



TAXATION AMENDMENT ACT
(EQUIPMENT PURCHASED FOR
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES), 2008 /
LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES IMPÔTS
(ACHAT D'APPAREILS POUR
LES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES)

Mr. Murdoch moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 109, An Act to provide a tax credit for the purchase of equipment or devices for persons with disabilities / Projet de loi 109, Loi prévoyant un crédit d'impôt pour l'achat d'appareils ou de dispositifs pour les personnes handicapées.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, Mr. Murdoch, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: As you know, our times come up for private members' bills; I actually thought of this one back when I was out campaigning for the election about a year ago. I went to one home in our area and met some parents and their daughter, who actually lived in this place, and they asked me what our policy was on people with disabilities.

At that point, a little book that shows you what we're supposed to say mentioned that information was still coming. It was about halfway through the election, so I was a little concerned that we didn't have a lot of policy on that. I did know, though, that we did believe that people on disability do not get enough to have a proper life. There's no way that the little bit of money that they get from the province and the feds is good enough. People with disabilities didn't ask for the disabilities; these things happen sometimes, sometimes they're born that way, whatever. So I thought about this.

Then this couple mentioned to me that their daughter needed orthopaedic shoes, and they're really expensive. She definitely would have had a hard time walking. They bought these shoes for her, but being that she didn't live at home, there was no way—there didn't seem to be any agency or any group that could help. They were concerned that maybe we should have something like that. You know, at least we should allow them to claim on their income tax the money they spent to help someone out. It's just a simple thing. It's not a hard, big, long bill with a lot of explanations; it's just that if you know somebody who has a disability—either related or not related; it doesn't even have to be related—and you want to help them out and buy the device or something that will make their life better, at least there should be some way of recognizing that. I thought, well, why couldn't you just claim at least up to \$4,000 on your income tax? It's very simple.

That's why I brought this bill forward today, so that this House can debate it for second reading, vote on it and hopefully pass it. I really can't see anybody who would be against something like this, because I know everybody who sits in this House wants to help people with disabilities if they can. This is just a small way of doing that.

The bill got some news coverage, and some information was sent out across Ontario, and we've had a lot of people who have sent letters and support for the bill. Michael David, director of the Ontario chapter of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, says:

"I am writing to express my support of Bill 109, An Act to provide a tax credit for the purchase of equipment or devices," like we've said.

"This bill will provide every Ontarian with a disability with additional significant savings in their purchase of equipment or devices, and in some cases, give them the ability to actually purchase the device instead of forgoing it because of financial need. This bill will save money for families, seniors and individuals."

And it will. A lot of times people in Ontario just can't afford the devices they need, for whatever disability they have, to make their lives much better and to live as normal a life as they can. There are a lot of agencies that do help out, and we've got to appreciate them, but it's sometimes the paperwork or just getting through to an agency to ask them for help. They have many people asking them for help. Sometimes that's just onerous on a person or families, and it doesn't happen. In this case, at least they could claim it on their income tax.

As I say, we had many other agencies, such as the March of Dimes-and Janet Macmaster and Judy Williams are here from the March of Dimes. We appreciate your being here today listening to this debate. As I say, I hope that all parties in this House will support it.

William Adair, executive director of the Canadian Paraplegic Association, Ontario, is also writing to say in regard to Bill 109 that he thinks this is a good bill and would support it. He goes on to say, "specifically to ask that Ontario allow our citizens with disabilities to take advantage of this opportunity, to alleviate the barriers of undue hardship." That's what I mentioned. Sometimes the barriers are there, but people just can't get the help that they need. If somebody has a friend and they want to help them, as I say, this would enable that friend to claim up to \$4,000 on their income tax if they help somebody with a device that makes their life much better.

I have a letter from Penny. She's an adult who is deaf and blind, living in Ottawa: "Technology moves at such a rapid pace that keeping up with it is a challenge." So for her to buy other devices to help her out-it's important that she's able to do this. If somebody helps her or her family can help her, then again, they can use this as a way of helping them out and being able to claim it. She goes on to say how this would really help her in her situation.

As I say, many other agencies have written to us. Michelle Gold, senior director of the Canadian Mental Health Association, is another one who has written to us. It doesn't give us time to read all the letter fully here, but: "This letter is in support of Bill 109.... The Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario division, is a provincial association that is committed to improving services and supports for individuals with mental illness and their families, and to the promotion of mental health in Ontario." They go on to say, "Bill 109 would increase an individual's access to assistive devices needed to carry out the usual activities of daily living, which in turn supports their mental health."

In the long run, by allowing this bill to pass, when we can help people out it helps us in many other areas. It helps people, as I say, to live a better life than they had before.

We also received many e-mails from people who work in the accessibility coordination field, helping people get equipment they need to function, like Jeanette in Kingston: "As both a person with a disability and someone who works towards improving accessibility for persons with disabilities, I know intimately the many struggles that folks like myself face in navigating an environment designed without due consideration of our needs.

"The ability to transcend some of these significant barriers often depends on access to equipment and technology. I know, for example, that my life has been nearly transformed since I got my cochlear implant in 2004. On a very basic level it afforded me considerable independence and success in almost every area of my life, but especially in my professional life and as a mother."

There are many other letters like this from people who have disabilities and think that this is a good idea and a good bill for this Parliament to pass.

Here's another one: "I support your private member's Bill 109. I myself am hearing impaired and have been waiting to be able to buy hearing aids, and passage of your bill would go a long way in helping me and likely hundreds of others in doing so. Good luck."

I also have signed support from staff and volunteers from the following organizations based out of London and surrounding area. I know the good members who live in London will be glad to hear that these people also support this bill: the community care access centre; Victorian Order of Nurses; Community Living London, Hutton House, London; autism dog trainers; Regional Support Associates; Thames Valley Children's Centre; and the Epilepsy Support Centre of London. I also mentioned that the March of Dimes are here to support this bill.

Hopefully, everyone else in the House can throw their support behind it and we can get on with this bill, moving forward, so that in the future, in the new year, people will be able to claim it on their income taxes. It's a simple little amount that would help people out in their way and make their lives that much better. I appeal to everyone here today to support this bill so we can move it along through this House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Before I ask for further debate, I just want to explain the rotation this afternoon. Normally, in a regular Parliament that had room, the independent member would sit between the third party and the government. Because of the rump, we're unable to do that, so the Speaker, after the independent member speaks, looks to the government side to speak next in the rotation.

Is there anyone from the government side who would like to speak?

Mr. Bob Delaney: It is a pleasure to follow the address by my colleague from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. I do have to say from the very outset that I support the bill. The member is on to a good idea here. Frankly, I think he might be a little ahead of his former party. In fact, if his former party had listened to him and maybe worked with this issue instead of the one that they did bring to the last election, things might be a little bit different in the House today-but that's just water under the bridge.

1530

Let's talk about some of the people who from this proposed measure, whether it passes in this or another format-because this is private members' time and the member has proposed a private member's bill, and what we've seen here, even this fall, have been two examples of issues that were first brought up as private members' bills. The member for Durham brought up more than once his proposal for a cell phone ban, which is now a government bill, and he has been suitably recognized for his contribution. The member for Sault Ste. Marie brought up his idea on the apology, which is in fact now passed as the Apology Act. So whether it be this private member's bill or whether the measures proposed by the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound resurface in a different way, I thank him for bringing this measure to the House.

Some of the people who are likely to benefit most from the type of things that he's proposed are people very much like us who stand here today, members of the baby boom generation born between the years 1946 and 1966. We would now be between the ages of 42 on the young side and 62 on the elder side. It is often said that, especially among men, everything you truly value about your body in time thins out, wears out, spreads out or falls out.

As this enormous baby boom demographic moves from middle age into old age, we will all increasingly need assistive devices. The member, somewhat inaccurately, refers to the province of Ontario's support for assistive devices as a pittance. Just to ensure that we put this in its proper perspective, Ontario has what is called the assistive devices program. It covers some 8,000 separate pieces of equipment and supplies, and it pays-now get this-up to 75% of the price for most devices. So let's just repeat that just to make sure everybody grasps it: Ontario's assistive devices program can pay you up to 75% of the price for most devices. Now you say, "So what kind of devices are we talking about here?" Prosthetic devices, wheelchairs, mobility aids, specialized seating systems, feeding supplies, monitors, test strips for insulin-dependent diabetics, insulin pumps, supplies for children, hearing aids, respiratory equipment, braces, garments, pumps, visual and communication aids, oxygen and oxygen delivery equipment such as concentrators, cylinder, liquid systems and related supplies-the list is a very extensive one. I won't read all 8,000 items on it.

So you would say, "So what does this represent on behalf of the government of Ontario?" It represents an investment of some \$67 million-an amount that has increased by nearly a third since 2003.

I'm going to leave time for some of my colleagues to discuss this measure. As I said before, I think most of us are very much in support of what the member is trying to do with his private member's bill. We're glad to see it brought to the floor. It's very much congruent with the direction the government is headed in, and I thank you for the time to stand up and discuss it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, and as the community and social services critic for our caucus, to talk on Bill 109. I would like to acknowledge the work and the background that the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound put into this bill. I think it has some great ideas, great suggestions, and I would like to talk about some of the specifics on it.

The bill, of course, amends the Taxation Act to provide a credit to individuals who purchase equipment or devices designed for persons with disabilities for use by the individual-and this part is important-or by a member of his or her family. I think the reality is that there are many family members who would be more than willing to participate in the purchase of assistive devices that aren't covered by the assistive devices

program if they had the additional incentive of the tax credit. That's a good move forward on the part of the member.

There are, of course, many organizations in Ontario that would support such a move. I think, right off the top of my head, of the CNIB, the MS Society and Autism Ontario-the list goes on. The reality is that every day there are new programs and new devices that can make the lives of people across Ontario with a disability easier, and anything we, as legislators, can do to encourage that innovation and ultimately encourage the use is a good thing. So I'm pleased to support it.

You know, when we go back to our constituency offices we all talk. We often hear of family members and individuals who have gone through the assistive devices program, and we all know full well that many devices and many individuals are not fully covered for this program. So this is a good move by the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, and I applaud him for that.

I think of a mother I had come in. Her son went through the school system and was given a special computer that he was using in his classroom to assist him and to allow him to be included in the regular stream of the school. The sad part of the story was that the computer was not allowed to go home. So if the child had any homework, or if the child had any kind of initiative where he wanted to do some additional work at home, he didn't have the specialized computer to use.

The mother said she would look at purchasing it, if there were some kind of support. I think that Bill 109 is a perfect example of something that maybe would be the tipping point to allow her to purchase that computer to match what she had been able to get through the school system.

I guess we could get into a bit of a discussion about why the computer wasn't able to be transferred home to allow him to do homework, but we won't get into that at this point; we're talking about Bill 109.

I'd also like to talk about some of the other bills that Progressive Conservatives have brought forward to assist people with disabilities.

Tim Hudak, our finance critic from Niagara West-Glanbrook, raised Bill 28, the Homestead Act, as something that would assist persons with disabilities and allow them to keep their homes.

Bill 70, the Blind Persons' Rights Amendment Act, is from Gerry Martiniuk. His riding is Cambridge.

Bill 78, the Property Tax Deferral Act, from our member for Thornhill, Peter Shurman, was debated in the last session.

Of course, on December 11, I am bringing forward a private member's bill that I trust everyone will be debating and supporting: Bill 94, the Social Assistance Statute Law Amendment Act. It would allow Ontario residents to set up a registered disability savings plan and not have that additional money clawed back through ODSP. I look forward to debating that bill on December 11, and I trust that the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound will be back to support me on Bill 94.

In closing, I think it's a great idea. I would like to acknowledge the work he has put into it. I hope we get an opportunity to debate the bill further, because it has a lot of benefits that I can see in both my riding of Dufferin-Caledon and, of course, across Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm happy to speak to the bill presented by the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. I think it's a good bill. A tax credit for equipment or devices up to \$4,000 is a good thing, and it speaks to the inadequacy of income supports for people with disabilities in Ontario. That's what it speaks to. It's an admission that people with disabilities have ongoing problems as it relates to their ability to live well and adequately, and to be able to pay for things that they need. That's what this bill is all about.

1540

I appreciate the brief history that the member for Dufferin-Caledon provided about the good things that Mike Harris did. It was a good reminder that Mike Harris left us a very interesting and important legacy. So I found it useful, just as a reminder.

A single Ontario disability support plan recipient has to live and survive on \$1,000 per month. That is money that puts them below the poverty line. While \$1,000 seems like a lot of money, it's not a lot. It's not a lot for anyone. While it is true that the federal government provides a disability tax credit, which provides relief for extra everyday expenses incurred by persons with disabilities who suffer severe and prolonged mental or physical impairment, while that is helpful, people with disabilities still find themselves in very difficult positions.

While it is true that we have an assistive devices program, as the member for Mississauga-Streetsville was talking about, and, yes, it helps residents with long-term physical disabilities to access personalized assistive devices appropriate to their needs, while that is true and while that is good, it is inadequate in terms of what it doesn't do for people with disabilities. While it is true that it provides up to 75% of the cost for equipment such as artificial limbs, as the member was talking about, orthopaedic braces, wheelchairs, breathing aids and other things—it only provides for up to 75% of the cost, which means they have to pay for the extra cost on their own. When we're talking about hearing aids, which the assistive devices program supports to pay for, it only provides for 50% of the cost. We know there are more and more people in our society who are having difficulties in hearing, me included. I'm not there yet in terms of needing the device but

there are more and more people who need this device, my brother being one. It's very costly. The government pays \$500 for these devices; I know that my brother had to pay \$2,000 to get it, and some may be more. That means people on ODSP, the Ontario disability support plan, have to pay that extra cost for that device.

It isn't just people on ODSP, but it's just people who are low income, who have these problems and have to pay for these things on their own. They may not have a health plan of their own. And so-

Ms. Sylvia Jones: If you're on ODSP it's 100%-assistive devices.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: If you're on ODSP. The point is, if you're not on ODSP and you are low income and need that device, the assistive devices program pays for 50%-that's about it. So there are a lot of people who need the additional support and they're not getting it.

The point of this bill is, how do we help people who have a disability to get a little more support so that their needs are looked after? It speaks to obligations of governments; it speaks to our desire to help people who are in need. It speaks to a collective spirit, doesn't it, Bill, of helping each other? That's why Bill is independent. We want to have a collective, communal sense of what we owe to each other; isn't that it? It's part of that spirit that Bill embodies, and it may not be true of all Conservative members but it is true of Bill. That's why I want to support him in this initiative, because it's about looking after those whose needs are different than ours, who are unable to pay for the things that they need to be able to live happily and adequately. It's for that reason that I, for one, as a New Democrat, will be supporting it. I know my colleague from Welland will be speaking to this as well, and he'll share his ideas in a few moments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: First of all, I congratulate the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound for bringing such an important bill before us in the House to be debated today. It's a very important subject, a subject that's important to be discussed and to be supported. I know the member, who called himself the leader of the independent party or the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, he told me the other day-I want to congratulate him.

We talked many different times about different issues. I know of his passion about supporting disabled people in Ontario, and I know his daughter is very active in London in supporting people with disabilities on many different fronts. We meet with her pretty often. She comes to our office, and we discuss many different issues. It seems like the whole house, from the father to the children, established some kind of passion for people with disabilities, which explains why he had been expelled and banned from the Conservative Party-because he has a conscience about disabilities.

He talked about support for people with disabilities. I think it's very important. I was listening to the member from the third party, Mr. Marchese, speaking about the need and

obligation to support people with disabilities, because we as a government, as a community, as a society, are obligated to support the people who live among us, and for some reason have some kind of disability.

So our government, of course, invests a lot on this front. We support more than 8,000 pieces of equipment and assistive devices programs. I believe our investments are important, but we are still far from establishing our need and our goal, which is to support every person with a disability across the province with whatever they need, because, as I mentioned, we are obligated to do so.

My colleague the member from Mississauga-Streetsville spoke eloquently about the details and the elements and how many pieces of equipment we support-up to 75%-e specially with the people on ODSP and also some people who need it badly.

I think it's an important initiative and it's worth it to discuss and to debate. I commend the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound for bringing this issue forward, and I hope this initiative will see the light and go to committee, and the committee will debate more, and we'll see how we can establish it and how we can make it a law and benefit all the people with disabilities across the province of Ontario.

I said it many different times. I had the chance, in my past life, to work with people with mental disabilities and intellectual and developmental disabilities, and also to work with people with physical disabilities. I know how many challenges they face on a daily basis. I think some kind of support-tax relief-would be important to give them the ability to survive; especially if they are on a low income, they don't have much money to spare in order to buy certain equipment. And as we all know, that technical equipment is very expensive. Some of it is between \$1,000 to \$10,000 for one piece of equipment.

So I think the support is well-needed. I congratulate the member, and I'm looking forward to seeing it in the committee, and we'll discuss it more.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to add some comments on the legislation before us today, Bill 109, An Act to provide a tax credit for the purchase of equipment or devices for persons with disabilities. This is certainly an example of something that we can offer to those who require specific devices in order to live active lives and hopefully to stay in their own homes as long as possible.

I am also pleased to follow up on the comments from my colleague from Dufferin-Caledon, whose commitment and dedication to her role as critic of the Ministry of Community and Social Services has been nothing short of top-notch. I thank her for her input on this bill and the work that she does in criticizing-and there's a lot to criticize these days-the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

She brought forward Bill 94, with respect to social assistance amendments. I appreciate her work on that front, and I know that that's coming up soon in November, so it's advance warning to members on the opposite side that they might think they should be supporting Bill 94, registered disability savings plans, because that certainly helps those with disabilities.

1550

The other bills that were brought forward, which the Progressive Conservative Party has attempted to introduce in this Legislature, that would help persons with disabilities were mentioned: The Homestead Act, 2007, the Blind Persons' Rights Amendment Act, the Property Tax Deferral Act and the Social Assistance Statute Law Amendment Act. I say that especially for my colleague from London-Fanshawe, who seems to think that we do not have a good record of giving a hand to people who need a hand.

I also want to remind him that it was his government in 2004—Minister Sorbara's budget—when the Liberals cancelled the RST, or the provincial sales tax rebate, on motor vehicles purchased for a person with a permanent physical disability, which was a maximum of \$2,400 for vans and \$1,600 for cars. That was cancelled. I get lots of calls in my office on that. I just want to remind the members opposite that we can do more for people with disabilities; this is what this bill that we're discussing this afternoon is about.

I want to focus on another particular aspect that this bill would address. I've spoken on the proposed legislation from the member from Beaches-East York, and even the member from Pickering-Scarborough East has brought forward a bill about visual fire alarms to help Ontarians who have hearing challenges. Certainly, that concerns and deals with people such as seniors and those who are deaf or hard-of-hearing in all of our communities. We know that sound alarms are inadequate for these people. What would be more effective is providing them with strobe alarms, visual alarms or similar devices in order to be alerted to the dangers that may occur in an emergency situation. This is where Bill 109 makes good sense, as these are certainly costly pieces of equipment, especially when you consider the fact that these devices need to be on each floor in numerous areas of a home. I've certainly had the opportunity to speak many times to Maggie Doherty-Gilbert, who represents the Canadian Hearing Society in the area that I represent of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, but also in the Peterborough area and part of Durham, and she does a fantastic job in that.

She's been working closely with the Durham Deaf Accessibility Committee and she's met with many MPPs, besides myself. In May, she came to see me again and she brought an individual named Rusty, who is a senior and who is deaf. Rusty and Maggie both indicated the level of fear experienced by those who can't hear, with respect to their safety. They also fear the fact that they can't afford the fire alarms. When the fire department comes, they could get charged. Rusty was very scared that he was going to get charged by the fire department for not having a smoke alarm in his house.

Statistics show that as many as 40% of the seniors in our community are either deaf or hard-of-hearing. They can't hear fire alarms, sirens from emergency vehicles or even the door when the neighbours knock and say, "There's a safety concern. Please come out of your house." To most of those people, an audible fire alarm isn't sufficient to make them aware of the potential danger that they may be faced with. Strobe alarms are what's needed in these cases. As I said, we spoke several times in the Legislature about the need for strobe smoke alarms to be installed and the help that people do need with installing them. It's not just the alarm; they have to have them wired in properly and they have to be on different floors in different rooms. It can go up to over \$1,000 quite easily.

As legislators, we are certainly all given the responsibility of working to provide seniors and people with disabilities with the dignity and independence of staying in their homes. That is partially addressed, certainly, in this bill that has been brought forward this afternoon. I know that the member from Mississauga-S treetsville brought forward the fact that there are 8,000 separate pieces of equipment or supplies that are covered. I say, there's another assistive device that should be covered, and that's certainly been brought up. As I said, the Canadian Hearing Society have been strong advocates, and they've brought that to us several times. The private member's bill-this is the third time, I think, I'm discussing the assistive device program with respect to strobe lighting. We're trying to help the government. It would be a good thing for the government to do.

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Well, sometimes private members' bills can be non-partisan. We've had a couple of bills here today that have been non-partisan.

I want to congratulate the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound on the fact that he's bringing this forward, this tax credit bill that could help people who need the assistance that's not being covered now. I think it's a really tangible bill. We can go to committee, we can discuss it, and I'm sure the Canadian Hearing Society would certainly be there.

Mr. Dave Levac: The first one was motherhood.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Well, the government says it's motherhood. It is a good idea. They've got the power and they can bring it to committee and they can pass it in legislation. So bring it on; we'll certainly support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker. The member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, Bill Murdoch, has produced a bill that is obviously supportable by every member of this Legislature and represents good policy. It reveals a sensitivity to the difficulties faced by persons with disabilities here in the province of Ontario. I applaud Mr. Murdoch for this legislation and I appreciate the chance to speak to it here, along with my colleague from Trinity-Spadina, Rosario Marchese.

It's a good bill. We support it and it should go to committee-end of story. I could sit down right now, I suppose, except I've got a few more things to say.

The bill is going to pass; I'm convinced of that. Mr. Murdoch is going to stand up when the bill passes and ask for it to be referred to a committee, and I'm sure that this assembly is going to agree to that.

However, what happens then? What happens to private members' bills when they are referred to committee but find themselves-that is to say, the bills-constantly blocked by government business? If a bill sort of rises to the surface because of the completion of government business in that committee, the government will then refer bills that don't belong in that committee to that committee.

So my fear, Mr. Murdoch, is that notwithstanding that the Liberals are going to stand up in here and applaud this bill, and they're going to applaud you-where were they when you needed them?-I am fearful that the bill could be sent off into legislative orbit, that the bill could disappear in Stephen Hawking's black hole.

Interjection: You're such a cynic, Peter.

Mr. Peter Kormos: The member accuses me of being cynical. After 20 years of observing this, I say it's not being cynical; it's being accurate.

I despair about that. I find it a very problematic thing, especially from a government that just recently forced through amendments to the standing orders that included, oh, such fluffy, warm and fuzzy things as co-sponsoring bills. Oh, co-sponsored bills, my foot. You can co-sponsor bills until the cows come home. If you stand up here and you talk about it being a good bill, then make sure it gets dealt with in committee, referred back to this House, and called to third reading.

You see, a private member's bill is really no longer the member's bill once it has been referred back to the House by a committee on second reading, because only the government can call it. The private member, Mr. Murdoch, has no power, no authority whatsoever, to use any time that he might have available to him to call the bill for third reading. Let me make another observation: In this government, things don't happen unless the Premier's office wants them to happen.

It's a good piece of legislation. It warrants consideration in committee.

And let me say this. One of the things that I would want to see addressed in committee is to ensure that the range of devices for which there will be tax credits is a wide range, because the types of devices that are used by folks-I mean, every day there are new observations, new developments, new technology.

One of the things that we encounter-at least I do, down where I come from-is the need for seniors to have retrofitting in their homes, everything from the handrails in the bathroom

to perhaps different-height toilets to accommodate them; handles on the sink taps, because arthritic hands- you don't have to be real old to have a problem opening and closing those faucets that don't have adequate handles.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: How do you get to the second floor?

Mr. Peter Kormos: The various elevators and other devices that use stairways to ascend to the second floor; the installation of a bathroom on the first floor, a small lavatory and water closet on the first floor-

Mr. David Zimmer: A beer room in the basement.

1600

Mr. Peter Kormos: Some members want to treat this stuff frivolously; I treat it very seriously, because we deal with folks who suffer because of their inability to finance these sorts of things themselves.

We talk a big game about accessibility, but when we're put to the test by Mr. Murdoch, as he does with Bill 109, we fail those very folks we talk a big game about. You can't just talk about accessibility; you've got to make it happen. This bill, among other things, guarantees accessibility in the most sacred of places-in someone's own home. This bill can be used to ensure that people, as they age and become seniors and older and older, live in their own homes longer and longer. What a delightful thing to do, and quite frankly, what a pragmatic thing to do, because it saves the taxpayer a whole lot of money at the end of the day.

I applaud Mr. Murdoch, the unbeatable Mr. Murdoch. There's a story going around that Mr. Murdoch offered to give up his seat for John Tory to run. The only condition was that Bill Murdoch was going to run, as well, as an independent. John Tory didn't take him up on the offer, because I have no doubt that Bill Murdoch would beat John Tory up in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound in a New York minute, standing on his head with one arm tied behind his back.

If you ever go up there, folks- and I encourage you; it's a really beautiful part of the province- if you want to get a smile out of somebody, an acknowledgement that you're an insider, just say you know Billy Murdoch, because there's nobody up there who doesn't know him and doesn't like him, and it appears there's nobody up there who doesn't vote for him.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate today. I'll say right from the outset that I think this is a bill that should be supported by all members of this House, and I think it's one that really shows the sort of innovative thinking that we need in this province.

We look back to our forefathers, those people who decided that perhaps we should have a medical system that was different from the rest of the world and that if you got sick, we would look after you; if you got sick you didn't go to the bank first, you went to the hospital or you went to the doctor. The people who came before us, like Tommy Douglas, Pearson and J.S. Woodsworth, put into place a health care system that we should be proud of.

Since that date, we've had debates, we've talked to all aspects of this, and one challenge has always been the affordability. How do we match that expectation from a health care perspective with affordability from a taxpayer perspective? I think the type of innovative thinking that's being shown today by the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound is something that's worthy of consideration and should move forward.

A previous speaker talked about private members' bills that don't make it. Sometimes we should focus on the positive, and that's those private members' bills that do make it. You think of the member for Brant, for example, who brought forward a terrific private member's bill that dealt with allergies, anaphylaxis, and that became government policy; Firefighters' Memorial Day, for example, the same member from Brant. You look at the member for Sault Ste. Marie, who brought forward the Apology Act and something that prohibited smoking in cars with children. You look at the member for Willowdale, who brought forward some excellent legislation on boating. So it really proves that private members' bills can change things if they have substance behind them, and obviously, if they get the support of this House. I think this government has shown the willingness to include that. Mr. O'Toole just had some success the other day with cellphones.

The last time I checked, Mr. O' Toole was not a Liberal and didn't plan on becoming one. The last time I checked, the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound wasn't a Conservative either. So we've got some people moving around here.

If you see a bill like this that comes forward, a private member's bill that has the support of such organizations as the March of Dimes and the Canadian Paraplegic Association, regardless of the party membership of the member who has brought it forward-he's probably the most private member in this House right now. He certainly should have a private member's bill attached to his name. This is one that is worthy of support. This is one that I think is going to find support among service clubs, community initiatives, people who want to help out their neighbours, people who want to help out their friends, families and people in the community who perhaps need some help. This, to me, seems to be an extra incentive that would allow somebody to perhaps put their hand in their wallet, make a donation, make some sort of a charitable initiative that would allow somebody to have a much better life. It's that simple.

I think there's been a change in the way that society is looking and thinking about disabilities. This type of innovative thinking brought forward by the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound is an example to us all of the type of thinking we should be undertaking as we look for new ways to make our health care system the best in the world, but also affordable and efficient. This is right in line with this.

As I said, despite the previous comments about private members' bills not going anywhere, I suspect this is a private member's bill that has a chance of going somewhere and should be supported.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, Mr. Murdoch, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I certainly want to thank every one who spoke on this bill today.

First, I'm going to start off with the member for Mississauga-Streetsville. If you took out of my earlier remarks that it was just a pittance that we pay, I'm sorry, because that's not what I meant. I do understand that we have many programs within the government that help people out. Sometimes it's hard to get through the red tape, and that's what I was talking about. I know you did mention only up to 75%. That's why part of this bill, though, will help out because if they got that much, then someone else could help them with the rest and it would top it up and they would be able to claim it. So that's the reasoning behind this bill.

Also, I'd like to mention that all three governments since I've been here have supported things like this, so it's not that one government can take claim on helping out people with disabilities. I believe all three parties have done that. I have had the privilege of sitting with all three parties, so I just wanted to mention that also.

Interjections.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Maybe it was the fourth one. I guess, at this point, the fourth party hasn't been the government but maybe; there's always hope, you never know.

We also had the members for Dufferin-Caledon, Trinity-Spadina, London-Fanshawe, Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, Welland and Oakville. All those members spoke in favour of this bill. I was contemplating here that maybe, since we all support it, we could have gone for third reading and forgotten about going to committee, but that may not happen. So when we get to which committee, we'll certainly work hard and I will be here to remind you that everyone supported it. If it doesn't come to a committee, I'll be here to remind you that it's not coming along. We hope this bill does get passed in the near future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. The time provided for private members' public business has expired.