what you mean by "hand-picked." The two sides decided on an arbitrator following the conclusion of a strike to resolve their issues by way of arbitration. They returned to work. The arbitrator handed down a decision. That is the basis for the award.

Mr. Wilson: What's your shortfall between the effect of his decision and your ability to fund it at this point?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: In the first year of the Reaching Higher plan, we increased funding for colleges. I think it was between 12% and 14%. In the second year, I think the funding goes up an average of about 7.5%, 8%. We front-loaded the increases because we realized that colleges in particular had not had any real increase in funding for many years.

Mr. Wilson: But you know, that's a bit like the school board side, where you gave teachers a raise but you didn't necessarily make sure there was enough money in the system to help the school boards cover that. You did the same thing, or through the arbitrator the same thing occurred, in colleges. What is your shortfall there, and do you consider it a problem? I'm being fairly easy on you, I think.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: I think the two parties negotiated and the arbitrator handed down an award. That is an award that's being implemented. My point is that the taxpayers of Ontario are investing a substantial additional amount in the college funding so that by the end of the fourth year—by the end of the three-year multi-year agreements plus the interim year—the average college will have received a 26.4% increase in base operating funding. That's a very good increase, a very substantial increase. Does it make up completely for everything that everyone would like to do? We do need the federal government at the table and we look forward to them

coming to the table. But we believe the taxpayers of Ontario are making a substantial and significant funding increase for colleges to enable them to offer high-quality programs and additional access to those programs.

Mr. Wilson: In terms of giving colleges and universities more money—I'm going to have the figure wrong, but Dr. David Naylor was telling John Tory on a tour that John took two or three months ago that his hydro rates are eating up 50% of his increase in operating grants. I'm sure that wasn't the intention of giving them more money in operating grants. I'm sure it was the intention, as it is of every government, to improve quality, to improve access and to improve the overall experience for students, but unfortunately 50% of what you gave him has gone out the door to the gas man and the electricity man. So it's great to say you gave this much money, but half of it's gone to something they have no control over, and certainly your government does have control over some of that. What are your comments on that?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: It would have been interesting to have been on those tours during the previous 10 years to our arrival because, as I say, during about nine of those years, the total cumulative increase for college and university funding was eight point something. We know that costs would have increased substantially more than a cumulative total of eight point something over all those years.

1650

The taxpayers of Ontario are making a very substantial increase in college- and university-based funding. We're pleased to do it. It's important. We want it to go as far as possible, because money is challenged. And we'll continue to look for ways to encourage the federal government to step up to the table so that we can all do even more.

Mr. Wilson: The history lesson is always interesting. You're all reading from the same hymn book, we've noticed in the Legislature recently. It must have been an interesting seminar when they gave you all those lines.

But the people of Ontario really don't buy that. You should tell them. You claim to be giving them \$6.2 billion, which we know you're not, because 50% of that is committed after you might not be in office, so it's no commitment at all. If 50% of that 50% is going out the window for higher utility and energy costs, and increased enrolment is digging up a lot of other money that you gave them, I don't really see that they're that far ahead, when you actually crunch all the numbers and the bills are paid. So you can claim what you want, I guess.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: I think it is important to compare and contrast. I think the points you make about increasing utility and other costs are important costs. Again, one wonders what happened during the previous 10 years, when your government, for example, cut college funding during its first two years and they never, ever got back to the level of funding until our first year.

I think it's important to recognize a substantial investment the people of Ontario are making. I think it's important to recognize what we've always said: \$6.2

billion is a substantial sum of money, and it is over five years. I make no apology for the fact that it's over five years. You made reference, on a couple of occasions, to some of the funding coming in after the next election. Well, I hope nobody here is saying that your position going into the next election is that you would cut the funding.

Mr. Wilson: You can announce anything you want. Why don't you announce the moon and see if we can make it there with the meagre grants you're giving? It's just dishonest. That's what it is: It's dishonest.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: I think the word is inappropriate.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): On a point of order, Mr. Chair: I don't know whether the rules of the House apply also in committee. If so, might I suggest that the honourable find some other terminology. I leave it to the Chair to determine how one proceeds.

The Chair: We'll all calm down a bit here, as we get near 5 o'clock on a Thursday afternoon. I ask members to please watch their language in their conduct of business here at the standing committee on estimates.

Mr. Wilson: I think we're on Wednesday afternoon.

The Chair: Oh, it is Wednesday. It feels like Thursday.

Mr. Wilson: Just a simple question: If students don't qualify for OSAP, they will not qualify for assistance under the student access guarantee, so how will the province ensure assistance for these students? Correct me if I'm wrong.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: The student access guarantee will combine the Ontario student assistance program with institutional assistance. It says to all students, "We don't want you to be denied the money you need for your tuition, books and mandatory fees." What it says to the institution is, "You can't be increasing fees unless you're complying with and fully participating in the student access guarantee."

We're going to make OSAP an entry point for the guarantee. It's a way we can encourage all to go into OSAP. Many institutions now—you'd be aware of this, probably—if you go to the financial aid office not having access to OSAP, won't consider you, because they'll only consider you if you qualify for at least a dollar of OSAP funding. So we're encouraging everybody to go in.

Mr. Wilson: I was in OSAP. My parents had six kids in university at the same time. They couldn't afford any more. Every government has tried to change the rules to make it fairer, but it seems to me you're piggybacking. We brought in a student access guarantee.

I'd like to know, first of all—you mentioned if they were complying—were there colleges and universities not complying, that were raising their tuitions but not setting aside money for financial aid?

Secondly, you've sort of muddied the waters. You're piggybacking on that program, and saying that it's a Catch-22: If you don't qualify for one program, you don't get this; if you don't qualify for that program, you don't get that. In my case, for example, and that of many

of my constituents I've heard over the years, the parents, for one reason or another, are not contributing one penny. Therefore, the students are very much left on their own, and OSAP only gives so much, as you know, even with your increases. The idea of the student access guarantee was to make sure it was truly a top-up and not just a piggyback program of some sort.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: With respect, the way the program worked under the previous government, it was a set-aside program; it was not an access guarantee program. The institution had to set aside a certain amount of money. But there wasn't a required relationship between raising tuition fees and ensuring that students who came before it who didn't have access to the tuition books and mandatory fees would have access to the funds. That was compounded by the fact that the entitlement to student assistance did not increase for 10 years before we became the government. So what we're doing now is making sure, first of all, the two programs work together—they did not—second, that there is an entry point—and there is—third, that there is a relationship between an institution's appetite for increasing its tuition fees and the obligations that would be created, not only on the government side through the OSAP program, but on the non-government side through the institution program, to make sure that those students who will be adversely affected by the increase in fees because they don't have access to the funds actually get access to enough funds to get in.

Mr. Wilson: So how many students that don't qualify, for one reason or another, for OSAP now no longer have access to the student access guarantee? You could apply separately before. One wasn't tied to the other.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: You're talking about applying for institutional aid, because there wasn't a student access guarantee.

Mr. Wilson: Then explain to me the student access guarantee.

The Chair: That explanation will be the last question in this round.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: What the student access guarantee says is that if you, as an institution, want to increase your tuition, you have to participate in it. It ensures, with government and the institutions working together, that a student who qualifies academically will not be denied access to the institution because they can't come up with the funds for their tuition, their fees—

Hon. Mr. Wilson: But that was already in place.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: No, it wasn't.

Mr. Wilson: You renamed it, but our policy was that every qualified student—

The Chair: Order. Mr. Wilson, I did indicate that your time has expired. Minister, do finish responding to the earlier question.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: Just a sentence, if I could: What you had was an institutional aid program that was fed by set-aside. You did not have an access guarantee to ensure that students who couldn't find the money had a means of getting in and were not denied access because of tuition increases.

The Chair: Thank you. We'll move now to the third party. Mr. Marchese, you have 30 minutes of time.

Mr. Marchese: Given that we have seven and a half hours together with the committee, the minister, the deputy and other staff, including political staff—I wish I had political staff that was able to feed me information on a regular basis. You're so lucky, Mr. Bentley. What I want to do is simply make some remarks so that they will not be filtered by the minister, and when I'm done, I'll have some questions for him.

The Chair: Fair enough. It's your half-hour, sir.

Mr. Marchese: That's the idea.

Just to do a little review for the Liberal members on the other side—because the minister knows this—for their benefit: The student contribution in 1994-95 was about 22% for their own education. Now, in 2006, we are at 44%. Recall that in 1990 to 1994-95, there were no programs that were deregulated, as they were under the previous government and as they continue to be under the Liberal administration, which means that programs in dentistry, law and medicine have skyrocketed in terms of the tuition that students have to pay. We're talking about some students paying anywhere from \$12,000 to \$17,000 a year in some of these programs, excluding books, excluding the cost for any student who has to leave home and go to another city. Imagine that. So you've got deregulated programs where the students are, in my view, borrowing a whole lot of money from the banks because they're not eligible for loans. And those loans that you borrow from the banks come with a cost: You've got to start paying interest right away. I'm telling you, it's a life debt sentence for many students.

1700

Just to tell you, Lou Rinaldi, when I was a student, I graduated with a \$1,700 debt. I thought it was going to take me forever to pay it off, and it did.

Mr. Rinaldi: In 1940?

Mr. Marchese: We're talking 1996—not 1996; sooner than that.

Mr. Rinaldi: Just kidding.

Mr. Marchese: We're talking 1976-77—1,700 bucks. We're in a good economy now. Wages are going up. It took me forever to pay it off.

Now you've got students paying anywhere from \$25,000 a year to \$70,000 or \$80,000 a year, depending on the program they're in. The Liberal administration says, "That's okay." The Conservative administration used to say that was okay, too. I'll get to what the Liberals are doing to deal with that in a moment.

The Harris government in 1995 said student contributions should not exceed 25%. We are now at 44%. What does that contribution amount to by way of dollars? It's \$1.5 billion. I believe the ministry budget is \$3.5 billion. The minister, given that he's got a great deal of knowledge in his head, would be able to tell me the accurate amount if I'm a bit off. We're talking students paying \$1.5 billion, close to half of their own education.

The Ivy League proponents advocate for higher tuition fees. They say, "Let the rates rip. It's okay." If you've

got a rich mama and papa, it's not a problem. Most of us Canadians don't have rich mamas and papas. We come from modest backgrounds, which means we struggle, which means most of our students don't have access to loans, which means most of our students don't have access to grants, which means we're on our own. So if you happen to be in the Ivy League of Minister Bentley's cabal, grouping, class, category, you're okay, because they're asking you to contribute more to pay for tuition fees. I believe that this is a problemo.

To be fair, the Liberals froze tuition for two years—God bless them—and students thought, “My God, this will continue.” To be sure, they were so wrong. I was right in predicting that they were going to get whacked once the freeze was over, and they did. They're getting whacked with 20% tuition increases. That's historic, not the \$6.2 billion that's coming, but the 20% whacking of students with these historic tuition increases. How come the minister doesn't use “historic” to talk about the increases?

How could Liberal MPPs feel so okay about these 20% tuition increases? Surely they've got children. Surely they would know—as I do, having had one who left university with a \$30,000 debt, and the other two still in university—that it's expensive. It's painful to those students and painful to those parents who cannot afford to help them. The government, the Liberal administration, says, “That's okay. The current tax system redistributes income fairly. The income tax system is a fair way to collect money and distribute it to the general population. The argument that the current system subsidizes the rich, as some advocate, is false.”

Hugh Mackenzie, the economist, whom people probably don't appreciate because he doesn't say what government proponents want him to say—they disagree with Hugh Mackenzie—states, “The current system does not subsidize the rich, but the proponents of higher tuition fees”—which includes this Liberal administration that supports this view—“are aiding and abetting the need and the view that we've got to shift away”—although Mr. Bentley doesn't say it—“from government support to greater individual contribution to pay for their own education.”

The argument is made as well, and it's made by Mr. Bentley and others—not just him but others in the Liberal administration and beyond—that this is not just a public good but a private good. In fact, as Mr. Rae—who is now running for the Liberal Party—and others are saying, you individually benefit from a university and college education. Therefore, Mr. Rae and other Liberals argue, you should pay your fair share. Well, what is your fair share? When students contribute 44% of their money for their own education when it used to be 22% 10 or 11 years ago, what is fair? How high will tuition fees go? The Liberal administration just raised tuition fees by 20% for the next four years. That means students will be paying more and more of their education. Under a Conservative government we saw tuition fees go up and government support go down. Will this happen under a Liberal

administration? Yes; not as badly as the Tories, but it will continue under the Liberals. More and more students will have to pay more and more of their education.

We believe it's the wrong policy approach. Liberals say that having a good education—post-secondary, college, university—is important to economic activity and economic competitiveness. We agree. If that is true, why are governments not contributing much more and going to the lower levels of student contribution rather than moving in the opposite direction? If the Liberals acknowledge that it's a common good, what is that balance? Is the balance 70-30, as the OUSA organization recommends, which I am closer to by way of a political ideology, or is it 50-50, or will it be 60% tuition coming from students and 40% from government? What do you think, Liberals, is that right balance? The right balance is—moving more and more, it seems, under a Liberal administration—the students will pay more. We're shifting the direction from government obligation to Darwinian policies where, if you've got a rich mama and papa, that's okay, and if you don't, too bad, so sad kind of politics.

The government, being sensitive to the criticism of higher tuition fees, introduced a grant system. So in 2005-06, only those earning under \$22,000 were eligible for the grant. The government makes it appear, “We've introduced a grant system.”

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: You did, and I appreciate that. Students appreciate it.

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: Right. Deb Matthews applauds that, and she should; except, Deb, how many are eligible for that grant if you're only eligible if the family income is \$22,000? You see, if you've got two people, Deb—

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: I know; the minister knows. I'm talking to you because the minister knows everything.

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: I know.

So, Deb, if you've got two people working at Loblaws, Wal-Mart, earning minimum wage—what might that be, \$14,000?—and together they earn—

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: Mr. Delaney will contribute soon—and together they earn \$28,000, those two individuals with an income of \$28,000 during that year wouldn't be eligible for any grant. We're talking really low income, aren't we?

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): It's a start.

Mr. Marchese: Wow. Deb Matthews, it's a radical start. My, that's so historic, you should just clap yourself silly.

The government, having been stung by the criticism that only the poorest of society were eligible and the majority of people were not eligible, changed the system in 2006-07 so that now we have more people eligible. So people whose income is now \$76,000 or \$75,000 are

eligible for a grant. I would be curious to know—and I'll have questions for Monsieur Bentley as soon as we have a chance—how much are they getting from that grant if a family is earning \$76,000? Because I wager, Deb, they're not getting very much. And if you have any information, you should pass it on.

1710

It makes it appear that Mr. Bentley is really helping families with an income of \$75,000, but not much. Our estimate is that 10% of families will be eligible in one form or another for some grant and 90%, Deb—most of your constituents—are not eligible for a grant. We're talking relative middle class, low income to the middle class, higher income not being eligible: 90%. But you're proud of that; Minister Bentley's proud of that.

The gap between high income and low income is shamefully high and has not improved in 20 years.

The high fees do have an impact. Contrary to the views of Liberals and others, the high fees do have an impact, and I want to give you some examples to show you why that is. The Department of Epidemiology, University of Western Ontario, studied the effect of deregulated tuition fees on accessibility, something that you like to talk about very much. "By the fourth year of the study, when tuition fees had risen to over \$10,000, only" 7% "of students hailed from homes of family income less than \$40,000 ... a 50% decline in the participation of low-income students."

So you see, just by that mere study, the deputy would know and the minister would know that there is an effect on tuition fees in terms of who actually participates in some of these courses. You can deny it. The minister will never dare to comment on this. He'll just say something else, because he's got to, because he can't answer the question directly; he can't.

Mr. Rinaldi: Try it.

Mr. Marchese: We will. We have seven and a half hours.

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: Nah, Deb, take your time. We have seven and a half hours.

The minister did comment in the debate he and I had in Kingston. I suspect he won't answer it here today, but he's getting a lot of notes and I hope he'll be able to do that today.

Here's another survey.

Mr. Rinaldi: Ask a question.

Mr. Marchese: We have time. Lou, I need you to hear. I know.

The survey of physicians, medical students across Canada, of 1997, year 2004, reveals a similar pattern in participation by students from lower-income families, meaning that students who come from lower income are affected, that it does have an impact in terms of their career choices, in terms of where they can and will not enter based on the high tuition fees.

Lou, here's another stat for you: In 2005, Stats Canada released a report that demonstrated an alarming 50% decline in the likelihood of middle-income students en-

rolling in high-fee programs such as law, dentistry and medicine. See, I didn't make that up. Stats Canada gave you that fact. You have to take these stats seriously. You don't have to take me seriously, because you don't have to.

Mr. Rinaldi: Well, we do.

Mr. Marchese: But you don't have to.

Mr. Rinaldi: Not always.

Mr. Marchese: But you can't dismiss Stats Canada, which says that high fees do impact on the career choices students make.

The Reaching Higher plan of the Liberal administration at best will allow universities to reach the middle range, which is in general terms described as mediocrity: \$1.2 billion more by 2009-10 will bring funding to the national average. Think of that, Deb. We are one of the wealthiest provinces in Canada, although Alberta is squeezing us a little bit, but we have been the wealthiest province in Canada. Assuming we're going to get that contribution made by your government through Mr. Bentley, we'll be at the national average.

That's pretty sad. It's pretty depressing to think that we are wealthy, we've got the bucks, and that by 2009-10 we're going to be at the national average. It's—

Ms. Matthews: From dead last?

Mr. Marchese: Dead last, yes. Now here you go, Deb. So you're proud of being in the medium range. Okay, that's fine. I understand that. But you've got to understand, Deb: The bulk of your money, of the \$6.2 billion that Minister Bentley is proud of, \$4.2 billion comes by 2009-10. That is the bulk of the money. Mr. Bentley says, "I'm proud of that." Of course he should be, but he's slightly disingenuous, you see, because unlike his argument, I support the young lad who Jim Wilson quoted. That is to say, it would be more honest if the government were to say, "Here is our contribution for 2006-07, after which, or during the time we're into an election, we're going to promise four billion more dollars." Why don't you just say what you've contributed now and contributed for the last year of your administration? People know, we'll know—rather than saying, "We are investing historic amounts of money of \$6.2 billion," and he stops there. Only when pressed does he say and others say, "2009-10."

Here's the problemo, Deb: You don't know whether you're going to be elected. Mr. Bentley says, "Ah." But if you're going to not promise that if you get elected, it's a fair question, I suppose. But, Deb, what are you and the minister going to do if there is an economic recession?

Here's what I think you will do. Mr. Bentley, if he's still the minister, if you're re-elected, is going to say, "Ah, we did want to make that investment. Yes, we did promise it, but the recession, a slowing economy, fewer dollars—" You might even promise that the health tax—most hated by many in Ontario, particularly the Tories, because they don't like any taxes. Most likely you may even decide you're going to cut that down a little bit, which means you'll have less income coming in. Just to be able to compete with the Tories, I predict you might

do that. If you do that and that is your only source of revenue—your only source, \$2.4 billion—in a slowing economy, and you decide electorally to announce that you're going to take less, or cut that \$2.4-billion health tax—

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: I'm just assuming you might. I'm just assuming.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): Rosie, you of little faith.

Mr. Marchese: I know. But I want to raise the issues, you see, because you never know what you might announce next year during an election. Who knows?

I say to you that if there's a slowdown in the economy and you get re-elected, you're going to say, "We didn't anticipate that. Sorry. We're just going to have to cut back." But all along, you have the luxury of saying, "We're investing six billion bucks"—

Mr. Delaney: That wouldn't be like the social contract, would it?

Mr. Marchese: Oh, but Mr. Delaney, you'll have such an opportunity to speak soon, and you can speak to your heart's content.

So the Reaching Higher plan is, to use a nicer term, not as honest as it should be. It is certainly disingenuous. We put these out for the record so those watching will know, those who will seek Hansard will know, and it's important for them to know.

Then you've introduced what's called a \$210-million quality improvement fund, which I argued equals \$3.6 million per institution. Is that a lot? I don't think so. Is it more than zero? Yes, it is. Is it better than zero? Of course it is. As Mr. Bentley says, "Is it enough? No. Can we do better? Yes." That's what he says in the debates. And he sounds so cheerful and hopeful: "Yes, of course we can do better."

The point is, it's not a lot. It's hardly enough to deal with the student-faculty ratio, which is the worst faculty ratio in the country still. Do you understand, Deb? The worst faculty, teacher, ratio in the country.

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: No, you don't.

What does it mean? Deb, do you know that you have the worst faculty ratio in the country? And if you knew, how could you live with that and say, "Ah, it's okay. It's the price you've got to pay"? It's not the price we've got to pay. It affects the quality of teaching. If you've got more students, as a professor, it means the direct connection to the student is less and it means the quality between those two groups is less.

We're the wealthiest province in the country. We're losing some of that status, to be fair, but how do we allow that? We have some of the largest class sizes in the country. How do we allow that? One of the richest provinces in Canada, and we value education. Liberals talk about how much we value it, yet we have some of the largest classes in the country. We have the worst faculty-student ratio in the country, but we value post-secondary education, we say. You see how I argue it's

disingenuous to say these things? Professors have fewer lab assistants, fewer computer assistants, fewer administrative assistants, fewer librarian-technicians, less-equipped libraries in our college and university system. We have fewer academic librarians, we have fewer full-time faculty. Statistically, OCUFA says, for every 2% increase in enrolment there has been a corresponding 1% decline in the number of full-time faculty—more students, fewer full-time faculty. The wealthiest province in the country; we value education, we say. We need to improve service standards for students. Is \$3.6 million per institution a lot? Not much. Is it better than zero? Of course.

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In colleges, real per student funding is down by 41%, even with a Liberal administration. Enrolment has gone up 53%. We have fewer full-time faculty in colleges, and in universities, as I said. Part-time college professors cannot unionize in Ontario. Part-time college professors cannot unionize in Ontario. Only in Ontario, you say? Yes.

Mr. Delaney: Run that one by me again.

Mr. Marchese: You mean you want me to repeat it three times?

Mr. Delaney: Yes.

Mr. Marchese: Are you playing with your computer?

Mr. Delaney: No.

Mr. Marchese: Yes, you are. Part-time college instructors cannot unionize by law.

Mr. Delaney: In other words, a part-time instructor at Ryerson?

Mr. Marchese: Yes, right on.

Mr. Delaney: Do you want me to bring in my CUPE card, from when I taught there?

Mr. Marchese: Well, then you can support my bill.

The Vice-Chair: Okay, guys. Just keep going with your comments, Mr. Marchese. We don't need any questions and answers now.

Mr. Marchese: You can support a bill I brought that's in the books. You should be the one who says, "I'm right here with you, joining you," because you're wrong. Why don't you do that?

The Vice-Chair: Okay, we're not going to debate.

Mr. Marchese: We can.

The Vice-Chair: No. You're questioning the minister. By the way, you have five minutes left.

Mr. Marchese: Thank you. That's the idea.

In Quebec—which, by the way, suggests that it is possible for a provincial government to accomplish its goals and objectives if it wants—tuition fees do not increase beyond 2,000 bucks in any program. How do they do that? Why do they do that? How do they manage to do that? What is different about Quebec that is achievable in a province in Canada, but Ontario, the wealthiest province in Canada, cannot do that? Why? We can raise the bar a little bit, and we need to, more than what this government is doing.

Minister Bentley talks about needing to get the federal government to contribute a little more. It's true. I was in a government from 1990 to 1995 where we lost a great

deal of financial support for our post-secondary institutions, for our health and welfare. It started under Mulroney. In 1993, when Mr. Martin got elected, he slashed support even more than Mulroney did, in a good economy. How do you do that in a good economy? He reduced support to post-secondary institutions. So both Conservatives and Liberals have done that, and while it is true that the Liberals restored a lot of that support in the latter part of their dying administration, it never quite matched the levels of the dollars we lost.

But is it right for the provincial government to go begging the federal government to give them more? Don't they have the fiscal policy tools to deal with that on their own, instead of saying, "We can't do it. We can't reach out into the pockets of taxpayers. No, they won't like it. But we can reach out into the pockets of students, can't we?" We should deal with our own problems. We do have the financial policy tools at our disposal. We can't go begging the federal government to continually solve problems that you can solve.

The Vice-Chair: You are now complete, Mr. Marchese?

Mr. Marchese: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much. We now have up to 30 minutes, Minister, for you to respond to any of the comments made by the other parties.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: Ordinarily, I wouldn't take the 30 minutes, but having just listened to a tour through a library, and having spent a long time listening to the fiction section, I think it is important that we actually get the facts on the table.

I think the people of Ontario should be proud of their \$6.2-billion investment in post-secondary education and skills training. I am fascinated by what I've heard from other parties saying how much more should be done. The passion, the fire in those comments is wonderful to hear. You wonder where it was when they had the chance. So let's just review where we were, where we are and where we need to get to.

The \$6.2-billion Reaching Higher plan over five years is what it has always been, but I think now we know that we need to be careful. The \$6.2 billion outlines a spending plan for five years, and both of the previous speakers have said, "Oh, there's an election coming up." I guess maybe they are subliminally sending us a signal that they wouldn't follow those investments. Is that what they're doing? Gee, I hope not, because post-secondary students in this province during both the NDP years and the Conservative years that followed did not get the investment in post-secondary education and skills training that they should have. That's why we set out a five-year plan, so we could see a progressive investment in the necessary knowledge and skills that not only individual students but this province needs for the future. I am concerned, having heard both previous speakers make mention of the fact that the plan goes beyond October 4, 2007, and you may wonder whether they would propose to cancel those investments. It's interesting, because at the same time they say that, they say, "Do more, do

more, do more." So I'm not quite sure what the complaint is.

The funding: For many years, this province has been at the bottom of most tables, and the question is, how do you move forward? Everybody talks about the need for post-secondary education and skills training investment; everybody talks about how important it is; everybody says, "Oh, yes, that's one of the things we'd like to do." But guess what? They haven't done it. That's why the Reaching Higher plan was the most significant investment, in dollar terms and percentage terms, in 40 years. It is a 35% increase in the operating budgets of colleges and universities. By contrast, the previous nine or so years saw a cumulative total increase to those budgets of between 8% and 9%. That's a cumulative total, for all years. The Conservative government spent the first two years cutting and, as I mentioned before, in the case of colleges, they never got back to the level of funding that they were at when that government started. And the NDP started cutting back in the last couple of years. The first two years of our plan? It's an over-20% increase in the operating budgets for colleges and universities. That is a substantial increase in funding, and one we're determined inures to the benefit of students.

What we said was that we would take a multi-stage approach. We said we would freeze tuition for at least two years, and we delivered. That is a significant event, because it's the first time tuition's been frozen in the province of Ontario—period—in the recorded history of at least four decades. It's particularly noteworthy to talk about that two-year tuition freeze in light of the previous speaker's passion for the issue—such passion about tuition. So you would instantly assume that when the member had the opportunity to do something about it, when the member was there as part of the government, as he said, between 1990 and 1995, that tuition went down. No. It was frozen? No. What happened to tuition? It went up almost 50% over five years.

Mr. Delaney: Tell us it's not so.

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Hon. Mr. Bentley: Say it's not so; that is absolutely right. How is it possible that such passion could be brought today to an issue that has been around for decades and yet no freeze took place between 1990 and 1995? How is that possible? We know what happened between 1995 and 2003. We know there was no intention to freeze and there was no freeze. So we froze for two years.

We asked Mr. Rae to conduct a review with the other commissioners, and he said what we all knew: The system required additional investment. The system required additional investment by government, the system required student aid improvements and the system required investment by students. It's a multi-part approach.

The first part was the funding by the taxpayers of Ontario through the government of Ontario. Let's be clear: It is the taxpayers of Ontario who fund the programs. For some, the solution to every problem is to

increase taxes and reach into those taxpayers' pockets. But instead, we have to make sure that substantial funding increases achieve results.

We said that there would be improvements to the student assistance program. I heard some of those student assistance improvements described by my colleague from Trinity–Spadina. I don't know where he's reading from.

Mr. Marchese: Tell us the facts.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: I think it's important that we do all understand what the facts are. There is a 50% increase in the budget for student assistance over the life of the Reaching Higher plan. But it means more than that. It means that the total amount of student assistance an individual student is entitled to went from about \$9,350, where it had remained for a decade, to \$11,900, a 30% increase. That's important. That's access.

It meant more that, though, because everybody knows—or they should, when they read the research—that one of the most significant barriers to students from low- and middle-income families is the challenge of coming up with that front-end payment. So the upfront tuition grants, which have been in existence in Ontario for many years, were always an important access tool. They were eliminated in 1993 by the government of which the honourable member from Trinity–Spadina was a member. The Reaching Higher plan restored those.

Let us be clear about the eligibility for those upfront tuition grants, because I heard the member describe variously the purported program and who's eligible. In fact, this September, 60,000 different students in post-secondary education will receive between a quarter and all of their tuition paid—

Mr. Marchese: Can we get that information on paper?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: —from families up to \$75,000 in income. It's on paper. It was in the release. You were asking about the details of the program, and we're providing them to you. The people of Ontario should be proud of that program. That's real access—60,000 different students; not 10% of the students. One in eight students gets an upfront tuition grant. But there is another type of grant.

Mr. Delaney: There's more?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: There is more. There is another type of grant, and that's the grant that is created when a student has access to more than \$7,000 in assistance—because the student does not have to pay back more than \$7,000 of the assistance he or she receives in a year. If you receive \$11,900 in assistance, for example, what you get is the assistance interest-free for the life of your post-secondary institution, and what you have to pay back is only \$7,000. So the \$4,900 is, in fact, a grant. Another approximately 60,000 different students will benefit from that program. So the total for grants is about 120,000 different students. Some receive both; they will qualify for the grants. That's important. That is real access for the poorest students and for middle-income students.

Why did we pick \$75,000, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, you might ask? Well, the reason is that

\$75,000 is just above the median family income in the province of Ontario. So, in fact, we wanted to make sure that middle-income families were eligible for the grants. That's important, because, of course, access is essential if you're to get in and succeed.

What about OSAP itself? When you apply for OSAP, of course, they do a needs analysis, and your eligibility for assistance depends on criteria such as the cost of the books in your program. Interestingly enough, what you had been allowed for things like books had not changed, in some cases, in 20 years. Everybody here knows that the cost of books had increased over the previous 20 years.

Mr. Marchese: But who's eligible for OSAP?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: We updated the measures, increased the amount of assistance that you'd be eligible for, so more and more students—in fact, there were, this September, approximately 480,000 students in post-secondary education, of whom we estimate almost 200,000 qualify for OSAP of some description or other. That's access, and that's important.

Of course, in addition, there will be various institutional aid programs. There will be various institutional aid programs that will work, hopefully, hand in glove with the government assistance program, and that's one of the things that we're determined to ensure. We're determined to ensure that the governmental aid programs, whether it's through OSAP, work hand in glove with the institutional aid programs so that we can ensure that students who need the assistance get the assistance they need. That's access. That's what the student access guarantee is all about.

One of the things that we heard time and time again is that many people don't know about what's available through OSAP. Many people can't navigate the system. Many people don't know how OSAP works together with institutional aid programs. It's important that they come together. It's all about being user-friendly and letting students get into the programs. That's why we are making a concerted effort to bring the two together through the student access guarantee. There is a relationship between an institution's decision to raise tuition and the effect it has on the access of others. It is not a relationship that was recognized very well in the past. It is a relationship that we recognize now, and we're determined to ensure that students get in. So we are working toward a much easier access point. We are working toward a student access guarantee. We're working to ensure, as I said, that students in financial need have access to the money they need for tuition, books and mandatory fees. And that will be a significant improvement in access for the people of Ontario.

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But of course, access has another aspect. If you go to the theatre and there are 1,000 people who want to get in to see the movie, but there are only 100 seats, then 900 don't have access. If you're going to give those 900 access, you have to build a bigger theatre or run it in two theatres, or three or four. That's what we've done with

the post-secondary system. We have ensured that 86,000 more students will find a place in post-secondary education in our institutions over the 2002-03 numbers. That is 20% more students. That's real access, at the end of the day—real access for the students of Ontario, real access for the hopes and dreams of Ontarians and Ontario families.

But of course, it goes beyond that and that is why we have said we will dedicate additional funding to ensure that students from traditionally disadvantaged groups—persons with disabilities, aboriginal persons, first-generation students—francophone students are represented in the same degree but it's been traditionally difficult to find French-language programming with the same richness and diversity they would like. So we've said there should be additional funding to ensure access to post-secondary education and success in post-secondary education by individuals such as those. That's why we have additional programs to ensure that takes place.

You heard over the previous few minutes much characterization—and I want to return to this—of the tuition framework. I think it's important to set the record straight and make sure that the people of Ontario who may be tuning in to these committee hearings, to the estimates program, actually know what the facts are.

During the course of our government, the first year, tuition was frozen, but we also funded the freeze to make sure institutions didn't fall further behind on the quality agenda. The second year, tuition was frozen, but we also funded the freeze to make sure that quality didn't fall further behind.

Mr. Marchese: The third year they get whacked.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: The third year? The third year—
Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: The third year will see institutions able to raise their tuitions a maximum average of 5%—

Mr. Marchese: A mere 5%.

Hon. Mr. Bentley:—within a fully regulated and predictable framework, which means that for 90% of college students, their fees will have gone up less than \$100; for 70% of university students, their fees will have gone up less than \$200.

Mr. Marchese: And deregulated programs—

Hon. Mr. Bentley: The overall approach means that for every extra dollar we are asking students to contribute to their own education, the people of Ontario are investing three extra dollars. Everybody has to make a contribution. By contrast, of course—and others may run from this—during the Conservative government, for every extra dollar students were asked to invest in their own education during the deregulated and skyrocketing tuition, the government took 15 cents out. During the years of the NDP, when you heard much talk about a passion about having to freeze or wanting to freeze tuition, about getting whacked with tuition, what happened to tuition? It went up almost 50%.

Mr. Marchese: Use your own words.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: And for every extra dollar students were asked to invest in their post-secondary education,

the government invested 90 cents. So during those years the government wasn't keeping up with the students. I think that historical review gives us some idea of how we end up where we are today and the challenges we met when we arrived in government. That's why the Reaching Higher plan was so important and so necessary to the future success of post-secondary education in the province of Ontario. It was so important to ensure that students could have the post-secondary education system that they wished.

There has been much talk about the multi-year nature of the Reaching Higher plan. I suppose the other members, unlike, I might say, university or college administrators, who want predictability, multi-year funding and have been asking for it for years; unlike students, I suspect, who would like to know that the program they're in today is actually going to be there tomorrow, particularly in light of their experience, for example, in the first two years of the Tory administration when, in 1995-96, the first thing the government did to colleges was slash their operating budget by 20%—it never recovered, it never got back to where it was until the first year of the McGuinty government.

I think predictability in a positive way is a good thing. That's why we have brought in a five-year plan and backed that up with multi-year funding agreements. Again, I would be interested to hear—surprised a bit—if any member here would suggest their party would cut, take away or decrease the proposed funding investments in the last couple of years of the Reaching Higher plan. It would be interesting.

Why multi-year funding? Well, university and college programs don't stop and start on a dime. It takes a while to hire faculty, to develop the course material, to outfit the classroom, to get the right equipment, to develop the program. So you need multi-year funding to make sure you can do that, to make sure that you can properly predict where you're going to be next year and the year after. That's why the multi-year accountability agreements are so important, because it not only asks for results for the funding from the institutions, but it also ensures that the institutions know what funding they're going to get. That's important for planning and budgeting purposes.

How do you budget from year to year if the government budget comes out after your year begins? That has been a historical problem and no one party—and I'm not going to say that—

Mr. Wilson: You didn't in your first year.

Hon. Mr. Bentley:—and I'm about to say that—has had a different approach to that historically. It's always been the same, no matter what government was in power in the province of Ontario; frankly, federally, as well. You go from year to year not really knowing. But that doesn't help the planning process, it doesn't help good budgeting, it doesn't help a process where you try to get the most out of the money. That is why in the post-secondary area, just like in other areas such as health, the McGuinty government approach is a different one. The

McGuinty government approach is to say to institutions in our post-secondary area—colleges and universities—“You should have multi-year predictability so that you can do the planning, so that next year you’ll know what money you’re getting.” Some may argue it should be more; some may argue even that it should be less. Not me; others might, I don’t know. Let us at least have a system where the institutions know year over year what money they’re going to be entitled to so they can make those longer-term hiring plans and longer-term commitments for the success of the students.

You heard much about percentages of contribution by students and who’s giving what percentage and this, that and the other thing. The numbers are all over the place. I think what’s important to know is where you start and where you’re going.

Mr. Marchese: What about the facts?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: That’s why we’re reviewing these things, to make sure that we all have the facts. That’s why it’s important to do that. It is, over the course of the Reaching Higher plan, an approach which will show that the people of Ontario, through their investments, are putting in \$3 for every dollar the students are asked to contribute to their own education.

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Education is enormously important. It is both a public benefit and a private benefit. It has always been a combination of student, governmental and, frankly, other participation. If we’re to ensure that the goals are achieved—and the goals, let’s be clear, are not ratios; the goals are access to the best possible quality education. Let’s get there and then we will ensure that students have what they go to the institution for, which is the best possible quality of education that will take them throughout their career, because the investment that’s being made in post-secondary education is an investment for a lifetime. You can cheapen it, absolutely. You could cheapen it in a second, but nobody will thank you for that. You could reduce the price of education simply by reducing the investment in it. It’s not hard to do that. But that’s not why anybody goes. They go to get the best quality of education, they go to get the highest quality of education.

We are determined to make sure that we advance the access agenda, that we advance the high-quality agenda. That’s why the people of Ontario are making this historical investment in post-secondary education. That’s why we’re determined the education investment will go as far as possible through the multi-year accountability agreements and through the Higher Education Quality Council, which is going to be able to provide good, arm’s-length advice to the people of Ontario and the government Ontario because it’s not a secret body. We’ll get input from all to provide good advice for all—first among all, the government—to ensure that we can improve the quality of education and improve access to that education. So, for example, they’ll conduct research, I suspect, in areas of quality measures to see where we need to concentrate to actually improve the quality of

programming. They’ll monitor or help us monitor the student access guarantee to make sure that students are actually getting into post-secondary education and not being denied the opportunities that post-secondary education presents. That’s why we’re going to make sure that the Higher Education Quality Council is able to provide us such good and important advice.

There has been much said today about post-secondary, but what we all must agree on, I suspect, I hope—

The Vice-Chair: You’re down to a couple minutes of your 30 minutes, Minister.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: What was that?

The Vice-Chair: You’ve got about two minutes left in your 30 minutes.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: Thank you very much. What we all must agree on, as I watch the seconds tick by, is that we want access to high-quality education for everybody who is academically qualified to get in. In fact, we go beyond that and say to those who were traditionally underrepresented, we’ll do extra to help you get to where you can have access to post-secondary education. Once you get in, you should have access to the highest possible quality of education. Others will look at other factors, but at the end of the day it’s got to be about quality, it’s got to be about access, because it’s about the students’ future, it’s about the province’s future. It’s not only about the economy, it’s about our opportunities generally. The better education you have, the more opportunities you’ve got. It’s better for you, better for students, better for the people of Ontario.

The Vice-Chair: Minister, thank you very much. We have five minutes left today. Are you prepared to do that five minutes now, Mr. Wilson?

Mr. Wilson: Yes.

The Vice-Chair: Okay. We’re not going beyond 6.

Mr. Wilson: Minister, I just have one question, because I think it was horrible politics when you did the two-year freeze. First of all, if you didn’t mean for the promise to look bigger than it was, why did you use the exact wording, being “at least two years”, in your own campaign document? If it was to be two years, you should say two years. That’s why, in the North Bay Nugget on September 20, it’s written: “The Ontario Government’s stewardship of post-secondary education came under fire Tuesday as a new poll suggested a majority of respondents are unimpressed with the Liberal effort to improve access to college and university.” You’re aware of this poll.

“More than half of those surveyed—52%—don’t feel the quality of post-secondary education in Ontario has improved since the Liberals were elected in 2003, says the survey, commissioned by the Canadian Federation of Students and the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations,” who I recall your two parties, the Liberals and NDP, used to be in bed with for years when we were in government.

“Another 18% of respondents said they feel the quality has declined in the last three years.” Then, as you know, 74% believe that you broke your promise on tuition fees.

Don't you think it's morally wrong that you, for political reasons, say, "We're going to freeze you for two years, but everyone else coming into the system is going to get hit with a 5% increase"? Wouldn't you have been better to just spread the increases over so it's fair to everybody? If the increases were coming in, wouldn't it be better to do 1.5% per year and you don't discriminate against students coming into the system or students who, finally, in their third and fourth years in the system get whacked with an increase? Wouldn't it have been fairer and a little more honest to spread that increase and not give special attention in terms of a freeze to just two years of students? You did that because of an election campaign coming up. That's why you did that.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: We had to freeze it because of the rampant increases that had been taking place in the province of Ontario for the previous 15 years, not accompanied by improvements in student assistance—

Mr. Wilson: That's totally wrong. We increased student assistance and you know it.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: —and not accompanied by the necessary funding by governments. That's why we froze it, so that the Rae commission could go out and do the report, tell us what was necessary—

Mr. Wilson: You're doing the same thing with MPAC. It's crass politics.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: We took that good advice—

The Vice-Chair: Let him answer the question.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: That's why we launched the Reaching Higher plan—

Mr. Wilson: It's immoral and it's wrong, and you did it for politics.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: —which funds the colleges and universities, improves student assistance, and then we came up after that with the regulated tuition framework.

Mr. Wilson: Then why are 74% of students disappointed?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: Excuse me?

Mr. Wilson: Seventy-four per cent of students say that they feel you broke your promise. That's pretty high. That's not 10%; that's not 15%.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: We're asking the people of Ontario to invest in students' education because it's the right thing to do. We didn't go out and conduct a poll to do that. We knew it was the right thing to do.

Mr. Wilson: Your polling showed that—

Hon. Mr. Bentley: We know that improving student assistance is the right thing to do and we know that improving student aid is the right thing to do.

Mr. Wilson: —freezing tuition fees was 100%, which people didn't understand—

Hon. Mr. Bentley: We know that expanding the number of spaces is the right thing to do.

The Vice-Chair: Hold on, one at a time. Minister.

Mr. Wilson: You had the same polls we had before the last election and it showed that would be very popular, but it was wrong.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: I'm proud of the fact that the people of Ontario are investing in post-secondary education. They should. We did exactly what we said we would do.

Mr. Wilson: Then why did you use the words "at least"?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: That's exactly what we did. We got good advice from the Rae commission. The Rae commission said, "Don't continue the freeze." The Rae commission gave us the blueprint for investing and improving post-secondary education in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Wilson: Bob Rae would never have agreed with it in the first place because he would understand—

The Vice-Chair: Okay, guys. That's enough for today. We've had a long day. We're going to adjourn until next Tuesday afternoon right after routine proceedings. Thank you, Minister.

Interjection.

The Vice-Chair: Fifteen minutes, beginning next Tuesday right after routine proceedings.

Thank you very much, everyone. Enjoy the rest of the day.

The committee adjourned at 1759.

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