



# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

## Official Record of Debate

(Hansard)

### Bill 187, Budget Measures and Interim Appropriation Act

April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2007

**Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington):** Here they go again. For more years than I would care to admit, I've sat in this House and listened to the member for St. Catharines. No one would question his political stamina, given his 30 years of service in this House, most of which has been spent on this side of the House as opposed to the government side.

No one would question his commitment to his constituents, having been re-elected by them so many times. No one would call into question his sense of the traditions of this House. And no one would question his loyalty to his beloved Buffalo Sabres. However, we must question: How many times while serving in opposition did he complain about any restrictions or limitations on debate, and how many times did he lament the bypassing of the democratic process, which he said was inherent in these kinds of time allocation motions?

This motion we're discussing tonight to curtail debate on Bill 187, the budget bill, stands in his name. He must accept political responsibility for its contents. He must explain why the government believes it is necessary to ram this bill through the House before all members who may wish to speak to it have had a chance to do so. I have to say that so far, the case that has been put forward by the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal and the member for Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge has not been very convincing.

This spring sitting of the Legislature will most likely be the final sitting of the 38th provincial Parliament of Ontario. In fact, six months from today, we will be taking down our election signs, a new Parliament having been elected the day before. This fact is not lost on the staff in the Premier's office and the Liberal Party's campaign team—none of whom have been elected but who are now calling all the shots in the McGuinty Liberal government. They are now in charge of all of the strategic and tactical decisions of the government, rendering the elected MPPs and even the executive council of Ontario redundant.

We know that the member for St. Catharines didn't dream up this time allocation motion. It originated in the Premier's office. We must ask, why the rush? Is it because they plan to shut the House down early, to deny the opposition the chance to hold them to account? The House calendar would have us here until the end of June. Are they planning to ignore it? Have they become so cynical and so bereft of new ideas that they will truncate this session and then have the audacity to ask the people for a second mandate when they couldn't even properly finish off this one?

We oppose this motion, and we will vote nay at 9:20 tonight when the Speaker calls the vote. We oppose it because we oppose in general the budgetary policy of this government, and we are not prepared to give them the benefit of the doubt. In saying this, I believe that I am representing the views of the majority of the people in Waterloo, Wellington and Halton Hills. If this motion passes, the standing committee on finance and economic affairs will be tied up with Bill 187 most likely until May 2.

As a member of this committee, I have to express my disappointment that we have not yet commenced public hearings on the issue of the loss of manufacturing jobs. I have been raising the need for these hearings for almost two years. My private member's resolution was tabled in this House in May 2005, because I was convinced that we faced a crisis in manufacturing and that the government had no plan to avert it.

My resolution was finally passed by the House on November 30, just over four months ago. In the finance committee's pre-budget deliberations during the winter, the committee itself endorsed my proposal and included a recommendation for public hearings in our final report to the Minister of Finance. We are now in the fourth week of this sitting, and the finance committee has not yet met since we've returned. It would appear that the government does not want to hold public hearings on the loss of manufacturing jobs, because it would expose their abdication of leadership. It's unfortunate that they care more about their public image than they do about the more than 124,000 workers who have lost their good-paying factory jobs.

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The words "abdication of leadership" best describe the government's approach to tourism, as well. The Minister of Finance should be embarrassed that his 2007 budget papers document and his fall 2006 economic outlook background papers, when compared together, show a confused and distorted view of the tourism industry. One document says that there were 257,000 people employed in the tourism industry in 2006; the other says that there were 175,500 employed in tourism in that same year. This is a discrepancy of 86,500 jobs. One document says the tourism industry contributed \$6.3 billion to Ontario's GDP in 2005; the other says that tourism is worth \$11 billion to the GDP that same year. This is a difference of \$4.7 billion. Which one is it? Does anybody know over there? It's no wonder they've had so much trouble balancing their budget.

One thing that is clear is that the Ministry of Tourism's budget was slashed from \$210 million to \$191 million, year over year, in the fiscal year just ended. This indisputable fact from page 166 of their budget papers document would seem to contradict the McGuinty Liberal government's repeated claim that they are committed to promoting the tourism industry.

As I have always believed, the potential for tourism in Ontario is infinite. With visionary leadership, there should be no limit to the number of visitors who would want to come to Ontario for their holidays. With our scenic beauty and abundant natural resources, outstanding hospitality, world-class attractions, geographic location, vibrant cities, and quaint and picturesque small towns, Ontario should be leading the world in the growth of tourism visits. Instead, we are lagging behind, and this government must acknowledge its responsibility for this fact.

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As I informed the House before Christmas, same-day car trips to Canada from the United States are in steep decline according to Statistics Canada. Last fall, we hit a record low. Unfortunately, the most recent data I've seen shows no real improvement; in fact, we are continuing to lose ground. The situation is not helped by the fact that the McGuinty Liberal government has virtually given up on the American tourist market. Instead, there is a marketing campaign which purports to encourage Ontarians to plan their vacations within their home province. In reality, it appears that the marketing campaign was initiated in an attempt to make voters feel good about the province and to try to soften them up to support the McGuinty Liberal government in six months' time. If that is its real objective, I predict it will fail.

As the PC critic for the Ministry of Tourism, I welcome any new investment in tourism marketing, provided it is well planned, effective, non-partisan and shows the best of the entire province. We should include every region from east to west and north to south, with special emphasis on the communities and regions which are particularly dependent on tourism for their local economic success.

A few months ago, I received a great deal of input from our Ontario tourism partners. I want to thank all of them for their responses and today mention the advice I received from Mr. Gary Clarke of Sam Jakes Inn of Merrickville, in eastern Ontario. He put a lot of effort into consulting with many of his colleagues and wrote a very thoughtful, compelling report which he shared with me. He addressed issues of improving the prosperity and competitiveness of Ontario's tourism sector. He encouraged new measures to increase investment and decrease the burden on families. He called for tax relief to stimulate growth, and drew attention to the need to invest in our neglected tourism infrastructure. He suggested changes to our labour laws and highlighted the need for upgrading skills training and education.

This is the kind of action we need from our next minister responsible for tourism in a John Tory Progressive Conservative majority government. This is the hope we offer the tourism industry, as together we embrace the promise of the future.