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Monday 21 October 2013

Lundi 21 octobre 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 21 October 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 21 octobre 2013

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm delighted to introduce two former members—cabinet ministers and honourable sirs: the honourable John Snobelen and the honourable Elmer Buchanan. Welcome.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm absolutely honoured this morning to introduce to the Legislature Emma Hill. She's here with her parents, Christine and Mark.

Emma is an ambassador for the Holland Bloorview hospital. She's an absolute inspiration, an amazing speaker. I have no doubt that she'll find a seat down here one day if she keeps on the track she's been on. Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to introduce her today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Introduction of guests? The member from Oak Ridges–Markham—Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Frank Klees: Thank you, Speaker. I want to extend a special welcome to Kirsten Rudyk, who is a University of Toronto student and the niece of my good friend Bob Yaciuk, who will be joining us today here in the Legislature. She's interested in the proceedings of this place, and we look forward to having her here.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I apologize to the member, as I was looking at two other people standing and I wasn't sure which one I was going to acknowledge. I apologize to the member from Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to welcome the students of the grade 10 civics class from Francis Libermann Catholic High School in the great riding of Scarborough–Rouge River. They're here visiting today in the west gallery with their teacher, Stephanie DeProphetis.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to welcome—we have some delegates from Kenya, Mr. Speaker, this morning—MP Patrick Wangamati and his entire entourage from Kenya as well. I welcome them. They'll be coming in shortly.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to introduce to the world my newest granddaughter. Evelyn Margaret Lang Wallace was born Saturday morning in Peterborough, and she and her mother and father and brother are all doing great.

Ms. Cindy Forster: There are some guests from Port Colborne who are here today: Gene Paggeto, Richard

Vittore, Ron Smith and Bob Saracino, who's here for an Ontario Senior Achievement award today.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm so happy to welcome the first page from Essex county since I've been elected, Benjamin Diab, who attends Holy Cross Catholic School. He's a page here serving from October 24 to November 7, and Evan Tanovich is also serving as a page. I want to welcome them here today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As is the tradition coming from the Speaker, we do honour our former members. In the gallery with us today is John Snobelen from Mississauga North in the 36th and Mississauga West in the 37th Parliament. Welcome, John. We're glad you're here with us. And Elmer Buchanan from Hastings–Peterborough was in the 35th. Thank you very much for joining us today in the gallery.

ORAL QUESTIONS

JOB CREATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. In light of the gas plant scandal and the \$1 billion wasted to save Liberal seats and cancel the Oakville gas plant, we asked the House to sit longer to debate that. You refused to do so. I'm also worried that you're renegeing on our deal.

A month or so ago, you and I sat down in your office. We agreed to clear the decks on legislation that was not really focused on jobs and the economy in large part so that would pave the way for you to put forward your jobs plan. We have yet to see that plan. You have moved from tanning bed legislation now to restaurant menus, but I've not seen anything when it comes to jobs or balancing the books in the province.

I wrote you a follow-up letter asking if we could sit down so I could see your plan. Let me ask you, Premier, bottom line, why are you renegeing on our deal?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we did have that conversation and the conversation went like this: I suggested that there were some pieces of legislation that we could move ahead with, that we could find agreement on, so that we could continue to have debates about some other things that maybe we didn't agree on. One of the things that we don't agree on is the path forward, because I think what the Leader of the Opposition is suggesting is that we would adopt his plan to slash and cut public services in this province. That is not what we're going to do.

Instead, what we're going to do is, we're going to invest in people, we're going to invest in infrastructure and we're going to invest in a business climate that is going to create jobs. For example, we've committed \$17.6 million to support regions and businesses in this province. That's leveraged over \$133.1 million in investments and it's created or retained nearly 2,800 jobs. That's just one piece of the work that we are doing. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition didn't support that strategy for regional encouragement of jobs, and that is confusing at best.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Before we move on, just as a comment, I will not allow shouting people down anymore.

Supplementary?

1040

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, maybe there's some confusion. I thought we had agreed we would clear the decks so you could bring forward your jobs plan. It seems like you want to clear the decks so you can bring legislation around restaurant menus, as opposed to our vision, which is paving the way for more jobs and more opportunity for Ontarians.

Premier, a million people began this week with no job to go to. They're losing hope in this great province. I worry that your ideology blinds you to the challenges we face or what's necessary to turn our economy around. You know that if interest rates go up that will put on another \$500 million of debt interest, taking away our ability to hire more nurses or do more MRIs.

Clearly, you ran to be Premier for some reason other than to have that office. It has been nine months of endless study, conversations and consultations. Where is the big plan? Where are the ideas? Where is the hope and opportunity? We've got that plan. You're welcome to steal it; just ask. Where's yours?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On top of the regional development strategy, which has created or has helped 2,800 jobs, I would suggest that the Leader of the Opposition talk to some of the folks who work in the Ford plant, because I think he would want to support that \$70.9-million investment in the Ford plant that will protect more than 2,800 jobs and allow Ford to take part in global trade.

He also might want to talk to people in small businesses who understand that the Supporting Small Businesses Act is going to help them with their payroll; it's going to allow them to hire more people.

Those are actions that we're taking, along with the Local Food Act, which will encourage and support more jobs in the agri-food sector, and the Waste Reduction Act, which will create jobs.

All of those are part of our strategy to make investments in people and infrastructure and in a business climate that will allow the private sector to create jobs. That is happening, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, we've put a plan on the table to create over 300,000 good jobs in manufacturing, to get energy prices under control, to lower taxes, to change the attitude of government and get out of the way of business, to stop always be standing in the way of job creation and get behind—so they'll invest and create jobs again. All I hear from you is more warmed-over old NDP ideas that, quite frankly, got us into a deep ditch back in the 1990s.

Let me ask you this, at least. It has been a month since we agreed to clear the decks. You've brought forward no plan. I wrote you almost three weeks ago. You've not responded to my letter to meet to discuss your plan as of yet. I'm worried that you have no plan. So will you stand up in the House today—I know that the economic statement is coming shortly. Will that be a game changer for the province? Will that be a moment of truth? Will we finally see the Kathleen vision—vision—Kathleen Wynne vision? That was a tough one. I've got to rehearse these more often. I've got to try that one more often.

Will we actually see what your plan is? Because you only have two moments: a budget and the economic statement every year. You wasted the budget. So please, it's got to be the economic statement.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

I suspect there was a reason why you fumbled over it—he knows that we're not supposed to use proper names in here; I think that was the problem. You stumbled over it. So I'm going to remind all members: Please use either title or riding when referring in the House. Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am not offended by the Leader of the Opposition calling me by my first name.

What our fall economic statement will not do is adopt the Conservatives' agenda, which will fire 10,000 education workers, fire 2,000 health care workers, drive wages down with harmful right-to-work legislation—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex, come to order. The member from Northumberland—no, I was thinking of whether I should or shouldn't, but I will—Northumberland—Quinte West.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, we will not adopt that plan, which we believe would undermine the progress of the province, would not provide for a future of well-educated workers, would not create an environment where investment wants to come to this province. That is what is happening now. Jobs are being created. We are investing in a business climate that's innovative and dynamic.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, my question this morning is for the finance minister. Minister, our party has

cleared the decks so you can present your jobs plan to the Legislature. We're still waiting to see it. You've been in office for nine months, held 100 conversations and created 32 panels, and yet there's still no plan to create jobs and kick-start our economy.

But your jobs plan isn't the only thing that's AWOL, Minister. The Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, which your government passed, states, "Within two years after each provincial election, the minister shall release a long-range assessment of Ontario's fiscal environment." Minister, you're two weeks late. When will you be releasing this assessment that you were legally required to release two weeks ago?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. I appreciate the fact that the member opposite is actually interested in knowing how to increase and promote economic growth in our great province.

He recognizes that we have achieved results. He knows full well that we've had a plan that's working. We have 180% return of those jobs that suffered during the recession. We are the top jurisdiction around the world, exceeding our targets. We are the lowest-cost government in all of Canada, at all orders of government. We have the most competitive tax regime to stimulate investment, and it is working.

We have a fall economic statement that's coming out shortly. We've produced first-quarter results that achieve our opportunities and that show the success we've had to date. Public accounts, audited public accounts, show that we exceed our targets.

We are coming forward with a long-term plan beyond the election-cycle politics that the opposition want to play. We're not going there, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Minister, that assessment isn't optional. You're legislated to do this. The act spells out the specific areas the assessment is to report on. Your predecessors actually did meet this requirement, but apparently you can't. You're running afoul of your own government's law. But then again, we've seen from the deleted gas plant emails that breaking the law seems to be nothing new over on this side.

Maybe you're working hard behind the scenes to get creative with the numbers—like you did on the gas plants—to hide your failed wage freeze, which we exposed last week.

Minister, in nine months, you've put forward no plan to create jobs, no plan to stimulate the economy and no plan to balance the budget. Do you have any plan at all to present your long-term fiscal assessment?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, not only do we have a plan, we have results that are working according to that plan.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Minister?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The plan has been outlined a number of times—which the opposition choose not to read. The upcoming fall economic statement will highlight some of those issues.

What the opposition must recognize is that what they talk about is actually a destructive plan. We will not take extreme views on across-the-board cuts that will harm the sensitive recovery of our province.

We have taken measures of austerity to a point that's necessary, but now we must stimulate economic growth. We will continue to invest in people, we're going to continue to invest in infrastructure, and we're going to continue to ensure our economy grows by—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Minister, let's recap the last nine months. There's no jobs plan, no plan to stimulate economic growth, no plan to balance the budget and no long-term assessment. It's clear that you're not up to the job on this file, Minister. It only stands to reason that Ontarians can expect another whole lot of nothing when you present your fall economic statement.

You've shown, through the gas plants scandal, that your government has a lot of trouble with numbers. The least you can do is use this opportunity to finally lay out a plan to get the more than 500,000 men and women who woke up this morning without a job back to work.

Minister, it's obvious your fall economic statement won't have a real jobs plan. Will you take our plan, our 14 white papers, and use our ideas to put Ontario back to work?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, if we recall their plan, their plan was to hide a huge deficit. Their plan was to sell assets at fire sale—their plan was to give it away. Their plan left a legacy of an energy problem that we're still paying for today.

We have taken control. We have invested in our province. We're investing in our people. We're investing in infrastructure, and we're creating a climate of economic growth and business development with innovation. We're going to continue on that positive plan. We are not going to fall prey to what they're proposing.

1050

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. News reports indicate that the Premier is creating yet another panel. This time, the conversation will focus on so-called open government.

If the Premier is interested in openness, Speaker, will she commit today to returning to the justice committee to explain her role in the decision that handed over \$1 billion to a private power company?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I haven't received an invitation from the committee. If the member has a question,

I'd be happy to answer that question. I just want to say that I need to know what the new information is that the member is seeking, because I've accepted responsibility as a member of the cabinet that made the decision. I've apologized a number of times. I've explained my role at every step of the process. I've explained every interaction that I've had. I've explained my understanding of the cost estimates that were provided by officials. I appeared at the committee on April 30. I've answered 207 questions in the House. I've responded to the AG report; I responded the day that it was tabled.

I've done all of that, Mr. Speaker. I haven't received an invitation. As I say, I'd be happy to answer a question if the member has a specific question.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, people learned that Liberal waste is costing them \$1.1 billion, and the auditor tied that cost to decisions signed off on by this Premier. The Premier wants to have a conversation about open government, but people want some answers about the sky-high price of electricity that they're paying in this province.

Will the Premier come to the justice committee and explain why she was signing a document that was helping private power companies guarantee their profits, and putting families and businesses on the hook?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have explained my role in that process, Mr. Speaker. I have explained it in this House and I have explained it at committee. As I say, I have, a number of times, explained my whole interaction and my whole role in the process. The reality is that when I came into this office, I said that we were going to open up the process, and that is exactly what we did.

In fact, my commitment to open government is an expression of a belief that I have always held and that has been manifested by the fact that I have attended the committee; I have opened up the process. We've broadened the scope of the committee and we've provided thousands of documents in answer to the questions that have been asked by committee.

The questions that the leader of the third party is asking are questions that have been asked over and over and over again, and they have been answered over and over and over again. If there is a new question, if there is new information that's being sought, I would like to hear that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier has claimed that she doesn't want to have this kind of thing happen again in Ontario, and I can tell her, neither do Ontarians. They're tired of watching their bills go up and up and up, and they want to know why.

People want to understand why the Premier was signing off on decisions that the auditor said clearly favoured private power companies. Will the Premier be coming to the committee to explain why she did that?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, Mr. Speaker, I have answered that question. I've talked about my role in

the cabinet walk-around that happened and I have taken responsibility for being part of a government that was in a process and was trying to avoid litigation. We've talked—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm probably going to ask the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek the same question I would ask him if he was in his seat, and that is to come to order, please. Thank you.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I spoke the week before last about the advice that we were given—that officials advised us that waiting to relocate the plant could have been more expensive and renegotiating was more prudent than ripping up the agreement. So we were engaged in that process.

But the point is, I have taken responsibility, as a member of cabinet, for that decision. I articulated my role and—

Interjection: Resign.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That will get you thrown out. If you want to start doing that, I'll start throwing.

Finish, please: 10 seconds.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, just to say that we have provided 175,000 pages of documents and answers to all of the questions that have been asked.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier. The Premier loves conversation, and she has the panels to prove it. Now there are 30 groups looking at everything from new tolls and taxes to undoing the damage to the horse racing industry.

Now the Premier is saying she wants a panel on openness. Will she show commitment to openness, Speaker, by coming to the justice committee and explaining why she signed off on a decision that clearly favoured a private power company?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Apart from the tone of the question, I just want to say that I think it's very, very important that government pay attention to people's opinions, that we engage with people, that we get feedback from people outside of government. That is how I have operated as a politician; that is how I will operate as a Premier.

Whether the leader of the third party thinks it's important or not to have people with expertise give us advice, we do believe it's important. We think that it's a very good thing to have people who understand a particular sector, or a particular issue, as, for an example, the open government process. I think it's a good thing for them to give us advice on engagement with the public, and I look forward to that process, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, maybe the Premier and the Liberals should have been listening to the council in Oakville back in March 2009, when they

passed a resolution trying to block the gas plant from being built in the first place.

Ontario families are looking for some real answers about their sky-high hydro bills, not conversation after conversation after conversation. Ontario's Auditor General specifically raised a decision that the Premier was part of, in her report on the Oakville gas plant. This government has created such a mess in energy planning that the Premier was signing documents that gave private power companies huge advantages instead of protecting families who pay the bills.

Will the Premier be returning to the justice committee to explain why she was a part of a decision that gave private power companies the upper hand, or is her new openness panel just another smokescreen?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just want to say to the leader of the third party that I agree with her. I have said many, many times that had we paid better attention, had we had a better upfront process in the location of those gas plants, then we would not have made the mistakes that were made. I've said that quite openly, that having a better community process is part of what needed to happen and needs to happen going forward. That's why we're putting a new process in place.

As for the justice committee, I haven't received an invitation, but I have been to the justice committee. I have answered many, many questions in the House and at committee. I have explained my role. If there is new information that's sought, I would be happy to answer that question, but I have been there, and I have not yet received another invitation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, fixing a community process is never going to get rid of the Liberals' penchant for their own self-interests ahead of the interests of Ontarians. That's what Liberals do all the time.

Last week, Ontarians found out that they had seen their electricity bills—were going to see their electricity bills, rather—keep growing faster than the rate of inflation in this province. It's getting harder for them to pay the bills already, and they deserve the answers, Speaker. They deserve to know why the Premier gave up legal protections for ratepayers and gave the upper hand to the private power company.

Will the Premier come to the gas plants committee and explain her decision to protect the interests of private power companies instead of the interests of people and businesses who are stuck paying the highest hydro bills in this country?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have said, I have been to the committee, and I have answered many, many questions, and I have not received an invitation from the committee at this point.

But, Mr. Speaker, when we came into office, the energy system in this province was in disarray. It had been left in disarray. There were huge investments needed in distribution. The capacity, and the generation capacity, was not what it needed to be.

We have made huge improvements in the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please.

The member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell will receive the same advice, or the question, that I asked the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. If you were in your seat, I'd tell you the same thing I'm going to tell you now: Come to order. She's asking; she's answering.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: So, Mr. Speaker, the investments that we have made in the energy system have made it more stable, and it's work that absolutely had to be done. As far as our commitment to green energy—that we are leaders in terms of the North American continent and making sure that we have clean, renewable energy going forward, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud of our record.

I have said clearly that there were mistakes that were made, and, contrary to what the leader of the third party is saying, I do believe that a better community process actually produces a better outcome. That's why we're putting one in place.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My question is for the Premier. Premier, you sat at the cabinet table and signed the document which authorized your Liberal government to waste over \$1 billion of taxpayer money to cancel two power plants. Over the past eight months, you have stated that your government reacted out of respect for the local communities' opposition to these power plants. If you haven't noticed, 73 municipalities in Ontario have declared themselves unwilling hosts, but despite your promises, wind projects continue to be approved for communities that do not want them. Since when did a person's postal code determine whether they receive respect or contempt from your government?

1100

Premier, about 200 tractors—excuse me; I was out in the rain with these folks on the weekend. About 200 tractors, trucks and cars made their way down a 30-kilometre stretch of Highway 402 to get your attention. Premier, will you recognize that—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the member opposite absolutely makes the point that I was making in response to the leader of the third party, which is that it is very important to have a good community process. The process that the Minister of Energy is putting in place, which identifies willing hosts and gives communities more input into the process upfront—that is exactly what needs to happen. I would suggest that the work we did on green energy has been very, very positive, and there is a lot to learn from the process that perhaps didn't take communities—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If it's a test, I'll pass it.

Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Back to the Premier. You know what they say: Those who can, do; those who can't, consult and have conversations. Enough is enough. Your government, with the support of the NDP, has lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs because of your botched green energy policies, and you have the audacity to announce another rate hike as of November 1.

Last Friday, I have to tell you, Premier, my constituency assistant helped a family of seven. Their electricity had been cut off because they could not afford to pay their hydro bill. The mother called my office frantic because she had five small children and we had the threat of snow this past weekend in my riding. Thankfully, on a Friday afternoon, we were able to arrange to get the hydro back on, but for how long?

Premier, where are you taking this province? Truthfully, I am dreading this winter in fear of all the people who cannot afford their hydro bills. Is this what you envisioned for Ontario when you took over this role? Are we to expect families not to receive the basic—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please.

Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Mr. Paul Miller: Who deregulated hydro?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let's not get wound up before I even get a chance to have her stand. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just say that we have rebuilt over 80% of our electricity system because—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Northumberland—Quinte West is warned.

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That rebuild of 80% of the electricity system had to happen because when we came into office it was not reliable, it had been neglected and that work needed to be done. On top of that, our plan for green energy has eliminated dirty coal, it has created more than 31,000 jobs—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Sarnia—Lambton is warned.

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: And it has generated \$24 billion in investments.

I absolutely take to heart—and I'm glad that the member opposite was able to work with her constituent to make sure that her constituent had power. But that power is available because we've reworked the energy system and we have capacity in order to provide that electricity.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Premier. This government dealt a death blow to the horse racing

industry under the pretext of OLG modernization. OLG modernization is simply a Liberal code for more casinos, but Ontarians have been very clear that they don't want casinos in their communities. Last week, the city of Vaughan voted to reject being a host site for a casino, and now the doors are quickly shutting to the possibility of a casino anywhere in the GTA.

Will the Premier listen to the communities and the people of Ontario and admit that OLG modernization is a giant, total, abysmal failure?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question, and I appreciate the premise of the question, recognizing some of the concerns that exist going forward with regard to the transformation of the OLG and our gaming. We recognize how important it is to be socially responsible. We recognize also the great degree of dividend and support that the OLG provides for schools and hospitals and investments in our communities. We also appreciate and respect municipal decisions, and that's what we have done all along.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: Back to the Premier: The Slots at Racetracks Program brought in \$1.1 billion a year in government revenue. By cancelling the SARP, this government has destroyed an entire industry in southern and rural Ontario for the profit of big casino conglomerates. But Ontarians don't want casinos in their communities; they want racetracks.

Isn't it time to admit you made a mistake? Reinstate the Slots at Racetracks Program until you figure out a fair and transparent plan for horse racing and casinos in Ontario.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: In fact, Mr. Speaker, the plan that we have put in place is an accountable and transparent plan. We owe a lot to former members John Snobelen, Elmer Buchanan and John Wilkinson. They have worked with the industry to put in place a plan that will allow for a sustainable industry.

The SARP was neither transparent, nor was it accountable, so it would be irresponsible for us to move back there. But what we want is a sustainable industry across the province. All of the tracks in the province, whether they're part of the core or whether they're part of the grassroots, will have an opportunity to present a business plan, work with OLG and have a sustainable future. That was our goal, and that's what we have put in place.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. Speaker, the Friday before Thanksgiving, I had the opportunity to join Mayor Watson, members of council and a number of colleagues from Queen's Park at an event to mark the start of boring the tunnel for Ottawa's light rail project. It was truly an exciting day for Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, even with this exciting news in Ottawa, there is a lot of interest in the transit debate that's happening here in Toronto. In fact, many Ontarians want to know how the government is helping to build the future of transportation infrastructure in the province's largest city.

Having said that, residents of Ottawa South want to know how this government is going to help Ottawa move forward. Recently, Mayor Watson called for a massive transit plan to get cars off the street and citizens to the places they need to be in an efficient manner. To the minister: What have we done to get Ottawa moving?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: We are investing, and have invested since we've come to government, \$1.8 billion in the city of Ottawa. I believe that is an unprecedented investment in that community, Mr. Speaker, and I think that's due to the very hard work of a number of Liberal MPPs from that constituency who are delivering for the community.

The Confederation Line, which the member from Ottawa South has been a big champion of, is moving forward. It's a very significant contribution. It is part of over \$1 billion of investment in rapid transit alone, and \$600 million just to the bus rapid transit system.

Mr. Speaker, we often get asked what the jobs policy is. This investment is creating 20,000 person-years of work in Ottawa and creating the foundation for major private sector job creation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: It's very good news to hear that transportation funding is a priority and that projects are under way in Ottawa. Residents of Ottawa South will be glad to know that this government is helping municipalities like Ottawa to build the transit we need. There are many small to mid-sized cities that need a steady flow of funding to finance transit infrastructure. I know that we are committed to assisting all regions and all cities to get every single Ontarian to work and home as fast as possible.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to my constituents and to all Ontarians in small to mid-sized cities to know that they can count on funding to support their demands for their public transportation system. Can the minister tell us what we're going to do as a government to ensure that there is steady funding to help municipalities outside the GTHA?

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Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, if you understand the importance of infrastructure, you just have to look out the windows of the Legislature. The biggest commercial boom in construction is going on in the history of this city. It is estimated that half of all the construction cranes in North America are at work right now in the GTHA alone. That is a remarkable record.

It extends beyond Toronto, and I mentioned the huge investments in Ottawa. A small community like Ignace in northwestern Ontario has clean water because this government rebuilt its water treatment plant. In a community as small as Burpee Mills township, there are \$178,000

going to build a critical road in that community that will help revitalize that community. In Cobalt, almost \$2 million is being invested right now in basic road infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. We are building jobs and opportunities across Ontario.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question this morning is for the Premier. As you know, Premier, my Bill 74 takes a firm stand in support of Ontario workers and in support of an Ontario company. Premier, on September 9, you spoke in support, saying, "It's about a level playing field, and it's a very good example of the kind of thing where we find agreement"—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Attorney General.

Mr. Monte McNaughton:—"and we should be able to move forward." Premier, you were all-in. But on October 2, you stated, "I will not be supporting it, assuming that the decision is not appealed. So that's the decision."

Premier, you have both flipped and flopped. But the time for clarity is now, and thousands of workers at EllisDon are eager for your word. With the decision being officially appealed, Premier, will you resume your support of my important bill, or will you renege on your word in favour of foreign corporations over Ontario workers?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As the member opposite knows, the Divisional Court has made a ruling that quashed the decision of the OLRB, Mr. Speaker, so the company can continue to operate as it did prior to the OLRB case. From my perspective, and I have said this because circumstances have changed, the urgency that was created by that labour board decision has been removed by the Divisional Court decision.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Well, Premier, just to reiterate your quote, you said, "I will not be supporting it, assuming that the decision is not appealed." That was your word, Premier.

Your lack of leadership and lack of decisiveness have risked an Ontario success story and thousands of Ontario construction jobs. My Bill 74 will maintain the status quo for EllisDon and will settle this issue once and for all. Premier, you stated that you would not be supporting my bill—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Attorney General will come to order—second time.

Mr. Monte McNaughton:—assuming it was not appealed. However, despite the appeal, you have chosen to stand with foreign construction companies instead of Ontario workers. Based on your past statements, it is obvious that your government expects the Divisional Court ruling to hold. Premier, when did you tell the sheet metal workers and the electrical workers that you expect their appeal to fail, and why do you refuse to stand up for

EllisDon and their thousands of employees all across Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the member opposite knows full well that there has been no appeal granted at this point. There's a leave to appeal before the court. I believe that the circumstances have changed. The Divisional Court has quashed the ruling by the OLRB, Mr. Speaker. Because of that, I believe that the urgency that was in place because of that OLRB decision is no longer in place.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, last spring, well-connected insiders hired by EllisDon had legislation crafted so they could escape a contract that they had with their employees. The Conservatives proposed it but the Liberals enthusiastically supported it, and the Premier agreed to speed it through this very House. Now she's scrambling to distance herself from the very bill that she championed.

Can the Premier tell us what today's position is on the EllisDon bill?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think I just answered this question, Mr. Speaker, but I'm now going to answer it again. As the member opposite knows, the Divisional Court quashed the ruling of the labour relations board. The fact that the company can now continue to operate as it did before the OLRB ruling, I believe, changed the circumstances. We believe that the bill is no longer needed and that the urgency that was in place because of the OLRB decision is no longer there.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: The Premier's position on this has more loops and turns than a roller coaster. What's more and more clear is that the Premier will say and do anything to help the Liberal Party.

First she championed the bill, passed it unanimously and put it on the fast track. Then she tried to convince the unions to abandon their right to appeal. Then, when they called her bluff, she zigzagged again, and now she claims she's going to oppose it. What assurances do people have that the Premier won't flip-flop yet again when the lobbyists from EllisDon come knocking?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have always believed that if one takes a position under a certain set of circumstances and then those circumstances change, the intelligent response is to reassess the position. If the circumstances don't change, then you don't need to reassess the position.

The circumstances changed. The urgency that was in place is no longer in place, and so I believe that the piece of legislation is no longer required.

IMMIGRANTS

Mr. Vic Dhillon: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. The Ontario provincial nominee program, known as the PNP, is a valuable immi-

grant selection program that allows Ontario to nominate economic immigrants for permanent residency.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, that will do.

Mr. John Yakabuski: "Circumstances change." No, really. "Circumstances change."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Really, that will do. If I have to get louder just because the member refuses to hear what I'm asking, then I will get specific. I've asked him to refrain.

Mr. John Yakabuski: A jellyfish response.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is the member from Renfrew choosing to ignore me?

Mr. John Yakabuski: No.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good. Please finish.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I just recently learned that the federal government has capped Ontario's yearly nomination at only 1,300 nominees. I was also surprised to learn that no new PNP applications have been accepted since August.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: How is our government ensuring that we select the best and brightest economic immigrants to fill the skilled labour gaps that exist in Ontario?

Hon. Michael Coteau: The member is correct. The federal government has capped our provincial nominee program here in our province at 1,300. The federal government can do better. Ontario deserves more.

Ontario has little say from the federal government on economic immigrants who are selected to enter our province. Of the 99,000 people who immigrated to Ontario in 2012, we had a selection of less than 1.5%, and that's not great.

If you consider what's happening in Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan: Last year the Alberta government had 11% selection, immigrant selection in Manitoba was 28% and in Saskatchewan, it was 34%.

Ontario's Immigration Strategy spells out the need for Ontario to have greater say in selecting skilled immigrants here in our province. By selecting highly skilled immigrants to fill positions in our labour force, Ontario will be able to grow its workforce to create more jobs in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Vic Dhillon: Many Ontarians do not know that our province is not being given its fair share of PNP spaces. I understand that the minister has written to his federal counterpart to request additional PNP spots. Many employers and investors are looking to come to Ontario and will be glad that our government is advocating for more selections through the PNP program.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Could you please address the misconception that bringing in skilled immigrants to Ontario negatively contributes to our economy and to more unemployed Ontarians?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to thank the member from Brampton West for his great question.

Our government is committed to economic growth, and believes that an educated, skilled and diverse workforce in Ontario is one of our greatest strengths. A diverse economy in our province is good for Ontario and great for this country. It's about bringing the best and brightest here to our province.

Since 2010, Ontario has nominated more than 2,000 international PhD and master's students for permanent residency through our provincial nominee program; 25 Ontario hospitals and health centres have used this program to retain specialists, doctors and nurses to better provide health services here in our province; and half of Ontario's universities have used the program to retain world-class professors and deliver better education here in the province.

Mr. Speaker, our government believes that the time has come for Ontario to redefine its shared immigration relationship with Ottawa so we can best position this province for success.

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ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. This weekend and this month, we're celebrating Small Business Week in Ontario. Small businesses, the heart and soul of job creation, are struggling to make ends meet here in Premier Wynne's Ontario. You've already taxed hard-working tradespeople by slapping on a new 576% trades tax, courtesy of your Bay Street bureaucracy, the College of Trades.

Section 7, Minister, of the College of Trades act, allows your College of Trades to tax employers for membership. Will you stand in the House today and promise employers that they will never have to pay the trades tax by the College of Trades?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to respond to that question. In fact, we were very, very clear some time ago, when we waived that provision for employers, so that employers are not paying membership; I don't know why the member would want to confuse them today and almost make them believe that they are. Employers are currently exempt when it comes to membership for the College of Trades. We did that for a good reason.

I'm pleased to say, Mr. Speaker, the College of Trades is up and running. They have indeed reduced ratios for apprenticeships more than every government in this Legislature on all sides of the House combined over the last 20 years. So they've made some great progress to date. We're confident that they'll continue to do that, and we're very confident that they'll continue to listen very carefully to the business community as they carry on their responsibilities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you, Minister. You waived it for one year, 2013. We don't know what's happening after that.

Only in Premier Wynne's Ontario would slapping a new trades tax on employers be the best way to celebrate Small Business Week.

Meridian Credit Union, Ontario's largest credit union, recently conducted a small business survey with Harris/Decima. The survey found that 75% of Ontario small businesses in Premier Wynne's Ontario have no plans to hire people next year. Your trades tax for employers will further punish these small businesses.

The difference is clear: The Ontario PCs, on this side of the House, stand up for small businesses on Ontario's Main Streets; the Liberals, on that side of the House, stand up for their multi-million dollar College of Trades bureaucracy on Bay Street.

Small Business Week is your golden opportunity, once and for all, to confirm that employers will never pay your trades tax. Minister, it's either Main Street or Bay Street. Will Main Street small businesses ever have to pay your Bay Street trades tax?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The rhetoric and fear mongering aside, we very deliberately did not proclaim section 7, and the member knows that. We have no intentions of doing so. We've been clear about that, we've indicated that, and I think that's important.

I suggest the member, from time to time—and I think he has already had an opportunity. He has been able to contact the new chair of the College of Trades, David Tsubouchi, an esteemed former colleague in this House, an esteemed former cabinet minister of his party. I'm very confident that Mr. Tsubouchi is going to do a fantastic job as our chair. I would hope that the member opposite would share that confidence in this fine gentleman, a former colleague of his, who we think is going to do a tremendous job for the trades in the province of Ontario.

We're very proud of how far the College of Trades has gone—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Brad Duguid: There's a lot more work to be done, and we think Mr. Tsubouchi is just the fellow to lead us there.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Last Tuesday, I was invited out to the horse races in Fort Erie. It was a bittersweet day for the community because in spite of the proud Niagara racing tradition, this Liberal government has decided that the Fort Erie Race Track doesn't deserve a 117th racing season. What does the Premier have to say to horse people, track workers and the community members about what her government plans to do to shut down horse racing at the Fort Erie Race Track?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me say, Mr. Speaker, categorically that that is not true. I have every confidence

that if Fort Erie Race Track wants to develop a business plan and work with the OLG, they can have a future, but it will be a different future than the present situation. That is the reality.

We have said all along that the horse racing industry needed to change, that the Slots at Racetracks Program was not accountable, was not sustainable.

Let me just read what some of the people who are in the horse racing industry have said about our plan. Mr. Ted Clarke from Grand River Raceway: "It's remarkably better than what our outlook was a year ago today. We essentially went from a place of having no relationship with government and no support to a place where we now have a spot to make a plan. This provides a new set of building blocks to move forward. We have been given some tools with which to work, and hopefully we can put them to good work."

The people in the industry see a way forward, and we are looking forward to working with them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, nobody in Fort Erie can understand why the Liberal government has decided that their community doesn't deserve a viable future in horse racing—not track CEO Jim Thibert or Fort Erie Mayor Doug Martin; not the jockeys or the concession stand workers; not the kitchen staff, the stable workers, maintenance, security, the mutual desk operators or the suppliers; not the horse owners, the fans or the bugler who calls out the post time—and not the veteran groomer of 36 seasons who pulled me aside and asked me to deliver a simple message to the Premier: Will the government see the light and save horse racing at the historic Fort Erie Race Track?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The panel who did an in-depth look at how we could put a sustainable plan in place noted that they urged the government to work with Fort Erie to develop an alternative and sustainable plan. There is nothing written in stone that says that Fort Erie doesn't have a future.

I understand the politics of what the leader of the third party is doing right now; I understand that. But it is not responsible of us to suggest that something that has not been accountable and has not been transparent, which was the Slots at Racetracks Program, should continue.

We have got a plan in place—and I have a copy of the plan here; I can send it over to the leader of the third party—because the plan that was in place, the program that was in place, was not sustainable. We've put a sustainable plan in place. We look forward to working with Fort Erie so that they can put a new plan in place.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the minister responsible for seniors affairs. Today there are nearly 200,000 Ontarians who have a form of dementia. In my recent visit at Mon Sheong long-term-care facility, both the caregivers and the families expressed concern about dementia.

As the minister is well aware, statistics show that three out of five people with dementia will go missing at some point in time. Sadly, statistics also show that 50% of those who go missing for 24 hours have a serious risk of death or injury from exposure, hypothermia or drowning.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can he please explain to the Legislature what the government is doing to address this growing concern?

Hon. Mario Sergio: My thanks to the member from Scarborough—Agincourt for her very deep understanding and compassion with respect to this very serious issue.

In March of this year, in partnership with the Alzheimer Society of Ontario, we launched a groundbreaking multicultural safety awareness program named Finding Your Way, a wandering prevention program aimed at people with dementia who may go wandering and go missing. As part of this program, the Alzheimer Society will distribute kits that include tips and resources to families and caregivers for preventing wandering incidents and acting quickly in cases of missing seniors.

Our government is very committed to providing funding for the Ontario Police College to develop and deliver training that incorporates wandering prevention into the police curriculum for quick, better and effective response.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Soo Wong: I'd like to thank the minister for his response. I know that my constituents in Scarborough—Agincourt and across Ontario are pleased to hear that the government is taking action, increasing the safety of Ontarians with dementia.

During many meetings with constituents, I often hear about initiatives such as the one the minister talked about, the Finding Your Way wandering prevention program. However, many family members and caregivers are unaware of what exactly is in the Finding Your Way kits to assist in preventing wandering or enhance community response when a senior goes missing.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can he please elaborate on the contents of the wandering prevention kits?

Hon. Mario Sergio: The safety kit will help families and caregivers establish a plan to ensure the safety, independence and dignity of an individual.

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The kits, by the way, are available in English, French, Chinese and Punjabi, and they include:

- a personal ID page that can be shared with police in an emergency;

- instructions on what to do when a person with dementia goes missing;

- the latest information on locating devices;

- instructions on how to safety-proof your home and immediate environment to prevent a person with dementia from going missing;

- as well, a list of important tips on what to do when reunited after a missing incident.

Speaker, Ontarians can contact the Alzheimer Society—one of the 38 societies across our province—through

Ontario 211 to obtain a kit. As well, it's available by downloading it.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question to the Premier is around jobs and the economy. Premier, as you know, the Fort Erie Race Track is 116 years old. It survived two world wars. It survived the Great Depression, but it's not going to survive the McGuinty-Wynne Liberal government.

I look at everything for what it will do to create jobs, to grow our economy. You seem to want to close down the tracks and toss people out of work. Let me be absolutely clear about this: I fought for that track. I fought to keep it open. We gave it a 10-year lease on life, and I plan to do it again. I hope that we're on the same page on this, but let me test that out. Folks in Fort Erie reject this notion of a festival meet, the notion of a small-town rural fair where you drive the ponies in, you drive them out and you lose the jobs. That's not good enough for me. It's not good enough for the industry. It is not good enough for the people of Niagara. Will you commit to a full racing season next year to give some life to this community and give them back their jobs?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The starting point for this discussion is that the Slots at Racetracks Program was not sustainable; it was not accountable. It was not going to be sustainable over the long term.

The fact is that we have a plan. It's a five-year plan. It's a plan that was put together by people who spent a lot of time with the industry. I agree with the Leader of the Opposition: Fort Erie should have a future. The festival plan was one option that was put forward. What I have said is that Fort Erie needs to work with OLG to come up with an alternative business plan.

But to pretend that somehow what was in place was accountable and sustainable over the long term is just not the case. Don Drummond said that. We needed to put a new plan in place, and we've got a new plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Now, hold on a second. That's where I was born and raised. We all have fond memories of the track. We believe in a future for it. Premier, it was you who took the slots out of the track. It was you who ripped them out. It was you who tossed them out of work. I think all of us are tired of the NDP piping up on this issue because, quite frankly, they propped you up. They signed the deal and [*inaudible*] their own paycheques. Half the job losses are on your back and half the job losses—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. I'll wait. Thank you.

Please finish.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I fought for the track. I kept it open. I'm proud of that and would do it again. We've got a plan to do it. I've appointed Randy Pettapiece as our lead on this issue. He's got a plan.

This is a track, according to your own Sadinsky report, with the second-highest wagering in Ontario. It had 78 full race dates this past year. Your plan is to put them on the road to closure.

Let me ask you this: You're the Minister of Agriculture as well as the Premier. Will you agree to sit down with Randy Pettapiece and I to actually give life to that track, move it forward and ensure our sustainability—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have fought to get horse racing on a sustainable footing, Mr. Speaker. I have made it clear to the OLG that it will be integrated into the overall gaming strategy, and that is what will put it on a sustainable footing.

I know that the member for Perth-Wellington was at Grand River when we made the announcement. He knows that the horse racing industry is on a more sustainable footing than it was a year ago—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The chippy comments that come in almost like drive-by heckling are not helpful when I'm trying to get control. But also, I know your voices by now, and I know who to come to. So I'm asking that it stop. And member from Nepean-Carleton, please don't shout the Premier down. Thank you.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: On the subject of festival meets, I would just remind the Leader of the Opposition that the Kentucky Derby is a festival meet.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

CANCER TREATMENT

Ms. Sarah Campbell: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care: Last week my constituent Wes Bland was in the news across Ontario because of the roadblocks he faced in accessing a doctor-ordered PET scan. Mr. Bland was forced to make the long six-hour drive to Thunder Bay instead of a much shorter trip to Winnipeg. My office has been in regular touch with the minister's office since September, alerting her to the urgency of Mr. Bland's case and the problems he was experiencing accessing cancer care.

Can the minister please explain why her office didn't take steps to ensure that Mr. Bland could access the care

he needed quickly and close to home despite the minister's knowledge that he was being denied this care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member for the question. I must say, I'm a bit surprised at this question because she and I had a very good conversation, I thought, last week about what had happened and why this particular patient was unfortunately directed to the wrong place for the scan that he needed. Unfortunately, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority sent out information to physicians in Manitoba that was not accurate. We've identified the problem, and we have corrected that problem.

I am absolutely committed, as I told the member last week, that everyone in this province get access to excellent care. If they live in northwestern Ontario, and that care is available in Manitoba, then we cover that care. So if they're entitled to the care here in Ontario, they will get it in Manitoba. We've taken the appropriate steps to ensure this does not happen again.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: First of all, I need to say I appreciate that the minister did take some time and talk to me about this issue. But the problem is that, despite the minister's assurances that the problem is "fixed" or, as she just said, "corrected," Manitoba Health continues to insist that Ontario patients will still have to seek prior approval for out-of-province procedures such as PET scans, as stated in their memo. The minister has said that she has fixed the problem, but has she really fixed the problem when people will continue to wait weeks for approval for out-of-province PET scans or when they're actually forced to go to the Toronto Star so that care is provided in a timely and close-to-home manner?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I do my best to do my job in the province of Ontario. To the best I know, my responsibility does not extend to the province of Manitoba. They have set up this rule in Manitoba. It is their rule, not our rule.

I am committed, as I told the member last week, to do what needs to be done at a ministry-to-ministry level to smooth that system for the patients of northeastern Ontario—

Interjection.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —northwestern Ontario. As I said earlier, they deserve to get the care that someone in Ontario is entitled to, and if Manitoba is closer, that's where they get it. So we'll continue to work with the government of Manitoba and the authorities there to make sure that the people in northwestern Ontario get the care they need.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My question is for the Minister of Research and Innovation. Ontario's capacity to compete in the global knowledge-based economy depends on our ability to harness our research strengths, encourage innovation and provide support to entrepreneurs. Local business leaders I've met with in Scarborough tell me

that Ontario needs to remain a leader in entrepreneurship to keep our economy strong, and this will create jobs for tomorrow.

Given the challenges in the global economy, it is more important than ever that we take action that helps turn great ideas into thriving companies and new jobs. Can the minister tell us what action the government is taking to ensure that entrepreneurs are getting the support they need and that programs are easily accessible to them?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I would like to thank the member from Scarborough–Rouge River for that important question.

Entrepreneurship and innovation are at the heart of our government's jobs and economy strategy. One of our initiatives is the Ontario Network of Entrepreneurs, made up of three networks. The first is our 57 small business enterprise centres that are located in municipalities and help small businesses at the local level. The second one is our network of regional innovation centres, which serve to coordinate the work of all actors at the regional level. The third and last one is the business advisory service, which provides consultation and mentorship to grow businesses.

Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of our government's investments, which support entrepreneurs and innovators across our province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound on a point of order.

Mr. Bill Walker: Just a reminder that the Ontario Dental Association will be hosting a sports mouthguard fitting clinic in room 340 from 12 to 5 today. It's open to all MPPs and staff.

A further reminder that the Legiskaters play their first game of the season this Thursday at 5 p.m. against the firefighters at the Ricoh Coliseum.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Huron–Bruce on a point of order.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'd like to welcome Amanda Garofalo to the assembly. She is an intern with the Ontario legislative intern program. It's great to have her working in Huron–Bruce.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Then I'll do my reminder: Don't forget the wine tasting is this evening at 5 o'clock. You can't forget that.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1141 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Robert Bailey: In the west members' gallery is a guest from Lambton county, from Sarnia–Lambton, Warden Todd Case. Accompanying him are the CAO of Lambton county, Ron Van Horne, and the county treasurer, John Innes; and also another special guest, Myles Vanni, executive director of the Inn of the Good Shepherd. I'd like to ask everyone to give them a warm welcome to the Legislature today.

Mr. Michael Prue: I would like to introduce Mr. Douglas Wong, who is an intern in my office. He just started last week, and he's doing a terrific job.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm privileged to welcome former MPP John Cleary's wife and family, who are in the east gallery: Elizabeth and their four children, Sharon, Donna, Debbie and John.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome. When I was first elected, he was my seatmate; I sat right beside him.

Further introductions?

Mr. Jim McDonell: Again, I'd like to welcome my assistant from Cornwall, who is up today, Marilyn McMahon, and her sister, who is here—it just escapes me. Thank you. Della.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We'll put it on record. Della; right? Thank you.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

BUTTER TART CONTEST

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: This past weekend I had the honour of being one three judges. I was joined by Mr. Rick Norlock, MP for Northumberland–Quinte West, and Mrs. Carol Darling, who is an expert judge and baker herself. I can attribute a few pounds that I'm carrying today to Mrs. Darling.

We were at the first annual amateur butter tart contest, held at the Legion in the beautiful village of Hastings. It was a very tasty event that showcased some of the finest butter tarts, not only in Northumberland–Quinte West but in the province as a whole. As my seatmate, Mr. Pettapiece, pointed out, it is his riding of Perth–Wellington that began the Butter Tart Trail, so I would like to acknowledge that. I'm hoping that Hastings can become a part of this wonderful tour.

I would also like to congratulate Mrs. Jacqueline Beamish, who was my grade 3 teacher, for taking home not only first prize in the contest but also the people's choice award. I would also like to thank Skye Morrison, Greg Evans and all the volunteers who made the first annual butter tart contest a great success. I know, from the turnout and the quality of the wares, that the second annual butter tart contest will be an even greater success, and I would encourage all the members to come to Hastings next year and enjoy the butter tarts.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): My glucose count went up just listening to it.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. John Vanthof: The Local Food Act may soon be passed into law, but the reality is, because of the way the Premier structured the bill, it will not be known for years if it will have any impact whatsoever on Ontarians' access to local food. The same cannot be said about the

draft CETA agreement signed by the federal government and the European Union. Although the agreement has the potential to create winners in the economy, some of the losers are already clear: local food, especially fine cheese.

The agreement will allow the amount of cheese imported into this country from Europe to double. Ontario dairy farmers who supply the milk to make Canadian cheese are obvious losers.

While this agreement does set a troubling precedent for supply management and the marketing regime under which dairy farmers operate, that same system is uniquely equipped to cushion the blow for individual farms. Dairy farmers pool their costs and their incomes. If markets decline by 2% because of CETA, every dairy farmer will take a 2% production and corresponding income cut—a serious blow, but not a knockout punch.

The future for some small Ontario cheese makers is not as certain. Since increased imports will be targeted to specific markets, Ontario cheese makers who supply these markets will not be able to compete against subsidized European cheese and may be forced out of business. There is no pooling mechanism for the cheese maker. Ontario could lose access to some of the local cheeses that they have come to love.

Will the Premier and Minister of Agriculture commit to stand up for dairy farmers and cheese makers to ensure that great cheese continues to be made in Ontario? They need more than goals, targets and talk.

JEAN AUGUSTINE GIRLS' LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise today to speak about the pleasure of opening and renaming a school in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt, the Jean Augustine Girls' Leadership Academy. This school is for girls in grades four to seven and includes academic and extra-curricular choices that encourage girls to be tomorrow's leaders. The girls at the Jean Augustine Girls' Leadership Academy receive mentorship and become advocates in both local and international issues. I've been involved with the Jean Augustine Girls' Leadership Academy from the very beginning, and I'm very proud of the teachers, staff and students who have made this program a success.

I also wanted to pay special tribute to Jean Augustine, for whom this school was renamed. The Honourable Jean Augustine was an elementary school principal. As many of you know, this former member of federal Parliament for Etobicoke–Lakeshore was also the minister of state for multiculturalism and the status of women from 2002 to 2004. She was also the first African Canadian elected to Parliament. She is currently the Ontario Fairness Commissioner.

In 2009, Jean Augustine received the Order of Canada for her distinguished career as an educator, politician and advocate for social justice in Canada. Jean is an excellent, outstanding role model for girls in my riding of

Scarborough–Agincourt but, more importantly for the new school, the Jean Augustine Girls' Leadership Academy. I offer my congratulations to everyone involved in this new school.

ALICE MUNRO

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I rise today to join a number of my colleagues here in this House to recognize a treasure from Wingham. Just prior to our break for constituency week, a number of people stood up and congratulated Wingham's treasure, Alice Munro, who also has a residence in Clinton, Ontario. It's an absolute joy to hear that the success that she has realized around the world has culminated in being recognized by the Nobel Prize in Literature.

I want to share with you that locally, at home in Huron–Bruce, there are so many other ways that we celebrate Alice Munro. We have a literary garden right next to the museum in Wingham, Ontario. Growing up, going to high school in Wingham, we studied Alice Munro's works and how she interwove all of the local communities into her stories. That was a really good exercise unto itself, but I'd like to say, most importantly, that Alice Munro in her success is inspiring future writers in our community as well.

We now host an Alice Munro writing festival. I'd like to recognize the following people; on September 29, these winners were recognized. In the youth category, there was Julia DaSilva; Dana Mitchell came in second; Bronte Cronsberry came in first. Finn Hogue got an honourable mention, as well as Julia DaSilva. Aidan McKee came in third place. In our senior category, it was great to see a number of entries. Helen Rossiter received first place; Jennifer Hutchison, second; Isobel Raven, third; and an honourable mention went to both Marilyn Kleiber and Susan McCrae.

HENRY MERLING

Miss Monique Taylor: It's with a heavy heart but great pride that I rise today to speak of the passing of a giant in Hamilton politics. Henry Merling passed away this last Thursday at the age of 80. Henry was the ward 7 alderman in Hamilton from 1974 to 1997, but he continued to practise politics until his dying day. He was a force on council and he was a force as a citizen, always standing up for what he believed was right and in the best interests of ward 7 constituents and the city of Hamilton.

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He will be remembered as one of Hamilton's most influential politicians. He cared deeply for the people he represented. People recognized and respected him, and they knew they could always count on Henry.

Henry would visit my desk more or less daily in my former role as the assistant to current city councillor Scott Duvall. He knew the ward inside out and backwards. He knew the people, the developers, the go-getters, the go-to-ers and certainly the best sign locations.

Henry had a hand that could be described as a mitt. When Henry shook your hand, you knew it. He would give it a grip and giggle because he knew he still had it. I will miss his encouragement and him saying to me, "You're doing all right, kid."

Henry leaves behind his wife, Wendy, and his daughter, Katie, and was predeceased by his son, Joey.

Thank you, Henry Merling, for your 24 years-plus of service to the city of Hamilton. You will be greatly missed.

FIONA COWLES

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It is my privilege to stand in the House today to honour Mrs. Fiona Cowles, a tireless volunteer from King township in my riding of Oak Ridges–Markham, who passed away earlier this month.

It is always a pleasure to meet someone with a strong sense of civic responsibility and community spirit. Fiona Cowles was one of these people, and her passing has left those of us who knew her with a strong desire to pay tribute to this remarkable and selfless woman.

Originally from England, Mrs. Cowles moved to King township in 1973 and was involved in many organizations: the Concerned Citizens of King Township, the Oak Ridges Trail Association and the King Township Historical Society, to name a few. Over the years, she served as a passionate advocate for both her community and the environmental issues that she held so dear to her heart.

Earlier this year, Mrs. Cowles was recognized as King township's Citizen of the Year, acknowledging Fiona's generous spirit and the many years that she gave as an employee, a volunteer and a community activist.

Fiona Cowles will be sorely missed. Her passing is a great loss for her family, her friends and her community, and to all of us she is a wonderful example of a life well lived in the spirit of generosity.

CITY OF BURLINGTON

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Last Wednesday, Burlington celebrated the beginning of the 10th anniversary of the signing of its twinning agreement with the city of Apeldoorn, Netherlands, a relationship dating back to that country's liberation in 1945. Ten years ago, Burlington and Apeldoorn signed a memorandum of understanding that would officially twin the cities on the 60th anniversary of the liberation.

Last week, a Dutch delegation including Apeldoorn Mayor John Berends, Dutch Consul General Mr. Anne van Leeuwen and Dutch high school students joined a group of Burlington dignitaries—among them, Burlington mayor Rick Goldring, ward 6 councillor Blair Lancaster, former Burlington mayor Rob MacIsaac, and Burlington's committee chair for Apeldoorn, Arnold Koopman—in beautiful Spencer Smith Park.

They gathered at a granite bench, designed by Dutch artist Gerard van den Berg, that was a gift from the

people of the Netherlands to celebrate this agreement. The group renewed that bond with a symbolic groundbreaking at Apeldoorn Park, formerly Elgin Park.

The city of Burlington hosts an annual celebration of Canada-Netherlands Friendship Day every May, marking the anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands by Canadian Armed Forces.

Happily, Burlington's twinning with Apeldoorn is a friendship that knows no season or end.

SENIORS' AWARDS

Mr. Monte Kwinter: The Ontario Senior Achievement Award honours people who have made an outstanding contribution to their community after the age of 65. This can include voluntary or professional activities in the arts, community service, voluntarism, education and fitness. This morning, I attended a special ceremony at the Lieutenant Governor's suite where the Honourable David C. Onley and the Honourable Mario Sergio, minister responsible for seniors, presented the awards.

I was proud to witness one of my York Centre constituents, Sam Simchovitch, presented with the province's highest recognition for seniors. Sam Simchovitch is a Holocaust survivor who has used his life to showcase his love of languages, translating works of poetry from Yiddish to English. A retired teacher and curator at the Beth Tzedec synagogue museum, he volunteers using his talent for translation to work on exhibitions.

He moved to Canada with his family in 1949 and writes about his experiences. He has had 18 pieces of his writings published, including seven books of poems.

Honouring seniors for their ongoing work and dedication to their communities is part of the Wynne government's commitment to ensuring that seniors in Ontario are properly cared for and have access to services and support that improve their quality of life.

NEIL ORFORD

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's an honour to rise and congratulate one of Dufferin-Caledon's finest educators, Neil Orford, on receiving the Governor General's History Award for Excellence in Teaching. In 2012, Neil was a recipient of the Ontario Premier's Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Neil is an amazing role model not only for his students but also for his community. His innovative approach to teaching history has struck a passion within many students and has led to impressive results, as evidenced by Centre Dufferin District High School taking top position in national history tests.

Initiatives like Mr. Orford's efforts to take students on interactive tours of battlefields in Europe are an example of the enthusiasm he brings teaching history. On these trips, students are asked to compile biographies on soldiers with roots from our local community involved in the battles, and these biographies are then given as additions to the Dufferin County Museum and Archives

online database—the first in Canada, actually. What an amazing initiative, and one that is so rewarding for Centre Dufferin students. Clearly, the impressive honour of receiving the Governor General's History Award for Excellence in Teaching is well deserved.

Mr. Orford has a reputation for inspiring his students to be interested in history, and it shows when you hear the amazing testimonials of his past and present students. I'd like to commend Neil on his incredible dedication and energy and all the amazing work he has done teaching students about the importance of history.

Dufferin-Caledon is proud to have such an amazing teacher like Mr. Orford call our community home. Congratulations, Neil. You deserve it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their comments.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Durham on a point of order.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to introduce a new staff person starting in my office today—he's here in the Legislature—Trent Angiers. Welcome, Trent. Good luck over the next several years.

JOHN CLEARY

Hon. John Gerretsen: Speaker, I believe that you will find that we have unanimous consent to pay tribute to Mr. John Cleary, the former member for Cornwall and Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh riding from 1987 to 2003, with a representative from each caucus speaking for up to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Attorney General is seeking unanimous consent. Do we have unanimous consent to do the tribute? Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Jim McDonell: On October 6, 2012, Ontario lost an advocate for rural issues, and the people of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry lost a humble man and a great friend who worked tirelessly on their behalf. This humble man I speak of is former MPP John Cleary.

John was a big man in stature, but I'd like to tell this House that John Cleary was indeed a modest man, one with a heart of gold, and a real gentleman.

John was born in Northfield Station, now known as Lunenburg, Ontario, the son of Neil and Wilhelmenia Cleary on August 31, 1932. He resided there, continuing to farm, until his death just last year. John loved rural life and its qualities, including the appreciation of family values that it instills.

John met the love of his life, Elizabeth, when they were just 12 years old, marrying her eight years later in 1952. Just last year, on June 21, 2012, they celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. John and Elizabeth have four children: Sharon, Donna, Debbie and John. They are all here today in the gallery. The family has grown to include five grandchildren: Natalie, Chantal, John, Kristina and Alexander; and four great-grandchildren:

Nicholas, Isabelle, Kayden and Grayson. John and Elizabeth's legacy will continue to grow on. His family is here today, and I'd like to reiterate again just how our hearts are with you.

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John was trained as a millwright, and worked for Domtar Fine Papers until he was elected MPP in 1987. In addition to the full-time job at Domtar, he successfully ran a beef farm operation. His children talk of working with him on the farm, putting in long days in the field baling hay, feeding cows and all the other chores that make up a farmer's daily schedule. Anyone who has worked on a beef or dairy farm knows all too well what it's like to work in a mow at 100-plus degrees.

John was a big volunteer in his local community. In 1972, his friend Tom Maloney approached him to run for councillor on Cornwall township municipal council. After much hesitation John finally agreed, and that was the start of a very successful 31 years of holding political office, first as a councillor, then deputy reeve and reeve of South Stormont, and in 1983, warden of the great and historic counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry.

An interesting story about his start in politics and his reluctance to run for the township council: His wife, Elizabeth, is rumored to have suggested that John just tell Tom Maloney to buzz off. Elizabeth must have been very much like my mother, who said a similar thing when somebody talked my father into running in Lancaster township around the same time. In fact, my dad and mom were very good friends with Elizabeth and John, always enjoying each other's company at various county functions, events and conferences.

Then, in 1987, John threw his hat in the ring at the provincial level and served four terms as the local MPP until 2003. This is when I got to know John as the township councillor. We often met with him at his home and at Queen's Park to resolve issues at the township and county level. John was always very approachable and understanding of the issues affecting rural Ontario. In fact, I visited John and Elizabeth just after my election to Queen's Park, and he gave me what I believe to be some very good advice as a newly elected MPP: It was not to forget why I was here and not to forget the people who had elected me, the people of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

John Cleary set a high standard of public service in Cornwall and Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry. With a track record like John's, it was clear that they could never say enough about how respected he was by the residents of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry. John's success was underpinned by his wife, Elizabeth's, and his family's 100% support and by all of his continued efforts to be a caring, honest politician who listened to constituents and followed up on their concerns to make their lives better.

John believed in family, fairness and doing a good, honest day's work. He believed that if you work hard and treat people right, not only will you reap the benefits but so will everyone else around you. John also never forgot the residents of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry who

elected him to be their voice at Queen's Park. They were always in his heart, and he never forgot why he was here and who sent him here. He was here to do his very best for the people. He said many times that his job was to do what the people wanted or needed him to do, and to do right by them.

I'm honoured to have known John Cleary, and I understand why my dad, Bernie, enjoyed his time working behind him. To Elizabeth's and John's family members, my heart and the hearts of the people of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry are with you. Please know that John Cleary will always be remembered with fondness and love. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further tributes? The member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When I arrived here in 2001 as a rookie, this was an intimidating place. I got to meet all the MPPs of that day slowly but surely. One of the last ones I got to meet, actually, was John Cleary. The reason was because he was a quiet and gentle guy. He sat there and didn't say much, but he was always very genuine. When I did get to meet him, I have to say that I admired him very much for his 30 years of public service but also for the way he acted and controlled himself and acted in this Legislature. You would never hear cross words or yelling out, and when he stood up to say something, he meant it from his heart. I think all of us in this place could learn a great lesson from him.

He was a quiet and unassuming man, but he was, most of all, and what you understood almost immediately, beloved by his constituents. He was hard-working and he was constituency-oriented. When we had brief conversations, he would talk about going back to his constituency for the weekend and the many events he would attend and people he would speak with.

He was hugely successful, Mr. Speaker, in his dealings with the people of Cornwall and the area around Cornwall. He was very successful, and you know that. Not only was he elected for 31 years in a row, but he was elected to this place under very trying and difficult circumstances. In 1987, of course, he was first elected in a Liberal wave. Politicians of all stripes in this place come in in great numbers when their party is in ascendance. What he did after that is the true mark of genius of the man. In 1990, when the orange wave swept Ontario, he survived and, actually, his numbers went up. In 1995, when a Conservative wave swept Ontario, he survived, and his numbers went up. In 1999, when redistribution affected all of the ridings of Ontario and he lost his riding—or at least a part of it—he had to go head to head with a very famous Conservative by the name of Noble Villeneuve, and he beat him. So you can see that a politician who was beloved by his constituents and did his constituency work got elected not only in a wave but survived three things that would have probably done in most other politicians.

He always, in this place, stood up for his riding. Whenever he spoke or said anything, it was about his

riding and the people who lived in his riding and the influence that he had on them and that they, in turn, had on him.

He always did what he thought was right. He would take on the government of the day, who, when I was first here, was the Conservative government. But he didn't think twice if he thought his own party was doing the wrong thing—speaking against them, too. I remember, on one occasion, he was said to have spoken against his own leader when the Liberals were saying what John thought were unfair things about then-Premier Mike Harris.

I want to talk about his family, who are here today. The family obviously has had to make a great many sacrifices over the years. To his wife, Elizabeth; his children, Sharon, Donna, Deborah and John; and I understand friends are here today, Marilyn McMahon and Tom Ayerst: They are here not only because they love John, but they are here in tribute to what their family meant, I'm sure, to all of them. The weeks that John would be away; the travel home on Thursday or Friday, to get all the way there and then turn around on Sunday and come all the way back; the missed family events that I'm sure occurred—we are grateful in this House to his legacy of honesty. We are grateful in this House to his legacy of integrity. He is an example of a steady, quiet-reflection kind of guy. He was an example to all of the members of all parties of how we should behave in this place.

On behalf of Andrea Horwath and the NDP, we would like to thank John and his family—the Cleary family—for the commitments that were made to public service, but, most importantly, we want to thank them for the integrity that John brought to this job.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further tributes?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I'm honoured to represent the government caucus as we pay tribute to John Cleary, one of the most successful politicians in the history of Cornwall and Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry counties.

Once again, in the members' gallery, we have his wife, Elizabeth, and his children, Sharon, Donna, Deborah and John. I would invite all the members to the government House leader's office after the tribute here today for a reception, so you get an opportunity to meet the family members at that point in time.

As has already been stated, he was elected and re-elected, provincially and locally, for 31 years. As a matter of fact, the first time he got elected was in 1972, which, coincidentally, was also my first election.

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From the Cornwall Standard Freeholder, in an interview that he gave in 2009, he said the following: "What was the most exciting electoral victory for you?" I think all of us can relate to that. It's always the first one: The first time you put your name forward and get elected. This is what he said—and it sort of coincides with what was said earlier. This is him talking to the Cornwall Standard Freeholder: "Going back to day one, I had been appointed to a tribunal for drainage and fences by the

municipality. We had to settle disputes. Some got the idea I was doing a half-decent job, and they got the idea I should run for council. My wife Elizabeth wasn't happy—four kids, farm, working at the paper mill, and sometimes having upwards of 70-80 head of cattle" to deal with. "My dad came to talk to her," and he said to her, "Don't worry! Him running against that bunch in there a long time! You don't have to worry!" He won't win. On election night, he led the polls. That was John Cleary in every way, Speaker.

As has already been mentioned, he was warden of the county at one point in time. He was reeve of Cornwall township council. He was elected here in 1990, 1995, 1999, and up until his retirement in 2003. As a matter of fact, he was first elected in 1987. His last election was an interesting one—Mr. Prue has already mentioned that today—in that he ran against a formidable candidate, the Minister of Agriculture at the time, Noble Villeneuve, also a well-known name in that particular part of eastern Ontario. Even though the Conservatives won in a landslide, he won quite handily.

As a matter of fact, the very first person that I ever spoke to after my election in elected office was John Cleary. You may recall that in 1995 there was this great expectation that the Liberals were going to form government. That's why many of us ran at that point in time, to be quite honest about it. When that didn't happen, quite frankly I didn't hear from anybody here for at least a week or so. I think everybody was just too darned tired out or they were just too disappointed in not being elected into government.

I remember phoning the whip's office, and John's office used to be right next to the opposition whip's office on the third floor of this building. I talked to the whip and I said, "Are there any members around?" She said, "Oh, yes. John Cleary is right next door. I'll get him for you." I talked to John, and I said, "John, I'm John Gerretsen. I'm from Kingston." He said, "Oh, yes. I've heard of you. You're the city slicker from Kingston; that's right." But we're all from eastern Ontario, as Steve Clark would well understand. I said, "When are you going to have a meeting?" He said, "I don't know, but one of these days I'm sure we'll have a meeting, and I guess, with everything that's going on today, we'll just have to make the most of it."

He was one of those individuals that was truly a local politician in every sense of the word, because the other thing he said—and I think many of us that have served in public life, both provincially and locally, can attest to this. When he was asked what he would rather do, be a municipal politician or in provincial politics—most of us don't want to say this when we're here in provincial politics. He said that municipal is by far the best. It is very close to the people. If you were a reeve or a mayor now, if you wanted to do something, you got it done, and it doesn't always work that way at Queen's Park all that quickly.

I'll just leave that at that. I can totally identify with that. Certainly it shows you what kind of a gentleman John was in every respect.

There's always a reason for success. Sometimes it's a little bit of luck and good fortune, but I think the most important thing is that he remembered that all politics, at the end of the day, is local. You can get so absorbed in this place with so many different issues, but if you forget your local constituency, the people that sent you here, you're just not going to succeed, and John succeeded in every which way.

As a matter of fact, some of the accomplishments that he had provincially: There was a private member's bill passed—and John wasn't necessarily known for putting bills forward on a daily basis like some of us do in this House. But one of his private members' bills is still protecting consumers and businesses today, 17 years later. On behalf of the Ontario Plumbing Inspectors Association, he put in private member's Bill 67, which was given royal assent on December 19, 1996. It provided for the professional designation of certified plumbing systems inspectors. It became a reality, and as a result, the consumers of this province are better protected.

There were also a number of local issues that he was quite involved and quite successful in. In the same interview that I quoted from before, he stated that he was very proud, for example, of being able to obtain drinking water for areas like St. Andrew's in his riding, and upon the completion of the Glen Stor Dun Lodge. He was also very proud of the role that he played in the establishment of the Long Sault Arena. Those are the kinds of issues, particularly in the local riding, that people are going to remember you for, and John will certainly be remembered for all of that, Speaker.

Finally, let me just say this. When the former mayor of Cornwall, Brian Lynch, heard of John's passing a year or so ago, he stated the following: John "was a real gentleman, modest, hard-working, and dedicated to serving his constituents and to making their lives better...."

"John was so successful because he was a caring, honest politician who listened to his constituents and followed up on their concerns. He was much loved by those who knew and respected him. Elizabeth Cleary at John's side was a constant support in his political career."

Mention was made earlier about how much effort it takes for members outside of the GTA to be here. I know that John drove back and forth to Cornwall just about every week—well, every week that the House sat and many other weeks in between. A drive from Cornwall to here is about a four-and-a-half or five-hour drive, at a minimum. So that shows you the amount of determination that he had for those 16 years that he served here, to be here, to represent the people of his riding to the best of his ability.

His successor, Jim Brownell, who was here from 2003 until just the last election, stated of him as follows: "In politics, John was a true gentleman, always going about his work in a sincere and gentle manner. Underneath the gentleness, though, there was a spirit of determination and understanding of what was just and fair." I think that that is probably the thing that John will be remembered

for around this place more than anything else: He believed in being just and fair in all situations.

We say to his widow, Elizabeth, and to the four children who are here today, thank you for sharing John with us for the 16 years that he was able to serve the people of his riding to the best of his ability. He will be missed in this place. It's too bad that nowadays there aren't more John Clearys in this House, on all sides of the political fence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their kind and heartfelt comments about John and to the family.

If I may take a pause for a moment, on a personal note, as I said earlier, I was a seatmate of John's. A gentleman, yes; a gentle man, yes—but I have to tell you that there was an issue that he took with passion, which endeared him to me immensely, and that was about children, and I thank him for that, because he's the example of what I was in this House for. My memory of him will be forever here, and I thank you for it.

Further, we will have a DVD and Hansard copies made available to the family.

Again, finally, thank you for the gift of John Cleary.

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PETITIONS

MARKDALE HOSPITAL

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Grey Bruce Health Services' Markdale hospital is the only health care facility between Owen Sound and Orangeville on the Highway 10 corridor;

"Whereas the community of Markdale rallied to raise \$13 million on the promise they would get a new state-of-the-art hospital in Markdale;

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

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care announce as soon as possible its intended construction date for the new Markdale hospital and ensure that the care needs of the patients and families of our community are met in a timely manner."

I support the petition, will affix my name and send it with page Helen.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Catherine Fife: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Enbridge Canada is proposing to reverse the flow of the Line 9 pipeline in order to transport western oil and tar sands oil through the most densely populated parts of Ontario;

"Whereas this pipeline project proposes changes to the pipeline that merit serious consideration, like the increase

in oil carrying capacity and the transport of significantly more corrosive oil through the pipeline;

“Whereas this pipeline passes under cities and major rivers and a spill would risk the drinking water and health of millions of Ontarians and cause permanent damage to ecosystems;

“Whereas Line 9’s reversal will have impacts that must be analyzed beyond the National Energy Board hearings held by the federal government;

“Whereas the government of Quebec has already indicated its intention to conduct an independent review of the line reversal impact, including the flow of oil sands crude into Quebec;

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

“That the province of Ontario acts in the best interest of the health and environment of the province and conduct a full environmental assessment of Enbridge’s proposed Line 9 reversal and capacity expansion projects.”

I affix my signature to this petition and give this to Owen.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. John O’Toole: An important issue in my riding, and a petition that reads as follows:

“Whereas citizens are concerned that contaminants in materials used as fill for pits and quarries may endanger water quality and the natural environment of the Oak Ridges moraine;

“Whereas the Ministry of the Environment has a responsibility and a duty to protect the sensitive areas of the greenbelt and Oak Ridges moraine;

“Whereas the government of Ontario has the lead responsibility to provide the tools to lower-tier government to plan, protect and enforce clear, effective policies governing the application and permitting process for the placement of fill in abandoned pits and quarries;”—and other locations—

“Whereas this process requires clarification regarding rules respecting what materials may be used to rehabilitate or fill abandoned pits and quarries;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask that the Minister of the Environment initiate a moratorium on the clean fill application and permit process on the Oak Ridges moraine until there are clear rules; and we further ask that the provincial government take all necessary actions to protect our water and prevent contamination of the Oak Ridges moraine, specifically at Lakeridge Road and Morgans Road in Durham” and the Greenwood plan in my riding of Durham.

I’m pleased to sign and support it and present it to Louis, one of the pages.

DENTAL CARE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas thousands and thousands of adults live with pain and infection because they cannot afford dental care;

“Whereas the promised \$45-million dental fund under the Poverty Reduction Strategy excluded impoverished adults;

“Whereas the programs were designed with rigid criteria so that most of the people in need do not qualify; and

“Whereas desperately needed dental care money went unspent and was diverted to other areas even though people are still suffering without access to dental care;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly do all in its power to stop the dental fund being diverted to support other programs; and

“That the Legislative Assembly fully utilize the commissioned funding to provide dental care to those in need.”

I agree with this petition, affix my signature and give it to page Benjamin to deliver.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Transportation has indicated it will be making improvements to Highway 21 between Port Elgin and Southampton in 2014; and

“Whereas the ministry has not acknowledged the repeated requests from the community and others to undertake safety enhancements to the portion of the highway where it intersects with the Saugeen Rail Trail crossing; and

“Whereas this trail is a vital part of an interconnected active transportation route providing significant recreational and economic benefit to the town of Saugeen Shores, the county of Bruce and beyond;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of ... Ontario to require the MTO to include, as part of the design for the improvements to Highway 21 between Port Elgin and Southampton, measures that will enhance the safety for motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists and all others that use the Rail Trail crossing; and to consult and collaborate with the town of Saugeen Shores and other groups in determining cost-effective measures that will maintain the function of the highway while aligning with the active transportation needs of all interested parties who use the Saugeen Rail Trail.”

I really agree with this petition. I’ll affix my signature and send it to the desk with Sophia.

SENIORS’ DINING PROGRAM

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from the seniors in my riding.

“Whereas the Seniors Seva Mandal developed the South Asian Congregate Dining Program to promote

well-being and encourage a healthy lifestyle for Hamilton seniors; and

“Whereas the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant LHIN provided funding for this program through the Victorian Order of Nurses (VON); and

“Whereas this program provides a necessary and vital service to about 160 seniors over three days per week with food costs being paid by participants; and

“Whereas the VON is required to be accountable and transparent to the LHIN; and

“Whereas the VON has not upheld their obligations under the memorandum of understanding to maintain open and honest communication, or to meet on a regular basis, or to provide financial statements and reports; and

“Whereas the majority of the budget is being used by the VON for administrative costs; and

“Whereas the VON has decided to shut down the program and replace it with another that does not include the dining portion which many seniors count on as their only opportunity for social engagement;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to call on the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant LHIN to reinstate the South Asian Congregate Dining Program and find a more appropriate partner to facilitate this.”

I couldn't agree with this more. I will give it to page Owen and send it to the Clerk.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Norm Miller: I have received petitions with a number of signatures on them in support of Bill 79, paved shoulders on provincial highways, from Tom de Gryp of London. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas pedestrians and cyclists are increasingly using secondary provincial highways to support healthy lifestyles and expand active transportation; and

“Whereas paved shoulders on highways enhance public safety for all highway users, expand tourism opportunities and support good health; and

“Whereas paved shoulders help to reduce the maintenance cost of repairs to highway surfaces; and

“Whereas the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka’s private member’s bill provides for a minimum one-metre paved shoulder for the benefit of pedestrians, cyclists and motorists;

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

“That private member’s Bill 79, which requires a minimum one-metre paved shoulder on designated provincially owned highways, receive swift passage through the legislative process.”

Mr. Speaker, I’ve signed this in support.

CHILDREN’S PSYCHIATRIC MEDICATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from the people of Chelmsford, in Sudbury, in my riding.

“Whereas there has been a dramatic increase in the use of psychiatric medication on children especially children in care or provincial custody; and

“Whereas it is an established scientific fact that psychiatric drugs cause shrinkage and related problems to the development of the still-developing brain; and

“Whereas it is our responsibility as a society to protect and care for our children;

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

“To create a policy statement discouraging the use of psychiatric drugs on children and send it to all Ontario clinics and mental health care facilities working with children;

“To actively monitor the rate of use of psychiatric drugs on children to ensure that it is going down;

“To amend the professional misconduct regulation so that prescribing medication to children where the use of such medication has not been specifically approved by Health Canada for their age group and purpose constitutes professional misconduct...”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Benjamin to bring it to the Clerk.

1350

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Toby Barrett: Speaker, I’ve got all kinds of names on these petitions gathered over the Thanksgiving weekend at the Norfolk County Fair. It’s titled “Stop the Gravy Train—Call an Election.” It’s addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the current Liberal government has wasted \$1.1 billion of taxpayers’ dollars on cancelled gas plants; and

“Whereas the people in Ontario have lost confidence in the McGuinty/Wynne government;

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

“Request the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario to call an election immediately.”

I support these sentiments and affix my signature.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This is one of thousands I’ve already delivered and it says:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas diesel trains are a health hazard for people who live near them;

“Whereas more toxic fumes will be created by the 400 daily trains than the car trips they are meant to replace;

“Whereas the planned air-rail link does not serve the communities through which it passes and will be priced beyond the reach of most commuters;

“Whereas all major cities in the world with train service between their downtown core and the airport use electric trains;

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

"That the province of Ontario stop building the air-rail link for diesel and move to electrify the route immediately;

"That the air-rail link be designed, operated and priced as an affordable transportation option between all points along its route."

I couldn't agree more, and the cost to the health of the children is worth more than this. I'm going to give it to Louis to deliver to the table.

Interjection.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm being heckled by the Minister of Education. Thank you.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's tradespeople are subject to stifling regulation and are compelled to pay membership fees to the unaccountable College of Trades; and

"Whereas these fees are a tax grab that drives down the wages of skilled tradespeople; and

"Whereas Ontario desperately needs a plan to solve our critical shortage of skilled tradespeople by encouraging our youth to enter the trades and attracting new tradespeople; and

"Whereas the current policies of the McGuinty/Wynne Liberal government only aggravate the looming skilled trades shortage in Ontario;

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

"To immediately disband the College of Trades, cease imposing needless membership fees and enact policies to attract young Ontarians into skilled trade careers."

I fully support this, will affix my signature and send it with page Sarhan.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from all over Ontario.

"Whereas there are a growing number of reported cases of abuse, neglect and substandard care for our seniors in long-term-care homes; and

"Whereas people with complaints have limited options, and frequently don't complain because they fear repercussions, which suggests too many seniors are being left in vulnerable situations without independent oversight; and

"Whereas Ontario is one of only two provinces in Canada where the Ombudsman does not have independent oversight of long-term-care homes. We need accountability, transparency and consistency in our long-term-care home system;"

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario "to expand the Ombudsman's mandate to include Ontario's

long-term-care homes in order to protect our most vulnerable seniors."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Ian to bring it to the Clerk.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. John O'Toole: This is another petition that I have spoken to the Minister of the Environment about and nothing has happened. This petition reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care unilaterally introduced cuts to the ophthalmology funding for physician services and diagnostic testing, retroactive to April 1, 2012; and

"Whereas the legislated cuts to the funding for ophthalmology diagnostic tests are up to 80%; and

"Whereas these cuts were implemented without consulting physicians about the impact such cuts will have on the health care of patients;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to protect ophthalmology services and consult with the physicians before making cuts to our health care system."

I'm pleased to sign and support it and give it to Arianna, one of the pages.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas aggressive dogs are found among all breeds and mixed breeds; and

"Whereas breed-specific legislation has been shown to be an expensive and ineffective approach to dog bite prevention; and

"Whereas problem dog owners are best dealt with through education, training and legislation encouraging responsible behaviour;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows"—on behalf of the over 1,000 dogs that have been euthanized because of this cruel law:

"To repeal the breed-specific sections of the Dog Owners' Liability Act (2005) and any related acts, and instead implement legislation that encourages responsible ownership of all dog breeds and types."

I'm going to give this to Sophia and sign it to be delivered to the table.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time that we have available for petitions this afternoon.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor was pleased to assent to a certain bill in his office on October 10.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The following is the title of the bill to which His Honour did assent:

An Act to regulate the selling and marketing of tanning services and ultraviolet light treatments for tanning / Loi visant à réglementer la vente et la commercialisation de services de bronzage et de traitements par rayonnement ultraviolet à des fins de bronzage.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESSES ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 VISANT À SOUTENIR LES PETITES ENTREPRISES

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 9, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 105, An Act to amend the Employer Health Tax Act / Projet de loi 105, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'impôt-santé des employeurs.

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon in support of Bill 105. I myself am a former small business person who started with a little idea and grew it into a company that employed, I think at its height, about 10 people. I was able to sell that company when I was elected to Queen's Park, because trying to run a business and trying to represent the interests of your constituents are obviously competing interests and ones that I don't think anybody should attempt to do. So as much as I didn't want to sell the business, it was time to sell the business.

It's interesting that often you talk to people and they claim to understand business and then you find that they've worked at a large institution all their lives. They worked at a bank or they worked at an auto manufacturer or they worked somewhere else. I think those people who truly understand business are the people who have taken an idea, have somehow gone out and found the capital, taken that idea and turned it into something that didn't exist before. We know the underpinning of our economy here in Ontario and Canada is the small business community, so anytime I see a bill that's intended to try to help and assist small businesses—have I spoken before, Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We appreciate your second speech, but unfortunately the rules only allow you to speak once at a time. I think I have to go into rotation, don't I? Yes.

Further debate.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 105, An Act to amend—oops, that's the wrong one—Supporting Small Businesses Act, 2013. I almost pulled out the wrong file.

Speaker, the objective here is to assist small business by reducing the overall tax burden. What we're told is that the way it's been implemented and proposed so far is

that it will raise exemptions for 60,000 of the smallest businesses. Those with the largest payroll over \$5 million will now pay more as they are no longer entitled to the exemption, and all others will not. Apparently it will cost the treasury about \$5 million. A key message from our side is, we're relatively generally supportive because we need to get small business moving. We need to do anything that will help and enhance small business, but this is definitely not the answer to Ontario's economic crisis.

It's clear that this provincial government is not listening carefully to the needs of small business owners. They don't have a plan to run balanced budgets. We've been waiting here in my time for two years for that to happen and it hasn't. It hadn't happened in the eight before that, and we don't see it in the foreseeable future. I believe we heard in this House this morning that the deficit is going to be at \$12 billion next year from \$9 billion this year. That's going, in my estimation, in the wrong direction, and these young folks in front of you are going to pay that price for many, many years if we don't soon turn this province around. Nor do they have a plan to reduce taxes on small business and address the burden of red tape that they shoulder.

I talk almost every day when I'm at home in my great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound to small businesses and what they tell me is exactly that. They tell me that certainly the challenge to make any kind of a go in business today is getting more daunting and more challenging. They're overburdened by red tape. Every time you turn around, there is another level of government asking them for more information, which takes them away from their true calling, and that is to serve the customers that they rely on to have a profitable business.

1400

It's an endless ream of red tape; it distracts them from their business. It prevents them, because they're spending this time, from actually expanding their business, which would hire more people. As again we heard in this House this morning, between 600,000 and a million people currently are looking for employment. That's just simply unacceptable in today's world. We need to do be doing everything we can to focus our processes and our interests and our passion and our energies towards creating business.

Because of these dire policies or, more to the point, the lack of the plan and policies from this Liberal government, business operators in my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and other corners of rural and northern Ontario are facing very, very tough times. From farmers to manufacturers to haircutters, every business is struggling to survive due to the rising cost of business, taxes, overregulation and—it can't be overstated—the cost of energy that, again, this Liberal government has allowed to double over the last eight years. I believe in early November, the rates are going up yet again. That is not something that—

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Walker: That is not something, as my colleague from Northumberland–Quinte West assures me,

businesses in his riding nor mine nor any great riding in this province needs.

Clearly, this Liberal government has a poor record in helping our job creators with tax cuts. Reality suggests the opposite: They prefer to raise taxes and/or invent new taxes at every opportunity. It seems as if this government has an insatiable appetite for new levies. From new farm tire fees—we talked about that in this House. In my riding again, a huge rural, farm, producing, agricultural economy, small businesses—they were hit big-time with 1,800% to 2,000% increases for their—without any consultation, without any stakeholder discussion: “Here it is; accept it and get on with it”; again, Speaker, just no willingness to work with the people that actually drive this. Eighty-five per cent of our economy now is run by the small and medium businesses. We need to be making them the focal point of our economy going forward.

The new trades tax—I just did a petition on the new trades tax. It’s hammering the people out there trying to make a living, particularly those self-employed entrepreneurs who take the risk. They don’t have a safety net; they don’t have the ability to fall back on a government pension or a government safety net. They’re out there in the trenches every day, trying to make a go of it. Now they have the added burden of this stifling trades tax, which went, by the way, from, I believe, \$60 a year to \$120 per year plus tax, and it’s mandatory. They’re starting with 15 trades and they’re going to expand it to 157 trades, being compulsory. It’s going to decimate a lot of these people. And my fear is it’s going to drive more money into the underground economy if they do that. They’re threatening to take their licences if they don’t pay these fees within 60 days, taking the livelihood of many of these small business owners away from them.

We can’t forget the HST and the health tax that this government promised they would not implement but did, right after getting elected. They imposed it on the great people of Ontario with no thought nor regard to what may happen. Despite its repeated promise of “no new taxes,” new taxes keep popping up on consumers, business and everything in between. Again—and I repeat, I realize, Mr. Speaker—despite the promise in the election campaign of 2007, “We will not raise taxes or impose new taxes,” almost the first act they did was a new health tax; they’ve never actually done anything in my mind to truly alleviate the concerns we have in the health care sector—being the former deputy critic for rural and northern Ontario. After 10 years of raising taxes, the Liberals finally caught on and said, “Hey, we need to do something with small business.” So, lo and behold, they bring in Bill 105.

While I think it’s honourable that they brought this in, the reality is they’re backtracking on their own tax hike and to deliver some long overdue relief, even though, again, it’s only partial relief on a tax that they hiked. It’s like what they’re doing in the horse racing industry currently. They came in with, again, no stakeholder consultation. They decimated an industry. Now they’re running in and saying, “We’re going to save the whole

industry. We’re going to put \$400 million over five years into this industry to try to save it and bring it back.” What they leave out, conspicuously, in most of those 30-second sound bites, is that they spent \$527 million on the three-person panel over a year and a half to study how they messed up that whole industry—unbelievable, Mr. Speaker, and the people of Ontario, certainly rural Ontario, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, are not being fooled by this for one moment.

I’m extremely pleased to see that Hanover is one of the eight racetracks that will remain. However, again, there they’re trying to make it all wonderful news. They’ve cut from 32 races two years ago to 20-some this year, to 15 next year. If I can do my math a little better than the Liberals, that’s about 50%, and that means most of those people are going to be part-time workers at best. So they haven’t done anything.

They can’t continue to start fires, come in with a pail of water and throw it on, and pretend that they’re heroes. This is really what we think they’re doing here a little bit with this bill. They’re trying to come in—the 30-second sound bites will all sound like they’re the big promoters, the big saviours of small business, but they’re the people who, in government, have added so much burden to small businesses that most people are trying to figure out a way to get out of business. They’re certainly preventing many people from having serious thoughts of going into small business for themselves.

Speaker, I want to remind you that the significant difference in this House is that we on this side of the House—the Conservatives at least—want this employer health tax eliminated altogether. The biggest problem I have with this bill is, how is this going to recoup the job and industry losses? Again, like many of the things they’ve tried to do, they’re tweaking around the edges. In my health care portfolio previously, they said about the LHINS, “We’ll go in and we’ll tweak around the edges. We’ll change it.” Well, they’re nothing more than an administrative body that again costs the taxpayers of Ontario \$300 million to shuffle paper. There’s very little, if any, direct impact on the people who are lining up for hip replacements, for cancer care treatments, for physiotherapy, which again they’ve decimated.

It’s much of the same, continually, all over: They want to tweak, they want to have the sound bites. And I’ll give them their due: They’re very good at spin and making people fall for, “They’re fixing this.” But they created most of the problems they’re supposedly fixing now.

With contributions of approximately \$34 billion to the province’s economy and with about 740,000 jobs across Ontario, the agri-food sector is an important industry in Ontario. It is the backbone of our rural economy, and it certainly is in my great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. Yet today, we have fewer farm operators and fewer farms than ever before.

One that certainly I heard as I was running for election back in 2011, and that continues today, is what they’ve done to the abattoir industry. They have virtually decimated that industry as well. It’s becoming more and more

common for people to leave the business because they can't deal with the unending list of red tape, bureaucracy and administration that this government continues to put in front of them. People have run these businesses for years and years. It was great. It was convenient for the local producer to be able to go somewhere local where they knew them, where they had first-hand experience with them. They understood both sides of the equation. They had a good working relationship. All of a sudden, that was wiped out because of this endless administration and taxation. So they've gone out of business.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Walker: There is a pattern going on here. In almost every industry we talk about, it's a very similar thing. If we take the energy file and plunked it onto these notes, it's almost the same. Don't even get me started on that one.

Some 50% of family-run abattoirs in our region have disappeared over the last decade. This is at least in part due to the government's appetite for excessive red tape and administration. The few butchers that are still left, including Grey County Meats, tell me they're struggling to cover the cost of some of the 400-plus government regulations. Can you imagine being a mom-and-pop shop that started the business or maybe took it over from a proud parent who had built the business for many, many years, and you have to deal with 400-plus regulations just for your one small business? How would you ever have time to actually do any of the work in the business with these types of regulations, limits and expectations put on you?

If this business closes, we will be left with only one in Owen Sound, one in Durham, one in Stayner and one in Coldwater. The next-closest one after that will be Huntsville. That's three and a half, four, four and a half hours one way to get there, which again takes that person out of their business, away from what they're doing—all the costs. This government likes to talk about the environment. Well, why are we making people drive 300 and 400 kilometres when they used to be able to drive 30, 40 or 50? The wear and tear on our highways, the loss of ability to raise money and actually be in the shop working—many of these producers are mom-and-pop shops. When they leave, nothing else goes on in that business and, next thing, they get back and there's another form waiting for them to fill out to tell the government so they can consult.

I think my colleague from Huron-Bruce raised a good point today: Those who can't do, consult. I think one of the words we hear from this Liberal government almost on an hourly basis in this House is, "We will consult. We'll have another conversation." Mr. Speaker, we can't afford any more conversations, because those conversations lead to more red tape, to more forms and to more bureaucracy for that little ol' small business owner who's just trying to make a go and provide for his family.

To the best of my knowledge, the government has no plan to work with Ontario's abattoirs. In fact, the last time this government talked to abattoirs was in 2008, five

years ago, when Leona Dombrowsky still had her seat in rural Ontario and was serving as Ontario's food and agriculture minister.

The Women's Institutes of Ontario have done a great job in trying to champion. They tried throughout that to save an industry that, again, was as local to a small, rural riding as apple pie—to no avail.

1410

This government, as they have done with many of the files that they've unfortunately taken and steamrolled over in rural Ontario, has said, "We know best and we will continue to go down this road," regardless of the opinion of people who are in the industry—if they were to consult those people. It's just unacceptable. It can't go on.

Three ag ministers later and two Liberal Premiers later—and I have to put it on record that the current Premier is both the Minister of Agriculture and the Premier of Ontario, and yet with all of that ability to provide leadership, there's nothing coming our way for these small, local abattoirs. Really, I don't see a whole lot, other than a lot of smoke and mirrors like the Local Food Act, which sounds good but really isn't doing anything significant to create more jobs and productivity for the people, those hard-working farmers in the agricultural sector in our great province. There's really nothing happening out there, and it's shameful.

With no abattoirs anywhere, it becomes pretty difficult to eat local. Again, even that 300-kilometre to 400-kilometre drive to get it to another abattoir or meat processing company somewhere else—there's no one in my riding who believes 300 kilometres to 400 kilometres is local. When they're thinking local, they're thinking 10, 15, 20 miles. That's local to them. They want to support the people who they know and have those lifelong relationships with—the ability to still do business over a handshake, not over 34 forms and government contracts.

Really, what is Bill 105 going to do for the decimated abattoir industry? Probably that: a whole lot of silence. Nothing. They haven't done it. It's like the horse racing industry. They're now coming back, trying to say they're saving it. They've already done the damage. Some 9,000 people, we know for sure, are out of work. Probably the number will still get to the 60,000 that was told to them before they made this fateful decision, and it's just not acceptable.

I'm going to change the channel a little bit, and head to the manufacturers: 300,000 lost jobs, including about 1,000 jobs just in my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound alone. That has a huge, significant impact. When you start to think about the horse racing industry that has been decimated and the abattoir industry that has been decimated—now you've got manufacturing. All of those have a ripple effect, because who's buying these types of things?

Earlier today, I talked about the tire tax that they imposed, again without any consultation—

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Some \$1,600 on my tractor.

Mr. Bill Walker: Huge—\$1,600 on my colleague from Northumberland-Quinte West's tractor. I'm assum-

ing he wasn't even thinking anywhere close to \$1,600; maybe a couple of hundred dollars would have been the bill, had they not imposed this.

When I talked to those implement dealers in my riding, they said that this was going to have catastrophic consequences, because now they're not going to carry those types of tractors because you can buy them through the States or through Quebec or in other provinces without this needless tax. So they're not going to carry them, which, again, puts someone else out of work in their shop. That person probably employed someone to do something, either in their house, their farm or wherever they happen to be employed. So there's a downward cycle and a downward ripple here, and it's just sad to be a member in this House and to see our province going off the cliff, the way this Liberal government is taking us.

Specifically in Owen Sound, PPG, a glass plant that was there for over 40 years—my brothers both worked there and a number of my cousins worked there and, in fact, I did a term for a summer there—is gone. They closed it down in its heyday. There were about 600 to 700 jobs there. I know you've experienced that in your riding, Mr. Speaker, with this government. You've had lifelong, 100-year corporations going out of business because of the way this Liberal government has mis-managed and imposed needless regulation and red tape on these small businesses.

PPG shut down. Finally, they were down to about 200 people in their employ and they shut down, and there was no plan by this government to help them get back into business and retain them in business or, at the very most, bring some kind of a business to the area that would employ people. There's nothing.

Today, our leader did a press conference. He stood up and said that we've tried to clear the decks with a lot of the bills that are here so that we can totally and solely focus on job creation and getting this province turned around. He had that discussion with the Premier a number of months ago. We've done our part; they've now reneged on that.

We've brought out white papers to invoke and engage the electorate so that they can have a say in where we need to go in the policies and plans that we should be putting in place. We've even offered them to take them all, to take every single page of everything we have if that's going to help this great province get on its feet again and get back on track, but, again, to no avail.

In fact, I don't believe the Premier has even answered the latest letter of our leader, who has reached out and said, "Look, we're here. We want to make this province a go. We want to work with you. We've cleared the deck. Where are you?"

Unfortunately and sadly, I don't even really like reading some of what I'm going to tell you because it shows other closures: Paisley Foodtown, in a small, little village, the only grocery store in town. Part of that, again, was the excessive red tape, the taxes, the government continually coming back and trying to solve their mis-management and their poor decision-making on the backs

of small business: "We want more money out of your pocket. We want you to produce more to give to us," and I dare say that they can needlessly spend it on things like a billion-dollar boondoggle of the gas plants.

People in my riding are absolutely furious that this government, to save some seats, willfully knew what they were doing and spent \$1 billion to cancel two gas plants. What is that going to cost our economy? What is that going to cost our taxpayers? Most importantly, what is that going to cost those young people who are sitting in front of you and at the other end? They're just here today. I hate to be the bearer of bad news for you young people, but we need to turn this province around so that you can live the glory days that past generations had. If we don't, I'm afraid to say—I have two young children at home—well, middle-aged guys now, 16 and 18, Zach and Ben. I'm afraid for them. I'm truly fearful that we're running a deficit here that we may never get out from under.

When you're paying \$10 billion just to service your debt, that's not helping small business. That's not being able to provide tangible benefits to small business so that they can expand, so that they can build. Who has the confidence to move to Ontario, which has doubled our energy rates in the last eight years? This Liberal government—we used to have the lowest rates in North America. In their tenure of the last eight to 10 years, they've doubled those, and they're going to double again. That doesn't give an investor or a small business owner much confidence to say, "Ontario is the place where I want to be and I want to do my business."

Markdale Tractor Sales, a dealer for almost 30 years of farm implements: They were known far and wide; they sold all across this great province. Again, after 50 years, they closed their doors because of excessive red tape, taxes and the bungling of this government to come to them with their hand out saying, "We want more out of your pocket to be able to fix our bad news."

Terra Footwear: closed; Nordic Furniture: closed; and Markdale is a town of 5,000 residents. Right now, Chapman's Ice Cream—and many of you, I hope, will have heard of Chapman's great ice cream.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Walker: I would suggest the best; there may be arguments in the House on that. They employ 600 people in a fairly small—

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It is great ice cream.

Mr. Bill Walker: Atta boy, Pete.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Walker: Well, I hope—no, they can't. I'm not going to allow them to move, but with these hydro rates, how long can they hold on, paying these exorbitant hydro rates?

A constituent and small business owner in Warton writes, "I have just received a 'Notice of Proposal to Suspend from the College of Trades.' There is no amount in the letter of what I owe. There is no province of Ontario letterhead on this notice. I renewed both my mechanic's licences on November 11, 2012, at \$60 each,

and the Ontario official receipt says these are good until June 17, 2015. I do not want to be a member of the College of Trades, as I have an interprovincial certification, but they have taken my money and I would like it back. I have been unable to get through to anyone at the college. They do not answer their phones. I have been active in the Abolish the College of Trades Tax grab. I am considering pressing charges as the official Ontario receipt says 'good till 2015,' but the college is threatening to take my licences away. Can you help?

"Mark Van Bilsen

"Self-employed mechanic and farmer in Wiarton."

I have numerous ones here. I'm running out of time. I just can't say enough. We need to be working with that great group of employers, small business, medium-sized business. They're the drivers of our economy. We need less tax and we need less regulation so that this province can thrive again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Tecum-see. I think Tecumseth is a little north of here. We're Tecum-see. Now, mind you, the great Shawnee warrior was called Tecumseh, but the community itself is Tecum-see.

I rise with pleasure to speak on G105, the small business act. What troubles me, I guess, is the definition of small business. Some small businesses are very successful. Some have payrolls of more than \$5 million. Now, \$5 million may be a small amount of money to people who, for example, would spend more than \$1 billion cancelling a government contract. But to me, \$5 million is a lot of money—a heck of a lot of money—and not a small amount at all. Therefore, I cannot support the concept of companies with a payroll of more than \$5 million receiving and remaining eligible for the exemption from the employer health tax, especially any major bank. Currently, banks are allowed to write off their first \$400,000 in payroll. Why on earth would we forgive a bank in this country? Banks make so much money, and yet we want to write them off.

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I have enormous respect for small business people: They're the small engines of our great economy. This act does need some improvement. A friend of mine just dropped into the office the other day with five rolls of red tape that he wanted me to bring in as a prop, but I wouldn't risk that, Speaker. He wanted me to cut some red tape on behalf of small business; I won't be doing that. Thank you for your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm pleased to rise in my place and respond as best as I can to the honourable member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. Someone once asked me if I knew the difference between a pessimist and optimist. I said, "Well, what is it?" They said, "A pessimist says, 'Oh, my goodness, things are terrible, and they couldn't possibly get any worse,' and the optimist says, 'Oh sure, they could.'"

I'm not sure where the member was coming from over there. I can say, and I want to say here, that I am part of a government that has cut business taxes, that has done all kinds of things to correct a deplorable electrical system so that we have power to spare.

I come from a small business—

Interjection.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Did I interrupt you when you spoke? I didn't.

We look at red tape all the time. I agree with the honourable member to the extent that there is some identifiable red tape that, if eliminated, can make business a bit easier. We're for that. I know that when I had the privilege of serving as the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, it was an ongoing challenge. In fact, I co-chaired, with the president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, an Open for Business group that cut agri-food industry red tape by 28%. We worked very, very hard at that.

As for history around some of the impediments, governments make mistakes. We've owned up to some of the difficulties around the gas plants. But you've got some on your side of the House, too: the stranded debt, the sale of the 407. When we came to office in 2003, all the financial records were shredded. We had to bring back the former auditor to make the case for there being a deficit there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm standing out of respect for the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. What he did is, he stayed on focus and talked about small business and the implications for his riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. I give him credit because that's what's missing.

On the other side I hear the minister, a member of cabinet, up there sort of excusing—an apologist for Premier Wynne. Really, when you get down to it, I think we should look at independent observations made in the province of Ontario.

Here's a recent article, "The Stolen Decade: 10 years of Liberal Rule Marked by Scandal, Boondoggles, Broken Promises and Mounting Debt." If you look at the next article, "Dialogue Needed on Soaring Debt"—

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: This is from the Toronto Star; these are your briefing notes. It says, "We need to talk about debt, deficits, unfunded pension liabilities and more."

Our leader, Tim Hudak, put something on the table. He said he gave you the plan. We've cleared the deck. That means that we've taken all this legislation off the table by allowing it to go to committee. He challenged the Premier of Ontario to bring forward a jobs plan. What do we have? More red tape. That's exactly it.

This bill itself, our former finance critic, Mr. Peter Shurman, has just said—and he has read this in detail—that it's a complete sham, an absolute waste of time. I'm quoting him, if somebody wants to attribute it.

What it really does, though—the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away—is provide an exemption threshold.

They've raised the threshold for those payrolls under \$400,000. They've given them more room so that they don't pay into this employer health tax, which is a Liberal tax. What they do now is they are going to shift that to other medium-sized businesses. They're going to tax—one of our critics here has pointed out that there's the new tax on trades, which could be translated into a tax on business, a tax on jobs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to join the debate and to add my comments to the comments from the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. He pointed out a couple of dozen deficiencies when it comes to the dealings of this government in respect to helping small business: high energy prices, regulatory barriers, environments that are not conducive to the growth particularly of small business. He didn't really speak to the merits of Bill 105, in terms of what it does. I certainly will do that in my 20-minute hit during this period.

I can tell you that New Democrats agree with the principle of facilitating a tax regime that supports those who create jobs the most, and that is small businesses in this country. The large employers, those that he had mentioned—I'm certain several of them fell victim to free trade agreements, particularly the effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement. The member talked about our beef industry, our domestic abattoirs. Those businesses certainly fell victim to the precursor to NAFTA, which was the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, GATT. At 10 years old, I was on the front lawn of Parliament Hill fighting against that, because we knew—we heard from farmers and small business owners—how this was going to decimate their markets. We see the ill effects. Here we are, decades into that agreement.

Now we see a wonderful new agreement supported by the Liberal government, certainly endorsed by the Progressive Conservatives: CETA, the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, with the European Union. You want to talk about crushing small businesses, the ability for governments to procure from small businesses—that's what CETA will be doing in earnest. We don't have those debates in this House because I guess it might be beyond the realm of people to talk about, but I think it's a part of this debate and something that should be fully considered.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments, so we return to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for his reply.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to those who spoke as well: the Minister of Community and Social Services, the member from Durham, the member from Essex and of course the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

I'm just going to go back to where I was at the first. Small business is driving our province, it's driving our country, and we need to be finding ways to work with

them. We need to find ways to keep people working. We need to find ways to ensure that people want to come to our great province of Ontario. One of the first things we have to do there is reverse the energy situation we have. The Minister of Community and Social Services made a comment that we produce a lot of energy. Yes, he's right. We paid half a billion dollars last year to other provinces and the United States to take our surplus, yet they keep steamrolling and putting up more wind turbines with this Green Energy Act.

The Premier today said that sometimes when you're presented with different information, after you've made your initial thought process you need to make a different decision. I would like to challenge her today that one way she could help small business, more than this employer health tax proposal that they're putting forward, is to actually put a moratorium, as we have called for—my colleague from Huron–Bruce and a number of my other colleagues, including our leader, Tim Hudak—on that Green Energy Act absolutely immediately. Speaker, that is the biggest thing that is actually impacting our small businesses, in addition to the ludicrous red tape and administration and the taxes that they keep enforcing and imposing on the great people in these small businesses.

They're the true entrepreneurs. They're the people who actually get up in the morning and say, "You know what? I don't need a safety net. I'm going to go out, because I have skills and abilities, and I want to make a go of it. I want to do that without the help of anyone. Just get out of my way and keep things simple." They don't need more red tape. They don't need more forms. They don't need more liability issues that put them out of business and actually prevent them from going down the road. We need to ensure that we're all focused on creating jobs so that those young people in front of you have an opportunity, when they go through school and come out at the other end, will have the best province. I am an optimist, because I'm here fighting for it and will every day.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's always a pleasure to speak in this House. We've had a week in our constituencies. All of us, I'm sure, during that week have enjoyed small business in our ridings.

I want to say that as New Democrats we're going to support this bill. It's a very small step; it's a very small bill. It's, in fact, a suggestion we made towards the budget to help with small business.

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It's time to really set the record straight in terms of which party is truly on the side of small business—small business that provides 85% of the new jobs in this province. If we want to create new jobs, and this government says it does, then we'd better be doing something to support small business, because that's where they're created.

Who does the best job at supporting small business in this country? I'm proud to say it's the NDP government

in Manitoba that does, with a 0% tax rate for small business; not in a Conservative-led province, not in a Liberal-led province, but in a New Democrat-led province—0%. And they dropped it from 8%. Why? Because they see the same statistics that we do: Small business creates 85% of new jobs.

Now, first of all, a shout-out to the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas, which represents 30,000 of our small businesses on our main streets—not necessarily in our malls, but on our main streets. A shout-out to them; they're an incredible organization. If any of those here take a gander at their website, they will see their current bugbears, their demands. Interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, for example, around minimum wage and around workers' rights, when the New Democratic Party first tabled the \$10 minimum wage bill—it was the first bill I tabled; I'm very proud to have done that and built a campaign that finally, with the labour movement, forced the government into action on minimum wage. There's a whole campaign starting now to force the government into action on minimum wage, which they had not done in the last seven years—one of the major ways we can fight poverty in this province.

In that campaign, guess who stood with us? Guess who stood with us on raising the minimum wage? It wasn't big business. Not to name names, but we can name some: Walmart. It wasn't the Walmarts of the world; it wasn't the McDonald's of the world. No, it was the small business owners who stood up, back then, and said, "We pay a living wage, and we've had to pay a living wage because the only way we can compete with the big guys in the malls is to pay a living wage." So a shout-out to Len from Home Hardware in Parkdale–High Park; he was one of the people who came forward and talked about how he paid a living wage to his employees.

I want to give a shout-out to all of my business improvement areas and associations in Parkdale–High Park. It's phenomenal work they do, and they really have completely contributed to the vibrancy of my riding. I have to say, when I first moved into my riding about 20 years ago, you could walk along Queen West, Roncesvalles to Dufferin, and it was pretty dead after about 9 o'clock at night. Now, it's vibrant. It has some of the best restaurants in Toronto. I would say to all the members who are here during the week, maybe from their rural ridings, you should check out Parkdale–High Park for some of the best businesses—absolutely. Grand Electric: best tacos in town, according to food reviewers, right at the corner of my street, right on Queen Street. Phenomenal restaurants along Queen Street: Porzia, recommended by American Vogue—who knew?—on Queen West, right in the heart of Parkdale. Go up to Roncesvalles. You'll see Barque. You'll see some phenomenal restaurants and the whole revitalization of the Roncesvalles area—phenomenal, and driven by small business.

Go up to the Junction, the most improved area. When I opened my constituency office in the Junction, there were about 20 empty storefronts. Now, that place is just vibrant: lots of young people; the Sweet Potato, a great

grocery store full of organic produce, local produce. By the way, a shout-out to the West End Food Co-op in Parkdale as well, where that goes. But again, phenomenal restaurants: We were taping my Google Hangout last Friday in Roux, a new restaurant very close to my constituency office—phenomenal place, phenomenal food.

Bloor West is an established area. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Bloor West was the very first business improvement area in the world. It started over 40 years ago. A shout-out to Alex Ling—there's a little square named after him—one of the men who really started Bloor West small business. And the whole idea of having a business improvement area started in Bloor West. How exciting, and we were there to celebrate that with them.

But also, of course, we as New Democrats stand here in support of small business. I stand here in support of small business because it's pretty personal for me. My son has a small business. I had a small business. I remember it very, very well. I started it when my children were very little. I started, as do most women who start small businesses—by the way, many women start and run successful small businesses. I started, I remember, with a \$5,000 loan, and I didn't have a job. I had been at home for a couple of years with my son. I was just getting back into the workforce. I started with \$5,000, a desk and a phone. I think, within two years, we were billing half a million dollars. How did we do that? We did it with other women. I hired nothing but women. We placed women in public relations and communications, the arts; places like the AGO and the TSO were clients of mine. It was phenomenal. It was a great success, and I enjoyed running it. We found jobs for women; that's what we did. I moved on from that. It allowed me to go back to school and do my doctorate and get into the ministry, and that led me here. So the very first big career I had was in small business. But I can tell you, I did it with no one's help—no government's help. I did it with nothing but a phone and a desk. I did it, yes, with lots of red tape to fill out. I did it with no benefits, and let me tell you, a young family trying to get by with no benefits whatsoever—that's tricky, that's difficult. That's what small business looks like.

My son: a very typical small business entrepreneur of this era; graduated from school in East Asian studies; learned to speak Mandarin. Did it get him a job? No, because he's like so many young people who graduate from university these days. There are no jobs for them. Well, there are McJobs for them. In fact, what he started doing during his university years was being a barista, like so many other young baristas, working—we won't mention the chain; not a small business chain that he worked for. But that's where he got his basic skills, and then he moved from that into another independent small coffee shop, and then started his own, because—guess what?—there were no other jobs. He started again, with a bank loan. A bank loan started it up, and now it's the go-to place in my area for all the young and the hip. There are many young, hip people here in Queen's Park. So I suggest you all come down to Queen and Dunn and get

yourself a latte—wonderful latte art, by the way—or some of the best espresso in Toronto, according to Toronto Life, among others. So go on down to Queen and Dunn, to Capital Espresso, hang out with my son and tell him that his mom sent you, and you will blend right in. I suggest you loosen your ties a little bit. Other than that, you'll be fine, and he'll treat you very well.

Mr. Speaker, he's a classic young business owner, which is to say, he pays his rent; he feeds himself; he has no benefits. There are no benefits to go with the job. He has provided employment for about 10 people now over the course of just a few years of being in business, and believes in paying his staff fairly, so that means he doesn't take as much home. He's getting by, but he's not thriving. He's not earning enough to ever have a family on. He's not earning enough to ever buy a home on in the city of Toronto, that's for sure.

That is the plight and that is the life of entrepreneurs. Why does he do it? He does it because he has a passion for it. He does it because he loves it. He actually thinks he produces the best coffee in Toronto, or some of the best coffee in Toronto. In fact, he invented a very good marketing strategy, which was called a disloyalty card. How it worked was, if you had a coffee at his coffee place and then you went to every other indie coffee place on the card, at the end of that, you got a free coffee. It wasn't just for one coffee place; it was to support other small businesses, other coffee owners like himself who had started out. It got them an article in The Globe and Mail and a lot of publicity and it helped. It did well.

Those are the stories of small business. Those are pretty successful stories of small business. I could tell you some others. I could tell you about my daughter, who tried to start a small business; started a bar; had managed a bar in the past; went in with other partners—always potentially a problem in small business, but that's the only way you can get capital together to start one these days—and ended up losing a whole lot of money. She's still paying that money back. I tell her that it's still cheaper than a master's in business administration, the experience she gained in doing that—but still paying that money back. That's the plight of many small business owners who end up going into bankruptcy because they just can't afford to keep it going, and what a tragedy that is when that happens. As we know, bankruptcies are on the rise. It's difficult; it's ever more difficult to start a small business.

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To go back to the TABIA website, if you're interested in knowing what small business wants and what small business asks for, you can go to no better place than that. What you'll see is the organization that really represents small business—30,000 of them.

Here's number one on their hit list. Here's number one of the requirements they ask from this government.

They're happy about this, by the way, but this really doesn't help small business. What this does is, it doesn't help big business anymore. That's what it does, because, really, what the Liberals are about is helping very large business.

I'll have a few minutes to talk about how they and the Conservatives have helped one client company, EllisDon. No small business gets that kind of help in this place, boy. But you know, if you have \$3 billion in profit, then you get help. In fact, if you've got \$3 billion in profit, you get your own bill written for you, which is what happened here: Bill 74, written on behalf of one client company. That's what happens if you're a big business in this place.

If you're a small business, what do you want? Number one, you want reform of the MPAC system. Over and over and over again, I hear this when I'm wandering around my constituency and talking to small business owners. What is the MPAC system? It's the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. This is a provincial body that assesses property taxes for businesses and for residents, and they do—may I say it?—a terrible, terrible job. They do a terrible, terrible job of it.

Every four years, when those assessments come up, I have a town hall in my riding. I suggest the rest of you should too. You'll have standing room only of people complaining about their MPAC assessments. Why? Because they're unfair. They're unfair.

They are a tax on unrealized income; that's number one. It's like saying to someone here, "Well, you're making six figures now, but I think that in three years you're going to be making about—I think you're going to make twice as much in three years, so I'm going to tax you on what you're going to make in three years"—not what you're making now, not what you're worth now, but in three years. That's what MPAC does. It does it on our houses, and it does it on our businesses.

Now, on our houses—some of us have been lucky in real estate, and they tend to go up, so we don't complain as much. But let me tell you, if you have a house identical to your neighbour's, there are many MPAC assessments that will say it's not, that one house will pay more taxes than another.

For a senior on a fixed income who has maybe paid off their house a long time ago, they may lose their house because of their MPAC assessments, because, again, the assessment is on what the house is worth if they sold it. But they don't want to sell it, Mr. Speaker. They don't want to sell it. They don't want to have to sell it, and yet many of them have to sell it.

Now, the impact on business is even more nefarious. What happens to small business? That is built into their leases, or is in their ownership, if they own the building they're in. That is passed on to them directly in their rent, and many of the MPAC assessments on small business are more than they pay in rent now. It gets passed on to them, if it's the landlord, or if they are the landlord, they have to swallow it. This is ridiculous—again, based on what they might get if they had to sell their business, according to some government bureaucrat who has never run a small business in their life.

This is the tax cut that hurts the most, and that's what TABIA is focused on, and that's what they'd like to see some relief on.

In fact, again, MPAC is the same government agency that—do you remember? They were bringing their high-paid executives—all political appointments, I'm sure—down to TIFF and having wonderful dinners at taxpayers' expense. That wasn't too long ago. That was MPAC too. I can tell you that when you see that kind of news story in the paper, and you're a small business hanging on by your fingernails and just barely getting by, it hurts. It hurts. So MPAC: a huge, huge bugbear for small business.

The other one, of course, for the 416 businesses is that they're not assessed the same for business education tax either. They're not assessed the same there. Again, we started a campaign in the New Democratic Party to try to affect that. The government brought it down a little bit—not as far as we asked them to, but they brought it down a little bit there as well.

Two instances of small businesses right across Ontario that have been directly attacked by this government: One of them is small butcher shops. The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound talked about abattoirs. I can tell you that old Polish butcher shops in my neighbourhood that had been there in business for 40 years were driven out of business by regulatory changes that this government brought in. Maple Leaf Foods is still doing okay, but the small mom-and-pop butcher shops are no more.

The other businesses that were hurt across the province—and it wasn't that long ago—were small pharmacies. Again, small pharmacies were whacked by this government, attacked directly by this government. We're seeing lots of big pharmacies open up, not a lot of little pharmacies making a go of it. I remember running around to all of them getting petitions signed, their petitions that I presented here, that many of us presented here.

Again, this is not a government on behalf of Main Street. This is a government, though, on behalf of big business—no question. When one company, EllisDon, can get their own bill brought in and passed by this government—and by the way, I love that the Premier has changed her mind about this. She could have changed her mind on the Thursday that we debated it here, but she didn't. She could have withdrawn Bill 74 from that omnibus bill, but she didn't. Now, all of a sudden, she has. We don't know, actually, where she stands on that anymore, but we do know how straightforward it is, if you are a company with \$3 billion in profits, in getting your voice heard in this House. But if you have a \$400,000 or \$500,000 payroll or less, good luck. Good luck having your voice heard in this House. That's simply the reality.

I just have a few minutes left. I want to give some shout-outs to some phenomenal small businesses in my neighbourhood, ones that have really excelled with very little help. There are places like Barque, Dr. Generosity, Earth Glow, Indie Alehouse and Butcher by Nature that still by make a go of it despite the attack on small butchers.

By the way, the other thing the Minister of Labour is now doing is sending out inspectors, not to the big

employers—no, no, no; only one in 100 of employers ever see anybody from the Ministry of Labour to look at their labour practices—but the little ma-and-pa stores in my area. What? This is ridiculous. Talking about red tape, you've got three employees and you get a visit from the Ministry of Labour, but if you have 300, you don't? What?

Again, to get back to what this bill is about, it's not really supporting small business. Not giving a big break to big business is what it's doing. Before this bill—something we asked for in the budget, we in the New Democratic Party—large banks, huge corporations could forget the employer health tax on the first \$400,000 of an employer's payroll, and now they don't. Now it's fair. Now the person with one employee is treated a little bit differently from the person with 1,000 employees. So it's really not helping small business; it's just not giving yet another gift to big business, something we support. In fact, we have long said that this government needs to close the corporate tax loopholes like the \$1.4-billion giveaway corporate tax loophole that they give to big business, not to mention the bills they pass on behalf of single companies like EllisDon, and instead start focusing on those that actually produce the jobs, and that's small business.

Again, to go back to my initial point, small business produces 85% of the new employment in this province. We need to do everything we can to assist our young and aged entrepreneurs in keeping their businesses, setting up their businesses and having their businesses thrive—and we don't. The other demand, very quickly, is help with employment for small businesses. That would help them because they do want to hire on more employees.

Again, do we support this? Yes, we do. It's a small, small step in not giving yet more hundreds of millions away to big corporations. But supporting small business, we're still waiting for that. I've been here—I'm into my eighth year yet—and we're still waiting for a government that actually stands up for small business. In fact, they don't even have a minister in charge of small business anymore. That's how highly they think of it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise to speak following the member from Parkdale-High Park. I'm pleased to be given about two minutes to talk about the bill. There's a big portion of this bill, Bill 105, that also talks about charity. I just want to remind the members of the House, with respect to this portion of the bill, that many of us in the House are debating focused only on small business when, in reality, the bill also covers recognized charities.

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We know yesterday in my city, the city of Toronto, we just hosted the international marathon, and many of the proceeds from the marathon went to numerous charities across the province. Like the member from Parkdale-High Park, I want to shout out to various recognized charities, like Heart and Stroke, the Cancer Society, the Lung Association and Alzheimer's.

But, Mr. Speaker, Bill 105—everybody is focused mainly on the small businesses in terms of exemptions of the employer's health tax. There's a good portion of the bill that talks about the charities, and it is the right thing to do, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to read a portion of the bill so that we will remind the members that as we debate Bill 105, we need to not forget there's various recognized charities that this bill will help. So section 2.1, subsection 9, of the act provides an exemption amount for an employer who is a registered charity. It's determined without reference to its total Ontario remuneration period. But, also, furthermore, the new section 2.1, subsection 11, authorizes the minister "to make regulations providing for special rules that apply to employers who are registered charities."

So at the end of the day, it's not just about supporting small businesses to ensure that they'll be successful in Ontario. We also need to support recognized registered charities across Ontario, so they will be supported through this bill, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for this opportunity to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to comment on my colleague from Parkdale–High Park, and interesting to hear that she has children who are self-employed and working in small business. They know all about what we're talking about here.

She talked about the abattoirs which, again, this government has run out, not only in the rural areas, which I know, but not too far from where she is, of course. And small pharmacies: We shouldn't forget that because, yes, I forgot, actually, how much damage this government did to a lot of the pharmacists across our great province.

As I said in my remarks, and I think she echoed a lot of it, there is no plan here. The government is devoid of a plan to actually put people back to work. They tinker on the edges; they bring out bills that sound wonderful—helping small business act. Well, helping small business would be having a plan. Helping small business would be ensuring that they're lowering taxes, not raising taxes on all the small business. Some 85%, as we've heard in this House, of all jobs are driven by small businesses in this great province.

We don't see anything that they're really doing to help those businesses. What they're doing is adding on more red tape, more bureaucracy, increased energy rates and, at every turn, more red tape.

The skilled trades tax that we're putting on people: Now they've got inspectors going out. We heard in this House last week from one of our colleagues that a barber in their community—it was going to basically shut him down. I've had people in my riding saying that they're getting calls saying either you pay your money in 60 days—which has gone from \$60 for three years to \$120 plus tax for one year—and if you don't, you're out of business.

Speaker, there's no plan. There's red tape. There's increasing taxes from this government. Let's not forget the

cost to service the debt at \$10 billion a year—just to service the debt. What could that be doing to help our small businesses put programs in place that would actually encourage and entice people to expand their business, to bring new people into their business, to start at least one more job in each business? Just think of the impact that that would have as a ripple, if we could get every small business in Ontario to add one person. What's going to happen with this government is that they're going to be actually laying off more people, like they did in the horse racing sector. We need more ability, less taxes and a plan.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the remarks that were made by my colleague from Parkdale–High Park. There's no question that there may be some small step forward here that's useful to people who are self-employed or operating a small business in Ontario, but, Speaker, as my colleague has said, clearly in this province it's the big businesses, the major corporations, that get the breaks, and the small outfits—mom-and-pop or self-employed—that have a tough time.

When this government changed sales tax, brought in the HST, I talked to my constituents who are self-employed, one- and two-person outfits who are going to be hit with an expense that they didn't have to absorb in the past, that they were going to have to put on top of what they were charging to their clients. For them, it was a big deal.

Yet major construction companies and developers were getting a huge break—a huge break. We see this again with the EllisDon bill: If you're big enough, the rules will be bent around your convenience. Whether it changes labour law in this province or not, whether it puts at disadvantage tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of workers or not, the law will be rewritten so that a very big company, EllisDon, can profit; while at the same time, the self-employed, people who run small consultancies and small retail operations, are finding themselves more and more stressed and stretched.

My riding has one of the highest percentage of self-employed people in this province. I have to tell you, right now, they do not appreciate the lack of care and interest that they see coming from this government.

This government has turned its back on the people of Ontario, and eventually the people of Ontario will turn their back on them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I am very pleased to speak today on Bill 105, Supporting Small Businesses Act, because, as I've said many times here in the House, my family is from small business. My grandfather had a business. My dad had the same business. My brother is having the same business, and now his son is with him running the same business. So I know what it is, and I know that government has to pay very much attention to small business. The small businesses are those who are

constant in a community. It's not fly-by-night companies. They are well established. They go from generation to generation, and often they are very successful because there is one of them in the community, and they're also very generous when giving their time to sit on different boards and different social organizations in the community. So when I speak about small business, I'm very—

Hon. Deborah Matthews: You know what you're talking about.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I know what I'm talking about.

I'm very pleased to see that now my nephew is going to take over a business that has been established from generation to generation.

When, as government, we put forward a different rule, a different regulation or a different piece of legislation, we have to also think about the impact that it will have on our small businesses. That's what this bill is all about. This bill is there to help small businesses, social agencies and not-for-profit organizations, and I'm very glad to support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. I return to the member for Parkdale–High Park for her reply.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I just want to say thank you to everybody who weighed in on this debate. Just a bit of an announcement, tonight, by the way: At the CN Tower, there is an event put on by small business called Shop The Neighbourhood. The whole focus of that is to think global and shop local. So shop on your main street. That's critical. Coming up is a big weekend for cross-border shopping. We don't want that; we want people to stay home, spend their money around the corner in their own locales, and that's what this is going to be a kickoff for tonight, for the whole of November and, of course, hopefully, onward from there.

Suffice to say, the very best record in Canada when treating small business—people should know this because there are many myths out there to the contrary—is the New Democratic Party's example in Manitoba of a 0% business tax for small business, the lowest in all of Canada. We're proud of that. We do it for a reason: because we know small business produces 85% of the new jobs.

To all of those small business workers who are out there, you should know that for the most part, your employer cares more about you than your big business counterparts. I mentioned the struggle, always, for a living wage, which is part of our DNA as a party as well, which is not in contradiction to the best interests of small business, but, actually, is in the same direction that most small business owners have been going for years.

So what we ask of this government—yes, this is a small step for small business. It's one we suggested and asked for in the budget, and they've come through. Good.

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But there's so much more. We need to reform MPAC. We need to reform the business education tax. We need

to reinstate, possibly, the grants that, again, another NDP government gave to small business for employing folk and have suggested that. We need to do so much more to help small business because that is the future of this province.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, it is a pleasure to take part in this particular debate. At the outset, I think it's my understanding that, when all is said and done, everyone is going to vote for this bill because this bill does something important. It's a reform to the employer health tax that is targeted at helping some 60,000 Ontario small businesses. If it does that, then almost by definition, it promotes growth, it promotes our economy, and it helps create jobs.

But, Speaker, this is part of Ontario's plan to get back to a balanced budget, and that plan is something that no other party has. It's the ability to maintain our progress with that plan that set Ontario uniquely apart from every other government in Canada. What other government has achieved all of its recession recovery targets since the bottom of the recession in the fall of 2009? The answer is no other. The feds haven't. Alberta hasn't. Only Ontario has never failed to meet its deficit reduction targets and has exceeded them each and every year, for four fiscal years in a row.

That's what makes this bill, Bill 105, Supporting Small Businesses Act, 2013, so important. What it means is that businesses with annual payrolls of under \$5 million will be exempt from paying the employer health tax on the first \$450,000 of their payroll each year. More importantly, that exemption will be indexed to inflation about every five years, which ensures that small businesses are going to see consistency. They won't see bracket creep remove an exemption.

Hopefully, as a small business, they'll be like Cyclone Manufacturing in Meadowvale, which started out as exactly that type of small business, moving to Meadowvale in 2008, one operation with about 80 employees. They were in every way a small business. Cyclone Manufacturing is in the business of fabricating airframe parts. Their clients are everybody: Embraer, Boeing, Gulfstream, Bombardier—you name it. Everybody in the world uses parts from Cyclone Manufacturing. In fact, they're not even a small business anymore. They've grown from one to two to three to four, and they now have four locations in Mississauga and Milton. Instead of employing about 80 people, now they employ closer to 500 people. In fact, during the recession, Meadowvale—not merely with Cyclone but also with Mitutoyo and a few others—became a world-class aerospace manufacturing hub.

A lot of that came about because of some of the actions of our government in not merely overcoming a \$5.6-billion deficit when we were first elected 10 years ago, but paying all of that down. We're Liberals; we do this the old-fashioned way when dealing with debt. We pay it down. The government ran three consecutive bal-

anced budgets in those fiscal years that ended in 2006, 2007 and 2008. In those three consecutive balanced budgets, those surpluses, in part, were devoted to paying down debt. We all believe in paying down debt on this side of the House. That's part of the way that Ontario has restored confidence in this province's economy and created jobs after eight long-lost years of PC government and five longer-lost years of NDP government.

So what is it that this bill aims to affect? It talks about the employer health tax, which each year raises \$5.3 billion, or roughly 4.6% of Ontario's revenues. That's important. This new exemption reduces the cost of hiring, and it reduces the burden of administration for small businesses. How many people will it then affect? Most of us know, if we look at the lists that are put out by our board of trade or chamber of commerce, that something in the neighbourhood of 95% to 98% of the businesses in our communities would be classified as small businesses. Those archetypal big businesses only represent 1% to 3%, depending on where you're from, of all of the firms in your area. So when we talk about helping small businesses, what we're really talking about is nearly 90% to 95% of all the businesses in our community. Whether they're franchise operations, whether they're chains, whether they're mom-and-pop shops or whether they're small incorporated companies, these are the ones that Ontario has done a good job of helping lift up and to say, "Let's see what we can do to help some of you, who aspire to do so, become larger businesses," just like Cyclone; just like other businesses in Lisgar, Meadowvale and Streetsville and other businesses across the GTA.

This bill helps something like 60,000 businesses in Ontario. It helps them with what they'll see as a reduction in their taxes, and that reduction comes about as a result of the reforms introduced by this bill, Bill 105. Among those 60,000 businesses, roughly 12,000 businesses will no longer pay this employer health tax at all. That's one of the things that our government—and, in this case, allowing for the fact that my understanding is that the other parties will also support this bill—that's what our collective government together has done to create the strongest environment in North America for small businesses.

I'd like to talk a little bit about some of the ways in which Ontario has improved that business climate over the last 10 years. Ten years ago, we had an archaic form of taxation which, four years ago, the province announced it was getting rid of, and three years ago it did. That was the provincial sales tax. The provincial sales tax of the day was a tax upon a tax upon a tax upon a tax, depending on how many steps in the value chain that you or your firm had to go through before your product was sold. It didn't allow you to deduct the tax that you paid on things that you consumed inside your business. It was only for things that you had acquired and then subsequently resold—a very inefficient tax. By the way, one of the reasons that, as Ontarians, we retain a sustainable, competitive edge over our neighbouring jurisdictions in

the United States is because they still, in many cases, do tax in that hopelessly inefficient manner. Across Canada, federally, our goods and services tax is just the type of value-added tax that allows people to deduct from all of the tax they charged all the tax they paid and only remit the difference. It's simple, and it works.

In Ontario, we took a convoluted tax that had something like 6,000 pages of rules and took 1,240 people in the Ontario public service to administer, and three years ago, that was phased out. We now have a compatible value-added tax which only needs one level of government—the feds—to collect, and now we have, through the HST, one of the key things that got Ontario through the recession. We didn't see revenues for the province collapse the way other jurisdictions did, particularly in America. It enabled Ontario to be one of the last places into the most recent recession and the first place out.

I'm looking at, how does Ontario rate in terms of competitiveness? By a very small margin, British Columbia has a lower corporate income tax rate in Canada than Ontario does, and by 1.5 percentage points, so does Alberta. But other than that, our corporate income tax rate is the lowest in Canada, and that, for a manufacturing jurisdiction, says something. Out in BC and Alberta, a lot of their local economy is based on their resource industries. For us, our economy is based on knowledge work and it's based on value-added manufacturing, and for us, that low corporate income tax rate is very important.

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One of the things that Ontario has done uniquely well in the last 10 years is to support research and development. For example, there's a 4.5% non-refundable—in other words, you don't have to give it back—Ontario Research and Development Tax Credit. It meant that in the year 2012, the last year for which reliable numbers are available, Ontario companies were able to devote \$170 million of their own money, which came back to them through the tax credit, toward research and development in this province. It meant that they could create jobs here. More importantly, it gave them an incentive to commercialize their products right here in Ontario.

There's a 10% refundable Ontario Innovation Tax Credit for small and medium-sized corporations. In this current fiscal year of 2013-14—the fiscal year in Ontario will end on March 31, 2014; new fiscal years always start on April 1—that Ontario Innovation Tax Credit will put \$249 million, a quarter of a billion dollars, into the hands of firms that are doing innovative things in their labs, in their product development, that are coming up with new things to do and new ways of doing things.

In Ontario today, there's a 20% refundable tax credit for research and development that is contracted to qualifying Ontario research institutions. That amounted to \$13 million of tax relief for firms at the cutting edge of their industries. So those kinds of businesses that Ontario aims to attract—businesses that employ people with a post-secondary diploma or degree, businesses that are high-value, high-wage industries—have been rewarded for

doing innovative research work right here in Ontario, and it's working.

In the United States, even today, some four years after the bottom of the last recession, America has still not recovered all of the jobs that it has lost. It's a little under 80%—77% or 78% as of September, if my numbers are accurate. Great Britain has recovered a little bit more than 100% of their job losses. Europe is still struggling to recover all of its job losses. How are we doing here in Ontario? We have recovered 170% of our job losses. That's 1-7-0; 170% of the people who had lost their jobs are now working. In the main, these are full-time jobs. These are jobs that require a higher education, and these are jobs that pay a good wage. These are the kind of jobs that every industrial jurisdiction in the world is setting out to gather, and here in Ontario we found a way to do that. We found a way to attract the best companies, and we found a way to make sure that not only can we as Ontarians share in their prosperity, but they as companies get a way to operate economically and fairly.

Our tax system is a big help. Our tax system doesn't double- and triple-tax things the way it used to. Our tax system is now lean and efficient. Contrast that with the United States. The United States is no good at distributing income through their tax system, and the United States is not that good at collecting taxes either. In fact, the United States actually has an average higher marginal tax rate than does Ontario. The US tax system does need a lot of attention, but that really is a problem that Americans have to solve.

What we have here in Ontario is, after 10 years of effort, a tax system that allows Ontario companies to have a sustainable, competitive advantage over the United States, and to say to companies that are looking at locating in America or anywhere else in the industrialized heartland of North America—"Where are we going to find all of the things that we need to find? We need to find an educated workforce. We can find that in Ontario. We need to have a first-class transportation system to be able to move our goods to market. We can find that in Ontario. We need to have a place with a good, solid, workable banking system. We can find that in Ontario. And we need to have a place that's competitive in taxes, and we can certainly find that in Ontario."

So for the last 10 years, what this province has done is to make Ontario not merely a better place to grow up, to raise a family, to get an education and to start a business, but a better place to run a business. There's a difference between making a jurisdiction a better place to start a business and a better place to run a business. What you don't want to have happen is to have people say, "I can start something here in Ontario, but when the time comes to grow, I've got to find my money in Asia and I've got to relocate to the States or to Europe." What Ontario has done in the last 10 years is to reward companies by making it easy and profitable for them to grow their business here in Ontario, and that too is working.

Internationally, Ontario's current combined federal-provincial corporate income tax rate of 26.5% is lower

than the 2013 average combined federal-state corporate income tax rate of 39.3% in the US and the average corporate income tax rate of G8 and G20 member countries. And by the way, it's almost exactly that of all of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries.

Speaker, this is just a part of a broader overall strategy by the province of Ontario to continue to make Ontario the most attractive place to employ people and to do business in North America. This particular exemption will continue to reduce the cost of hiring and it, most importantly, will reduce the burden of administration, often called red tape, for small businesses.

Here's something that a lot of people don't know: In our government, for the last several years, if you're a minister, before you can add a new rule or a new regulation, you've got to subtract at least two more. Across ministries, there's almost like a cap-and-trade scheme in effect where, over the years, Ontario has been reducing the administrative burden on small businesses. Where it's necessary to institute new regulations, absolutely it will be done, because our workplaces will be safe and our procedures will be fair and enforceable. But the important part is that as these things evolve, we've got to keep reviewing. What's no longer needed? What things can be combined? That's one thing that our government has excelled at over the years, is getting rid of obsolete or out-of-date regulation.

These particular cuts to the business education tax rates began in 2007. In aggregate, they've saved Ontario businesses \$200 million. Ontario is parallel to a 2013 federal budget measure to extend to the end of 2015 the capital cost allowance for manufacturing and processing machinery and equipment. The impact of that is if you're a manufacturer, what we want you to do is to upgrade the things that you have in your plant. And if you're upgrading your machinery, that means that as a manufacturer you're probably going to have a sharper pencil than the guy who's trying to squeeze a few extra years out of some obsolete machinery that may be years or decades old. If you've got the best, the most efficient, the fastest, the most energy-efficient stuff, then probably not only will you be making a better product, but you'll be able to offer it through your distribution channel at a lower price, which is exactly what we want. In fact, this measure will reduce Ontario taxes payable by manufacturing businesses by approximately \$265 million over three years. That's more than a quarter of a billion dollars in tax that Ontario manufacturers won't have to pay. That makes those employers better able to hire some of the high-quality people that our universities are producing.

Since 2009, the marginal effective tax rate on new business investment has been cut in half, placing Ontario below the average marginal effective tax rate among OECD countries, and well below the marginal effective tax rate in the United States, which, as I said earlier, gives us a sustainable competitive advantage here in the province of Ontario.

Along with my colleague in Parkdale-High Park, we had the opportunity a few weeks ago of being in the US

Midwest for a conference. It was very instructive to talk with a lot of our counterparts at the state levels.

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The States, by and large, are pretty well managed. A lot of them have some major concerns over what's happening in both Houses of Congress. But the States look at the province of Ontario, and they look upon us with some envy. We are the elephant in the room. We have a larger population and larger GDP than any of the surrounding states in the industrialized heartland of North America. There's enough credit to go around, and a lot of these measures have been supported by all three parties. I hope this one will be as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I just want to say that this Thursday coming up, the Legiskaters have our first hockey game against the firefighters, and I know the fine member from Mississauga–Streetsville is going to be stellar between the pipes for us again. We'll keep that undefeated record intact.

I listened with intent and interest as to what the member from Mississauga–Streetsville was referring to in talking about interest, taxation etc. We can honestly say—on this side of the chamber, anyways—that this Liberal government for the last 10 years has actually done a marvellous job of overtaxing and overburdening small businesses with red tape and actually stifling economic growth and advancement for small businesses.

It's unfortunate because when I travelled throughout my great riding of Northumberland–Quinte West and I approached small business owners and entrepreneurs like I did this past week back in the riding—I went to Frenchies restaurant on Division Street in Cobourg. It's a great little restaurant. You can get Montreal smoked ham on rye, and the proprietor there, Frenchie, she's a firecracker—

Mr. Peter Shurman: It's not smoked ham, it's smoked meat.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Smoked meat, sorry. Smoked meat.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Very important.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Yes, very important. Yes, I apologize. I'm being corrected here.

Frenchie, she's a real firecracker. She started up her own business—a restaurant, of course—and it's hard to open up a restaurant and be successful, but she's done it. One of the things that she was bending my ear about was the fact that government regulation and overregulation and paper forms are hindering her ability to expand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm really happy to be able to stand in the House and speak about the Concession Street BIA, which is in my riding, and the wonderful work that they do as a business organization.

Just this weekend, I visited FallFest, which is run by the Concession Street BIA, and it brings small businesses together in the community. It gets everybody out. Un-

fortunately, Mother Nature didn't go quite along with it this year, but there were still businesses from up and down the street. It was to my good fortune that I met one of our new business owners on the street, Mr. Robert Connelly, and his photography studio. He was really great to do a photo shoot yesterday with myself and my family. I'm hoping to get some great shots for our Christmas card this year.

I'd also like to take the opportunity to welcome our new executive director for the Concession Street BIA, which is Kim Pinczel. I know she's going to do a wonderful job of bringing new light to Concession Street, hopefully bringing new business, fresh eyes and a new way to do business on this street.

I'll take a moment to say thank you to Betty Toplack, who is one of our business owners on the street. For 37 years she's had the Mountain Bookstore. Unfortunately, come the end of this month, she will be closing down her store and leaving Concession Street. With hydro rates the way they just keep increasing and red tape on a regular basis, Betty is just finding it absolutely impossible to keep her small business going. But I wish her the best of luck as she decides to take that business into the Internet world and hopefully be able to do well there.

We have great, great businesses on Concession Street: Linseed's, Opie's, Papa Leo's, so many electronics places and Middle Eastern cuisine. We have a wonderful place, and I invite all to join.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to speak to Bill 105, An Act to amend the Employer Health Tax Act. I enjoyed the delivery, with all the factual information, from the member from Mississauga–Streetsville. There is no question that Ontario is one of the best jurisdictions, certainly in North America, to do business. Taxes in recent years have been reduced, and we understand that small businesses—that's where our employment comes from, and we have to encourage them all the way.

I was at a special event yesterday. Orléans celebrated their 150th anniversary some two years ago. That's my community—120,000 now. When I was a kid coming through there to high school, it was about 1,500 people. So it's a big growth area of Ottawa. It's right on the Ottawa River. This summer, all of the businesses and community groups got together and we celebrated the 400th anniversary of Champlain making his way up the Ottawa River past Orléans. June 8, I believe, was the date. That was one of the things where the businessmen got together, really supported the community and made the event much better.

Yesterday, we were celebrating Orléans in the 1950s and 1960s. We had a lot of pictures of Orléans businesses—Montpetit store; Dr. Major was there for 30 or 40 years, looking after the people in Orléans. We had these wonderful slides from those times. We had wonderful stories from those times. It was a 95% francophone community, but the McNeely families were given one of the notations. We had a horse business at that time.

Businesses are so important. This bill is good for business, and I hope the whole Legislature supports it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to bring my constituents' thoughts to the Legislature. I'll echo my colleague from Northumberland–Quinte West: We really do hope that Mr. Delaney is good between the pipes on Thursday night when we play the firefighters—and also our colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, who was stellar the last time, Jimmy McDonell.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: He stood on his head.

Mr. Bill Walker: He stood on his head, and we're hoping for that again. It's going to be a great night.

It can't be said too many times in this House. I know the member from Mississauga–Streetsville was talking about corporate tax cuts and trying to compare us with the States. You know what? What we need to be focusing on is exactly what we're doing here in Ontario. We should be the leader in this province again, and we will be. Enough is enough. We're going to turn this province around when we take government. We're going to get out of this business of continually taxing, adding administration, adding bureaucracy and adding frustration.

One of the members across, earlier today, insinuated that I was a person who was looking at the negative. Well, you know what? They painted a pretty bleak picture across the aisle, and I consider myself the eternal optimist. However, when you look at the fiascos that they've created and the small businesses they've run out of here—the abattoirs, the small pharmacists, the small businessmen of all facts and areas—it just scares me.

We need to have hope. What we need is a government that will stop spending \$9 billion more than they bring in in revenue each year. They need to be creating conditions in an economy so that small businesses actually want to step up and say, “You're absolutely right. I want to stay in Ontario. I want to come to Ontario.”

I want to see a jobs plan. I want to see less taxes. I want to see less red tape. I want to see taxes that are decreasing, not increasing. We don't want to see, every time we turn around, them coming into my back pocket to fix their ills, their mismanagement and their bad decisions. We need a government that inspires and provides hope, like we will, to show them. We've offered; our leader offered them all of our white papers, if they could even take one good idea and try to run it up the flagpole.

Mr. Speaker, small business is the backbone. We're here to promote it, and we'll be with them every step of the way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the questions and comments. I return to the member from Mississauga–Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's a pleasure to hear the comments of my colleagues. To my colleague from Northumberland–Quinte West, I assure you I am going to pack several weeks of miracles, goalposts and crossbars in my bag for Thursday. But I often wonder how he can call our

efforts anything but effective when taxes have been steadily going down and red tape has been slashed every year. You should actually have a look at that.

To my colleague from Hamilton Mountain, Hamilton's businesses deserve a great deal of credit for the stellar job that they've done in Hamilton's commercial and industrial renaissance in the last decade. The nature of the work that we do in our society evolves, and Hamilton's businesses know that they're going to be doing different things for different buyers and different customers in the year ahead.

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To my colleague from Ottawa–Orléans, Ottawa's eastern neighbourhoods, such as the one that he calls home, have created a real centre of innovation and new products and services, even while they celebrate their traditions and their roots. They've really made it a place to be proud to be from and a place to be proud to live in.

Of course, to my colleague from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, Speaker, I trust this member's comments indicate that he intends to back-check and block shots on the ice this Thursday—

Mr. Bill Walker: I'll be there for you, buddy.

Mr. Bob Delaney:—and I'm going to hold him to it.

I also say to the member and to some of his colleagues to go into the library and check out the May–June 2013 edition of a magazine—published in the United States, by the way—called *Foreign Affairs*. It's all about what's in their white papers. It's all about the policy of austerity.

What the article says—an American publication—is, “Austerity doesn't work,” and every jurisdiction that has tried the ideas in their white papers has failed and come out with more debt and not less.

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to stand today to speak to Bill 105, Supporting Small Businesses Act.

Just for the benefit of the folks who are just tuning in, this is an act that proposes to increase the exemption for the employer health tax, starting January 1, 2014, and ending in 2018. In 2019, the exemption would then be adjusted for inflation every five years.

Bill 105 would increase the exemption limit for the employer health tax for small businesses, charities and not-for-profit organizations with an annual payroll of \$400,000 to \$500,000, respectively. This indeed will alleviate the burden that payroll taxes have on small enterprises and their ability to grow and create jobs.

According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, this legislation will also result in more than 60,000 employers paying less employer health tax, and 12,000 of those businesses would no longer pay the tax at all. That's why the PC caucus is intrigued by this particular bill and has chosen to support it in second reading.

Again, this bill is called An Act to amend the Employer Health Tax Act, but I would be remiss if I didn't reflect back on comments that my colleague from Nipissing shared on Monday, October 7. My colleague from North Bay said, “It would be more aptly named the

'supporting small business while we stick it to them 100 other ways act.'"

That's what I want to reflect upon in my next few minutes, as I stand and debate this particular bill. But before I do so, I'd be remiss if I didn't recognize that, appropriately enough, as we talk about supporting small business, this is indeed Small Business Week in Canada, from October 20 to October 26. It's a national celebration of Canadian entrepreneurs and their contribution to Canada's economy. This event has recognized Canadian entrepreneurs for the last 34 years.

While we celebrate small business, a recent report conducted by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business delivers some surprising news. The report found that Saskatoon and the greater Calgary area are once again the best large Canadian communities for entrepreneurs to run a business in. The GTHA came in third, a fact that, sadly, speaks for itself.

It is evident that there is excessive red tape that is strangling business in Ontario, and we're going to talk on that in a couple of minutes. This government, the Wynne Liberal government, must work hard to reduce this. Talking about it and having conversations and consulting just doesn't cut it. There's still so much more work to be done, because third place for what was once the economic engine of Canada is just not good enough.

With that said, I'd also like to note that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business also noted that small business optimism in Ontario obviously dropped in September. Employers are worried about many other factors, including red tape, skyrocketing electricity costs, and being hit by new fees and taxes to pay for public infrastructure projects.

Just last night, before I left to come to Toronto, a constituent, a small business owner, came to my home. He's worried. His son—he has two sons, actually, who work for the business. He has one son in particular who hopes to take over the business someday. But he worries about the escalating red tape that is burying the basis of his business. He is a director on OASIS, and they meet in a couple of weeks, on October 31, in Waterloo. One of the keynote issues that is going to be addressed during this OASIS convention is the skyrocketing amount of red tape. They have to hire consultants to complete this red tape regimen, and that's absolutely ludicrous for a small business that employs 10 people. That's good news for a small community like Teeswater, and here he is being burdened with the cost of complying with redundant, unnecessary red tape. So we have to take a look at that.

Small business owners are listening to the Premier's discussion about revenue tools, and you know what? They're beginning to wonder if the Liberal government is going to give them this employer health tax relief with one hand and then claw back any gains through new taxes with another. A leopard doesn't change its spots. I think that, just like in the movie *Groundhog Day*, we're going to see the same thing happen over and over and over. They take with one hand and give with another.

But I'm always impressed with the tenacity and the dedication of small business owners in my riding, and

they will persevere. You cannot find more industrious and innovative people who are willing to take a risk and invest in their community. These are the people who advertise in our local papers and sponsor sports teams and charitable events. Most importantly, small business owners create jobs. Given that small firms with less than 100 employees make up about 98% of the total employer business base in Ontario, I think it would be safe to say that they are a baseload power of our economy. We cannot forget that. If we hamstringing small business with excessive fees and regulation, we choke the engine that, as I said, drives this province.

In my meetings with small business owners in Huron-Bruce, they expressed concern about Ontario's debt levels and the fact that this government does not seem to have any plan to lead us out of debt bondage. When we have to spend a large percentage of our tax dollars to service the debt, not to mention what will happen if our credit rating is downgraded again or interest rates go up, it's very difficult to grow our economy. Our productive capital is being drained away to pay interest on the debt, and yet the government continues down the path of spend and spend. It has to stop, Speaker. Business owners understand the bottom line, and they see through this government very easily. You cannot continue to spend more than you take in, and at a certain point the debt has to be paid. The citizens of Detroit have just learned that lesson the hard way. When money is wasted on poorly administered programs and giving \$7-million bonuses to executives for simply doing the job that they are well paid to do, there's nothing left to support the core programs that are vital to a healthy economy.

I'd like to talk about infrastructure now. All over my riding, municipalities are facing the closure of bridges and roads because they no longer have the money to maintain them. I was at the Bruce county wardens' banquet on Saturday evening. A former warden came up to me and said, "Lisa, mark my words: The bridges that are going to have to be closed this year because of the lack of infrastructure dollars are indeed going to be a political issue next campaign." I believe him.

Small businesses depend on public infrastructure to access markets and supplies. How many bridges could we have saved with the \$7-million bonus the Liberal government is paying to Pan Am Games executives? I would like to suggest that we could have repaired a significant number of roads with the money wasted on the gas plant cancellations. Just think of what we could do if we were not spending so much to service Ontario's crushing debt. We have reached a crisis point in this province. The financial cushion is gone, and we have to make every dollar count. But somehow, that whole point is missed on the Liberal government.

Now I'd like to touch a little bit on the TSSA. This is something that rings very, very clear and is of importance to small businesses around my riding and all over the province, actually. They raise the same concerns repeatedly with regard to the TSSA. While this legislation begins to address the payroll tax burden—Bill 105, spe-

cifically, that is—it leaves other significant problems unaddressed. Only Friday, I received an email from another frustrated small business owner in Huron–Bruce. This gentleman, along with many other farmers, is facing significant fees from the TSSA with regard to on-farm crop drying. Ontario dealers are facing higher costs to have their burners certified than their counterparts in the US. If these units are already deemed acceptable in other provinces and the US, why on earth do we need to burden our grain dealers with these crippling fees and destroy their ability to compete?

1540

That's the crux of it all, Mr. Speaker. This Liberal government is doing whatever they can to defeat the competitiveness of our province. Our businesses and our province are going to hurt as a result. To talk about the TSSA a little bit more, the cost associated with having just one burner certified has been well over \$3,000. When margins are tight and dollars are sparse, most people don't have that extra \$3,000, and couple that with the fact that most dealers have multiple burners. Where are they going to find this extra cash?

I've also heard from small business owners who sell propane. They are very clear that TSSA fees and inspections will force small dealers out of business. This is a blow to regions that depend upon tourism as an economic driver. Providing services and goods to campers and cottagers is a major source of income to many businesses in Ontario. Given that Huron–Bruce is Ontario's west coast, we enjoy our tourism. We want to provide the most cost-effective services available. Unfortunately, again, this is another way that the Liberal government is taking a whack at rural Ontario. We need to cut as much of the red tape and endless fees that burden our small employers and create an environment in which they can focus their energies on growing their business and creating jobs.

Speaker, red tape has been called the \$31-billion hidden tax. Ontario needs to cap inspection fees and bring those fees in line with similar private sector services. We must also ensure that TSSA employees are qualified to perform these inspections and that the TSSA publishes its standards and safety policies so that business owners know what standards their establishments have to meet. These frequent inspections and fees are creating a lot of stress in the business community, and take time and productive capital away from what the employer should be doing: successfully running his or her business.

Let's talk about WSIB. It's another bone of contention with small businesses across the province. While Bill 105 is a step in the right direction, it's like we're taking one step forward and 10 back. The Liberal government has increased the burden on many small businesses with Bill 119, which took away a WSIB exemption allowing contractors to substitute private insurance for WSIB coverage. Bill 119 forces independent operators, sole proprietors, partners in a partnership and executive officers of corporations in the construction industry to pay Workplace Safety and Insurance Board premiums. If

there was anything more ludicrous introduced by this government, I'd be hard-pressed to find something to beat this particular one. There is a lot of nonsense that has been introduced over the last 10 years, but I can tell you—in 2010, my husband and I renovated our farmhouse and, at that time, going into 2011, it came to our contractor's attention that his wife, who works out of their home and does the books for the company, was going to have to pay WSIB. This is an added burden which is absolutely unnecessary.

We have to start being real. We need a reality check with this government because, as I said, they are crippling small business left, right and centre. There are so many different examples from my riding that we could focus on, but I just want to say that my offices receive many calls—and this is on which I'm basing my comments today—and specifically about WSIB, the calls are coming in with regard to mandatory coverage, because it won't do a thing to improve workplace safety and it will increase costs for the average effective business by several thousand dollars a year. This mandatory WSIB coverage is a tax on job creators and drives up the costs of small businesses and contractors. It's just absolute nonsense and a perfect example of another way this Liberal government continues to prove they're totally disconnected from reality and they're doing nothing but pushing small businesses further and further down the road in terms of the burden of debt that they have to carry.

All of these extra costs are being levied on the small businesses that I've mentioned and will eventually be passed on to the consumers.

It's interesting. With regard to transportation regulations and farmers, they have no one to pass the extra costs of business along to. It stops there. I hear this government talk about how they want to embrace everyone. They're the only party that stands up for one Ontario. But I challenge that, because I think they are talking out of both sides of their mouth. On one hand, they talk about embracing and introducing legislation for one Ontario. On the flip side, they're doing nothing but crippling so many sectors throughout this province. That proves that they're not walking their talk, and they have to be held accountable for this.

The cumulative effect of all of these extra costs and red tape is a drain to precious resources from our producers and job creators. Slowly, our economy is being starved. Treating our small businesses as bottomless sources of revenue is no way to regrow Ontario's economy. In fact, it is a recipe for an eventual economic collapse. If these small business owners throw in the towel and either close or move to a more business-friendly environment, like what has happened in Huron–Bruce—Volvo, E.D. Smith; the list could go on and on—jobs dry up and disappear, and then the people disappear.

We already have a high rate of unemployment in this province. High unemployment takes a toll on our social programs, which places an even bigger burden on the remaining taxpayers. Food bank usage is rising across the

province and people are depending more and more on agencies like the United Way to make ends meet.

I referenced in a question I asked to the Premier this morning the fact that people are finding it very difficult to make ends meet. They're finding it difficult to pay their ever-increasing utilities, their hydro bills. You know what the sad part is? There are some agencies that are available to help, but when you call them now, the voice-mail answer that they get tells them that the cupboard is bare. There's no money left this year to help anybody out, and that is a travesty for what once was the economic engine of Canada, as I've mentioned before.

If Ontario is to once again prosper, we cannot drive independent school bus companies out with unfair procurement practices, another example where this Liberal government proves time and time again they just don't get it. We can no longer afford arbitrary decisions like the one to end slots at racetracks, which may end up costing 60,000 jobs, as we heard earlier today as well. I'd be remiss if I didn't touch on the fact that the closure of government facilities like the Walkerton jail and the Bluewater centre have taken a terrible toll on both the employees and the local economies in Huron-Bruce. How do we recoup those jobs? Where is the government's plan to put these people back to work? Alas, when we asked those questions this morning of the Premier, we did not get an answer. This Liberal government just doesn't have a plan to get Ontarians back to work, and that is a worry.

Where are we going to turn? Ad hoc decisions from a government that can provide no rationale or economic justification are undermining the very fabric of our society. Time and time again, just like this bill, Bill 105, it shows this government playing on the fringes of a fabric that is unravelling at a scary rate. How many entrepreneurs have been discouraged from starting a business after witnessing the outrageous tire stewardship fees, another example? Tire stewardship fees arbitrarily levied on farm tires have put our farmers and equipment dealers at a huge disadvantage. Several tradesmen contacted my office after the introduction of the College of Trades and informed me that they plan to retire rather than pay the higher fees.

Enough is enough. I appeal to the Liberal government, to Premier Wynne, to stop the nonsense and start working with us in the spirit of minority government and hear what we're saying. Let us work with you. Take a look at our white papers and take some things from them. How many jobs and apprenticeships do we have to lose?

I want to talk about the agri-businesses as well. Farm organizations have been clear in their message to government: Increasing amounts of red tape and paperwork are causing stress.

That reminds me, Mr. Speaker. It was interesting. Last week during constituency week, I got contacted by some of my local editors of community papers. A member from the Liberal caucus wrote a letter saying that I voted against Ontario's Great Lakes. Well, guess what? We as a caucus, the PC Party, chose to vote against the Great

Lakes Protection Act because it's bad legislation. It's just redundant and it adds another layer.

1550

Interestingly enough, the president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, at the Huron County Federation of Agriculture AGM on Friday night, also denounced that piece of legislation. The president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture said very clearly it—he agreed with us.

Just like the Green Energy Act took all rights away from municipalities, the Great Lakes Protection Act, if you read it thoroughly, trumps our nutrient management program. It trumps source water protection. It's bad legislation.

Yet this government continues to throw things at us left, right and centre that don't make any sense, and they need to be jacked up because of that.

I could go on about energy, and there's so much that needs to be said about that. Energy rates alone continue to be hiked through the roof, driving our businesses out; an example would be Bogdon furniture out of Walkerton. Again, they showed me their energy bills—and guess what? Walkerton is a beautiful community in which I have family. They're very proud of their community and of their manufacturers. But when their hydro bill is actually 50% more because of global adjustment, they scratch their heads a little bit and wonder, "Why on earth do we continue to try to prevail in Ontario?" Do you know why they do it? They do it because of their community, and they're committed to their employees. I wish we had a government in Ontario that were equally as committed to our employees in Ontario.

Speaker, we've got a long way to go with this bill, and I look forward to further debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: It was indeed a pleasure to listen to the member from Huron-Bruce. I sometimes had to stop and wonder what the debate was about, but she was very articulate. I know what the bill says. The bill is about \$450,000 and—that's what the bill is about, and it's about helping small businesses to get a little bit of extra money.

She went on to talk about so many things, and I was scratching my head, trying to figure out why she wasn't talking about the bill so much as about all the errors that this government is making. It must be a very easy speech for her to make because the government has made a lot of errors recently.

Then I looked at the bill itself, Bill 105. It does a very small thing around taxes. It does a very small thing about companies that have under \$5 million in sales a year. It's very narrowly focused. But it has this title of Supporting Small Businesses Act. Then I figured this was why she was standing up, talking about small business. I don't blame her for being somewhat confused. The government should be bringing in a bill that says "We're separating small business from big business and we're giving them a tax break act," because the reality is, that's what it's all about.

I listened to her and I agreed with her that small businesses are the backbone of the economy. I listened to her and I agreed with her that the work ethic in many small businesses surpasses that of large businesses or even public enterprise. I listened to her and heard that they are job producers in this province—all of which is correct. But most of the time she spent talking about Liberal mismanagement and how the government plays on the fringes.

I would remind her and everyone here that what this bill does is very small. It's very much on the edge, and we should get on and pass it to help those small businesses.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member from Huron—Bruce for her comments.

Bill 105, the Supporting Small Businesses Act, is another piece, I would say, in a very long list of significant tax reforms when it comes to enhancing and supporting small business across Ontario.

Two weeks ago, I had an opportunity to speak for about 10 minutes—I shared some time with the member from Oakville—and during that 10 minutes, I gave several examples of the support over the course of several years, new policy pieces that we have brought in that have enhanced significantly and supported small business in the province of Ontario.

I would say to the member from Huron—Bruce, as the official opposition and as a Conservative official opposition, I think in terms of cementing the idea that Conservatives like to put forward that they are the tax fighters, that they are the ones who will look after your pocket-book, to be fair, there was a real missed opportunity by the Conservatives several years ago on a policy position they supported, up until we brought it forward and did the heavy lifting on it. But when we brought it into the Legislature and voted on it, they did not support it. That, of course, was the single sales tax. There's likely not one tax initiative that could have been brought forward that would have helped all businesses, large, medium-sized and small. That single sales tax initiative, by the way, when we talk about red tape, was the single biggest thing you could have done to support the reduction of red tape. Not only was there no support from the official opposition on the input cost savings for businesses, but there was no support from the members of the official opposition on the elimination of 1,000 pages of red tape almost overnight. So I'm a little curious. Perhaps in her response she'll have an ability to comment on that.

Speaker, my two minutes are up, but I would simply say this piece is not the only piece. This is a long list of significant tax reforms for small business in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Mr. Speaker, it's always a pleasure to listen to the member from Huron—Bruce put things so eloquently and with such passion. She does represent her riding with great distinction, and I want to thank her for that.

Again, Bill 105 really needs to be worked on: some of the things we see in the bill and, of course, the over-taxation by the Liberals. I'll give you a perfect example of that. I recently purchased two new front tires, so the smaller tires, for my tractor. I was expecting to pay \$300 per tire, maybe \$400 a tire. It ends up that \$1,600 later I have two new tires on the front of my tractor—\$1,600, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bill Walker: That would have been the year the Liberals put that tax in.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: This tire tax that the Liberals have brought in does nothing for small businesses. Going back to the small business where I purchased the tires for my tractor, the proprietor there said to me, "Well, you know, Rob, one of the problems that we're facing is overregulation and over-taxation." They're having difficulty keeping those tires for rural farmers or for light industrial workers who use tractors for excavating or any kind of landscaping they might be doing. It's really become a hindrance, stifling business for these small businesses, and it's just sad to see that this once great province has now lapsed into a have-not province under this Liberal government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's an honour to rise on behalf of the people in Algoma—Manitoulin and just address this particular bill real shortly.

The member from Huron-Bruce brought up a really good point that is very sensitive to me along the North Shore. Over the last week that I spent doing constituency clinics in many of the communities in the northern part of my riding, the one item that consistently came up was the problem with TSSA and the impact it's having on small businesses. It's not that these small, community-oriented businesses, which are the backbone of these communities, are looking to get any more or anything less. They're not looking to get any breaks. They want to abide by the law. But you have to respect the fact that the inspection fees, the regulations, a lot of the orders that are put on these small mom-and-pop operations—they just can't meet what the inspections from TSSA are requesting of them. The time limits that are put on them and the availability of that specialized service that is needed across northern Ontario is not readily available as it is in other parts of this province. That is just one of the areas that is really being affected.

I really enjoyed listening to the comments that the member from Huron—Bruce made on TSSA. I'm really going to look at the points you brought up. Maybe they might be useful to me just to highlight and have some discussions with the people back home.

1600

But another point that I just wanted to bring up is there's good news that happened in Algoma—Manitoulin. There are quite a few new manufacturing jobs that are going to come to the area. But just the one that I want to highlight in the last eight seconds that I have is, we had 100 jobs at stake here, and it took this government six

weeks to authorize having the power opened up to the sawmill in order to gain 100 jobs. Now, if we're going to do something, why does it take so long to plug in in order to create jobs? That's where we need some help.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. We return to the member for Huron–Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I certainly do appreciate the comments from the members from Beaches–East York, Thunder Bay–Atikokan, Northumberland–Quinte West and Algoma–Manitoulin.

It's easy to time and time again point out Liberal mismanagement—it's almost too easy, Mr. Speaker—but the bottom line to all of it is that the band-aid approach that this government has tried is just not working any longer.

I found it interesting that the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan referenced the fact that Bill 105 is just one of many in a string of tax relief. Well, I can't help but shake my head because clearly, as I stated in my earlier comments, a leopard does not change its spots, and the reality is they're going to take from one hand—they're going to take from Paul to give to Peter and keep spinning around. What we need is just an absolute commitment instead of passing the bowl around. We need to stop, and start eliminating the red tape that this government has introduced over the last 10 years.

I thank the member from Northumberland–Quinte West. What a perfect example you shared with regard to the tire tax—absolute nonsense and cost for yourself and the business in which you purchased the tires from. I'd be curious to know if anybody really knew how big those front tires were, because it's ridiculous what they've done in terms of escalating the pressure of doing business. The Liberals just go at it over and over again.

In terms of adding pressure to doing business, the member from Algoma–Manitoulin was very, very interesting. I appreciate the fact that you're interested in my comments from TSSA. They're very real. This is what I'm hearing in my riding, and the interesting part is that those comments are universal across this province. It's great that you get it and that the PC caucus gets it. I just wish the Liberal government would catch up and get along with us as well.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to rise in the House today to address G105, the Supporting Small Businesses Act.

I just wanted to say that we just finished Oktoberfest in Kitchener–Waterloo. I'm going on my diet now. But actually, small businesses were worked into the theme of Oktoberfest. It's quite something. We had something called Techtoberfest. This was a local company, Communtech. It's not small exactly, but what it was doing was fostering the start-up connection across the province for young entrepreneurs who have these great ideas and would benefit, at some point, from some of the recommendations from G105.

I just want to quickly, though, review some of the background here, because it's important to know why we're actually standing up in the House today talking about something that potentially could be very positive, which I find a little encouraging given some of the debates that we've had in the past.

We're going to probably approach it from a very different perspective as the PC caucus, and that's actually becoming a trend, a trend that I might say is resonating quite well with the people of the province of Ontario based on some of those by-election results.

Just to review, currently, there is an exemption for paying the employer health tax on the first \$400,000 in an employer's payroll. This applies to a business with one employee and to the Royal Bank. The NDP has long argued that while the exemption is appropriate for small companies, there is no reason to have the first \$400,000 in a large employer's payroll exempted from the EHT. Therefore, one of our budget demands was to have companies with \$5 million in payroll or more no longer be eligible for the exemption, and this is included in the legislation.

The government has also increased, though, the exemption amount to \$450,000 for the 2014 to 2018 calendar years. Starting in 2019, the exemption amount is adjusted for inflation every five years.

Unfortunately, this will undermine some of the good intentions that we brought to that budget discussion. I'm sure some of you will remember that budget debate quite clearly. We brought a number of requests into that discourse, and, unfortunately—we'll try to make this better when it gets to committee. Of course, we're going to be supporting it, because it was one of our ideas.

We do have some specific concerns with the bill, though. By increasing the amount of the exemption, as I said, from \$400,000 to \$450,000, the new threshold doesn't raise any new revenue. I think all of us in this House should be able to come to some consensus that new revenue is needed and that we need to find creative ways to find that revenue which doesn't land on the backs of hard-working Ontarians.

The government also must be sure that it has closed off all possible ways of segmenting the workforce for payroll reporting purposes, which has been a problem in the past. This is where we will sort of dig down at the committee level to address some of these concerns.

This bill in this House at this time also provides us an opportunity to have a broader, perhaps more honest, conversation about taxation in the province of Ontario. There is a range of other tax loopholes that could be changed and, perhaps, should be considered for changing. As I mentioned, we are not going to cut our way to prosperity in the province of Ontario, as the PCs would suggest, and we cannot continue on the same path that we are on as a province, with overspending in other areas and wasting other tax revenue at the expense of the people who we serve.

The other tax loopholes that could be changed—the Liberals, of course, claim that the provincial government

needs to hit household budgets with new taxes to raise that \$34 billion for transit infrastructure by 2013. Yet at the same time, the Liberal government has committed to a series of new corporate tax loopholes and giveaways to Ontario's largest corporations and highest-income earners that will cost Ontario's treasury over \$35 billion by the year 2031. This does not resonate well with the people of this province, and nor should it.

Beginning in 2015, the government will open \$1 billion in corporate tax loopholes that will give Ontario's largest corporations an HST rebate on expenses like high-priced restaurants and box seats. This needs to change. We are going to fight this, obviously, because this does not put people first. Hard-working Ontarians have to pay their taxes when they go out to eat, if they go out to eat. Why should corporations not have to pay this tax?

Beginning in 2018, planned cuts in corporate tax rates from 11.5% to 10% will cost the treasury \$800 million per year. Quite honestly, when we have met with Canadian manufacturers and Ontario manufacturers, they're not actively lobbying for a reduction in their corporate tax rates because they understand. Progressive companies understand that when the taxes are collected—and corporations have a responsibility to pay those taxes—and we invest that money in progressive ways and efficient ways, for instance, in infrastructure, we actually make their companies more profitable. Infrastructure is a key piece of being successful in the province of Ontario.

Finally, beginning in 2018, the planned tax cuts only for individuals earning over \$500,000 per year, at a cost of \$470 million per year, are to be clawed back. Of course, this was one of our 2011 budget items and actually has generated \$470 million.

The total cost of new loopholes and giveaways comes to \$35 billion. The number is so big that it doesn't even resonate with your average Ontarian. It's just a lot of money that needs to actually go to the services and to the people of this province. That's why we're here. We are here to strengthen the very fabric of this province. That means a strong education system. That means a strong health care system where people don't have to go out of province to get certain medical procedures.

That also means preserving the environment. We've seen a lot of cutbacks around the Ministry of Natural Resources. Certainly, some of those tax dollars that we're proposing to give away to corporations in corporate tax breaks could go towards strengthening the Ministry of Labour.

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We had a very tragic event in the riding of Kitchener-Waterloo just over a week ago, where a young man was on a work site and suffered a fatal accident. That work site actually now has 17 work stoppages on it. You can't tell me that the Ministry of Labour had their eye on that location. We're going to delve down and find out more information about that, but when you protect workers, you protect the economy. These are the kinds of services that \$35 billion goes to, not to mention infrastructure.

For my comments today I'm going to focus primarily on corporate tax compliance, because we are not doing a good job of making sure that we are gathering and collecting the revenue from corporations. Even the Auditor General has said this for years. Don Drummond was commissioned—he wasn't exactly listened to, but he was commissioned—to make some recommendations on corporate tax compliance. He, among many other commentators, has pointed to a number of problems with Ontario's tax collection system. I would have thought that perhaps that might have been the focus of some of the other speakers, but this is going to be my focus today, because corporations are getting opportunities in this great province, and quite honestly, they should be paying their taxes as well.

The greatest challenge to the province relates to the ability of corporations to eliminate or decrease payments of provincial corporate income tax through creative mechanisms, including the shifting of profits and losses across Canada to avoid or reduce taxation in the province where income really was earned—which is where it's supposed to be taxed. Currently, corporate groups can use complex transactions to transfer losses among subsidiaries and across provincial borders. These transactions can also be used by corporate groups to shift income from Ontario to lower-tax jurisdictions than Ontario, even though the corporation benefits from the public services in Ontario.

I was just reading from the Calgary Herald this last spring. It's an article entitled, "Alberta Loses Battle for \$120 million in Corporate Taxes." This is now becoming known as the "Ontario shuffle"—there's actually a name for this. The Ontario shuffle lets firms pay less tax elsewhere. Companies that are benefiting from the infrastructure, from the economy in that province and in this province: If they have their headquarters someplace else, there are all sorts of loopholes for them to get away with not paying their fair share.

That's actually all that we're asking for: for corporations to show a level of leadership and become part of the solution, because I think most of them would say that government can't do it alone, and I think most of us in this House would agree that government cannot do it alone.

These are some of the issues that we are certainly going to be pursuing around corporate tax compliance.

In addition, corporate groups can use aggressive international tax planning strategies to shift profits earned in Ontario to foreign-based subsidiaries, thereby avoiding the Ontario corporate income tax altogether. Surely this is something that we can find some consensus on. For a long time, in the traditional sense, Conservatives have said, "Everybody has to pay their fair share, including corporations." Corporations need to pay their fair share as well. Actually, we have the ability to significantly strengthen this piece of legislation to ensure that tax revenues come into this House and are spent appropriately now that we have the Financial Accountability Office. We can make sure, and we can actually give some assur-

ances to those corporations, that the money that comes into this place is actually going to be allocated in a fiscally responsible manner. That was one of the reasons that we pursued the Financial Accountability Office with such voracity. Clearly, there was a trust issue. We addressed that trust issue by making sure that the Financial Accountability Office was a condition of our support of the budget. I think—actually, I know at the door for a fact—that it resonates quite well.

Most of these later practices around tax avoidance relate to a federally and provincially defined corporate tax base. The 2012 federal budget, as an example, went at least partway towards curtailing practices by foreign-controlled Canadian corporations with the introduction of foreign affiliate dumping rules. That sounds nice, eh? There's a name for it: foreign affiliate dumping rules. These were dealt with in Bill C45, the fall budget. These rules were introduced in response to the report by the Advisory Panel on Canada's System of International Taxation, which characterized certain dumping transactions as abusive. I don't know if it would take another panel or another advisory board to actually find that that would be abusive. On the surface, it does strike one rational individual as being an abusive technique or mechanism of the tax structure, as it's written. All of these activities can unduly reduce provincial corporate tax revenue.

When Mr. Drummond came out with his report, he made a couple of key recommendations. I would just like to remind the government of some of those recommendations: that the province “work with the federal government to address aggressive interprovincial and international” corporate “tax avoidance activities by”—this is not something that we just woke up and realized was happening last year; there is a systemic practice of avoiding paying taxes—“undertaking additional data review and research to identify activities of particular concern to Ontario;

“Entering into an agreement with the Canada Revenue Agency to invest resources in additional compliance efforts; and

“Implementing additional reporting requirements that disclose activities that cause income and losses to be allocated to a province where the underlying economic activity was minimal or did not occur.”

Finally, ensuring that companies that take advantage of loans, of grants, of write-offs and other Ontario corporate tax breaks on the assumption that they will undertake certain activities, such as job creation, new plant and machinery purchases, research and development etc., actually perform those activities in Ontario.

These requests are not out of the range of reasonable. If the government is going to say to corporations, “We want you to be part of the solution for our economy. We want you to come to this province. Try to ignore the hydro rates for now; we're working on that”—but if you are going to benefit from having a positive and mutually beneficial relationship with the government of the day, then you should, in turn, deliver on those promises. If

you are getting those tax breaks, then we want you to create those jobs. We want you to invest in that capital. We want you to invest in research and development, because the connection between R&D and innovative economies is indisputable. We know this. Even government knows this. We know this. And we know that corporations are sitting on a lot of money. We know. In fact, the former governor of the Bank of Canada, Mark Carney, refers to it as dead money. This should be a shared concern that we all have—all parties.

Drummond also recommended that Ontario collaborate with the federal government and other provinces to investigate options to tax corporations on a consolidated basis, with the purpose of ensuring a fair allocation of losses and income across Canada. By pursuing these steps, Drummond estimates that Ontario could raise up to \$200 million per year when fully phased in and \$50 million in year one. That said, it would take years to implement the many rules and administrative procedures needed to clean all this up, so the implications for the Ontario revenue base are very long-term.

You know, there is a lot of red tape for small businesses. I was sitting down with some of these young entrepreneurs last week at Oktoberfest, and they're ambitious. They want to start their own company. They're creative. They're absolutely inspirational, actually. As someone who comes back to this place and who represents their interests, I think it's incumbent on us to actually create a piece of legislation which will benefit their lives. It's incredible. A lot of young people are starting their own sort of start-ups because they can't find jobs. It's really like the next best option. Thank goodness that they have that drive and that energy to go that route. And thank goodness that there are angel networks and local, innovative sort of—what am I looking for?—investors to ensure that they have a chance. But as a government, we certainly should be more supportive of those start-ups, and I'm hoping, based on our youth employment strategy that we also made as part of a condition of our support of the last budget, that we address the high youth unemployment rate in Ontario—one of the highest in Canada—and that we address some of the need for investment in R&D and capital funding so that we are actually creating the conditions for our economy to thrive and to grow.

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This piece of legislation—I mean, I've been very clear about some of our concerns. I think that there should be some common consensus that we can find around corporate taxation, that people pay their taxes. I certainly think that it may take some time for us to put those mechanisms in place, but now that we have the Financial Accountability Office in place, we can actually make sure (1) that they will work, and (2) that that revenue will come into this place and once it does come into this place, it is spent appropriately.

We have a fundamentally different approach than the PCs. We, of course, wanted this exemption in place. It was a condition of our budget support, just like home

care, just like auto insurance and just like the Financial Accountability Office. We're going to continue to hold the government accountable because we see that as one of our core responsibilities as the third party. We have fought the good fight on some of the issues where we just cannot agree with the government or the PCs. A special interest group like EllisDon coming into this place and getting a special deal and a fast-track piece of legislation doesn't make sense. I know it doesn't make sense to everybody on the other side of the aisle. It's a nonstarter for us. But on issues like supporting small businesses and creating conditions for this economy to come back, we can work with you. We want to work with you. I think I heard that from the PC caucus earlier, although they have said no, consistently, for almost two years. We've said yes where we can and we've said yes when we know that we can make a piece of legislation stronger, because we actually see that as our responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, it's been a pleasure to address some of the concerns with G105. I think that we can do a lot more for small businesses in the province of Ontario. New Democrats are committed to it, and we look forward to this piece getting to committee where we can make it stronger.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: The member for Kitchener–Waterloo offered what I thought were some very thoughtful comments on the bill, for which I'd like to thank her. I don't agree with all of them. There are some of them that I very much do agree with.

I've always learned that when someone raises a reasoned objection or a comment, it really means they're trying the idea on for size. So I'd like to think that the member and her party are, in fact, taking the concept being offered here and saying, "Whether it's perfect or not, is this something that's going to make business better and, if it is, can we work with it? Can we adapt this? Can we make this thing help businesses by getting it through this House, and getting it through the House in an expeditious manner?"

If that's what was underlying what the member offered, then I think I'm very much with her. The only comment I do want to offer is to the member's party in general: this notion that somehow or other organizations are walking off wholesale with money—I don't quite agree with that. I'm willing to buy some of her comments on dead money and I am willing to buy some of her comments on artful tax planning. But what I do have a problem with is this notion that a corporation is a sponge that you can squeeze endlessly for money without any repercussions or any consequences.

One of the delicate balancing acts for the province of Ontario is to manage our tax burden, particularly on small and medium-sized businesses, to ensure that we retain that sustainable, competitive advantage, just a little bit lower than all of the surrounding states and provinces in the industrialized heartland of North America, which is where we are. The only places lower than us in Canada

are two resource-based provinces. If we can do that, then I think there's enough middle ground that the member and I can support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I found it interesting listening to my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo talk about this particular bill—her party's view of it, her view of it. I always enjoy listening to her, because she comes so well-prepared. The difficulty that I find in listening to what she has to say is that she represents a party that has propped up a government that has brought this legislation forth, and this legislation is—to describe it as a grain of sand on the beach or a drop in the bucket is to be charitable.

This is a very small piece of the puzzle. I speak—and I will speak at length in a couple of moments—as a person who owned and operated a small business for a number of years and understands what the implications are of changes to the tax code. Small changes to the tax code can mean an awful lot if it comes down to hiring employees, but in this particular case we're talking about, as I say, a drop in the bucket.

I'll explain more fully when I speak, when I mention a particular figure. If you apply the differential between a \$400,000 exemption level and a \$450,000 exemption level, which is anticipated by this bill, if passed, to start next year, you're talking about an amount that falls to the bottom line of a small business of about 975 bucks a year—\$975 less the corporate income tax that's applied to that.

What exactly is that supposed to do for a business? That's the thing that seems to escape my friend from Kitchener–Waterloo, as well as the Liberal Party. The folks on my left, the NDP, talk about how they are going to finance the province, and I must say, I watched one of them speaking on media a couple of weeks ago, saying that to finance things going forward, for example, on the transit file, it would be simple enough to close tax loopholes and tax corporations. I speak as a person who was a Montrealer when we watched that skyline shut down and this skyline get built. It can as easily go from Toronto to Calgary.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to thank the member from Kitchener–Waterloo for the debate that we had here and her contributions to Bill 105, Supporting Small Businesses Act, as well as the member for Mississauga–Streetsville and the member from Thornhill.

I also just wanted to add in a quick—I don't know if this is a point of order—congratulations to the Minister of Health on her new grandbaby today.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It's always an exciting time to have that happen in a family.

We're talking about supporting small businesses, and the initiatives that we can take to promote job creation. Hopefully this is one of those things that's going to

happen. It's going to help small business, yes, and save some of their employer health tax on their payroll, but with that savings, we hope that that will be put back into the business to maybe create jobs. Small amount that it might be, it's going to help small businesses, in a way, to hopefully grow the economy.

In my riding, I have wonderful local small businesses. The business improvement association in our neighbourhood does a lot of great work. Without those small businesses, a lot of those local jobs wouldn't be there, so we need to do what we can to promote small business.

As well, I want to make comments to the member from Thornhill. Every corporation, every small business and every citizen has a role to play in our economy, and we all have to contribute to the success of Ontario. If that means we need to look at other ways of closing corporate tax loopholes so that they can also contribute to the economy being stimulated and creating jobs, that's what we all need to do. We're all in this together. It's not just about one particular segment, but we all have to do our part. With corporations having those loopholes that the member from Kitchener–Waterloo has talked about, it means we can do a little bit more to close those loopholes and have that contribution come back into the economy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I'm very pleased to speak on Bill 105. This bill will help small businesses. As we all know, small business is the backbone of our economy, and 43% of the businesses in Canada are small businesses. In the province of Ontario, there are 392,000 businesses, and this bill will benefit all those small businesses.

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I know, as a former businesswoman, what it takes to run a small business. Every small thing counts when you're running a small business, and this bill will also reduce the cost of hiring, as well as it will also reduce red tape for small businesses. It would reduce red tape in the same way as when we implemented the HST. Ontario's business tax reforms will provide businesses with the benefit of \$8.5 billion of tax relief. Small business not only creates the jobs, but it also drives the local economy. So it's good public policy, and this bill should pass as soon as possible so that it can go to committee and we can hear from the stakeholders.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments, and I return to the member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you to my colleagues for commenting on some of the points that I've made.

I find it interesting that the member from Mississauga–Streetsville wasn't necessarily buying some of the comments that I made. I wasn't selling those comments. The very fact that between 2001 and 2011 the total cash reserves of private non-financial corporations in Canada grew from \$187 billion to \$575 billion—that is a fact. So you can buy it or you can sell it, whatever. What is very clear to us in the province of Ontario and in this party is

that a lot of those corporate tax breaks—we're being very generous with them and they are not working. We want corporate Ontario to be part of the solution.

I think the member from London–Fanshawe accurately points out that corporations want to be part of the solution, but they also want to have some confidence in the work that's happening in this place. Hopefully, that will come with the Financial Accountability Office.

The member from Thornhill always pivots back to a traditional spot, where they say that we're just holding you up. I think it's really disrespectful for the people of the province of Ontario. They sent a minority government to this place, and they want us to put them first—not their own political interests. So we are doing that. We are honouring the wishes of the people of this province by trying to get results for them. I know that it bothers the member from Thornhill and some of the other PC caucus members because when they knock on doors, they have nothing to show for it. We have a track record, and we are making it work for the people of this province.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Whenever they get angry, I get happy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been more than six-and-one-half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned, unless the government House leader or his designate specifies otherwise.

I'm pleased to recognize the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, we would like this debate to continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

Further debate? I'm pleased to recognize the member for Scarborough–Guildwood for her maiden speech in the Ontario Legislature.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I am pleased to rise in the House today for the first time to present a speech to the Legislature of Ontario. I'm so pleased that joining me in the Legislature is Dayani Ravichandran, who is a special assistant working with me here at Queen's Park and at my constituency office, as well as our newly appointed intern, Jessica Behnke, who has just joined us as of last week.

I know there are people from my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood watching. My family is also watching, including my younger brother, Andrew Hunter, who has just graduated last week with his MBA from Henley university.

I am so glad that my maiden speech is on Bill 105. It's all about small businesses, which are really the heart of our economy. Our family has a history of small business owners, starting back with my grandmother who ran a small business in our community back in Jamaica. I also have many relatives, including my own father, who ran small businesses at some point in their careers. In fact, I

started my career as a small business owner. While in university, I started a small business with the help of a grant that was provided by the government of Ontario to help students start businesses. This Ontario government grant allowed me to provide the seed money to secure office space and to hire employees, who, of course, were students I went to school with.

I have been given the opportunity to succeed by provincial governments of the past, and I want to recognize them, under Premier Ernie Eves, as well as Premier Dalton McGuinty. Ontarians today deserve those same opportunities and incentives to help their ventures to succeed.

My career has taken me from small business ownership to working at some of our country's largest corporations, to working in charitable organizations and non-profit organizations as well as municipal corporations.

I've also had a variety of mentors from across the political spectrum: business leaders, such as Mike Pederson and Courtney Pratt; political pioneers, such as Dr. Alvin Curling and the Honourable Jean Augustine; community and civic luminaries, such as the late David Pecaut, who was the founding chair of CivicAction, or the current chair, Mr. John Tory.

I'm so pleased today to welcome Tamara Balan, who is an employee at CivicAction. She has come to join us today, and I want to welcome her.

I've worked on a range of issues throughout my career, including work access for people who face multiple barriers to employment, affordable housing, as well as youth at risk. These are the issues that are still very much close to my heart. As a government, we need to invest in our youth in this province, we need to ensure a healthy future for our aging population, and we need to address homelessness and poverty in Ontario.

I am incredibly honoured to be here now as the newly elected member of provincial Parliament representing the riding of Scarborough–Guildwood. I am also deeply humbled to be working with Minister Ted McMeekin as parliamentary assistant to community and social services.

I have been given the mandate from the people of Scarborough–Guildwood. They have entrusted me to represent their interests and to share their values right here at Queen's Park and to be their strong voice. So today I will be speaking in support of Bill 105, on behalf of the small businesses in Scarborough–Guildwood.

From my history in the private sector, my past experience as a small business owner and from my time working in large corporations, I can understand the struggles of the small business community. Bill 105 seeks to help more than 60,000 businesses in Ontario by introducing reforms that will bring reduction to taxes, to bring businesses with annual payrolls of under \$5 million much-needed tax relief. This is part of the Ontario government's plan to invest in Ontario businesses and to make Ontario the most attractive place to do business in North America and indeed the world.

With this bill, the government is trying to ensure that in years to come, small businesses will have a consistent

reduction in their taxes. This is a good bill that intends to help Ontario businesses, while promoting jobs within Ontario. It is a bill that I know, should it pass, will help small business owners in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood.

During my time on the campaign trail, and since then, I have had the opportunity to speak to many small business owners in Scarborough–Guildwood. In fact, our small businesses are really the heart of our community. From St. Mary's Sizzle, where I've had the opportunity to have lunch many times during the campaign and since, to Govardhan Thal restaurant—the owners are the Shah family; I've also had the opportunity to go to their facility, and they are just an active family that's helping a thriving local community.

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To Z Creations and Herbal Beauty, to Mirch Masala Groceries—this is a cluster of small businesses that serves a particular community right in Scarborough–Guildwood—as well as Passion Hair salon: I had the opportunity to go and celebrate one of their anniversaries and to talk with many of their patrons. I truly believe that these small businesses really drive the prosperity in our communities.

Small business owners are at that heart of our community. They bring their cultures and customs to my riding. They bring wonderful food and beautiful clothes. They bring music; their language; their literature. They make Scarborough–Guildwood such a beautiful, diverse and vibrant place to live and work.

While these small business owners are hopeful and optimistic, they also have voiced concerns and fears to me. Of course, from my time as a business owner I can understand the difficulties in earning and keeping clients as well as catering to the many needs of those clients. The cost of doing business is high in this province. While the Ontario government has made many inroads on this issue and while Ontario is a vibrant and dynamic business environment, there is still more that we can do.

This government has introduced the harmonized sales tax, which will, when fully phased in, eliminate \$4.6 billion per year in embedded taxes paid by businesses. We have eliminated the capital tax, which forced corporations to pay regardless of profit and was a significant disincentive to investment. We have cut corporate income tax rates. The Ontario government has been committed to creating a business incentive environment in Ontario, aiming to make Ontario one of the most attractive and competitive places to do business in North America and indeed the world.

We have been succeeding. Ontario went from the highest corporate tax rate to the third lowest in the country. The elimination of the capital tax is saving Ontario businesses more than \$2.1 billion per year. Further investments, like cutting the business education tax and providing the research and development tax, support our attractiveness as a place to do business.

Canada is becoming more competitive as a country. Our business climate here is highly valued. KPMG's

2012 Competitive Alternatives report ranks Canada the second most competitive country among 14 major global economies, outranking both China and the United States. Toronto has been ranked as the fifth in competitiveness against 55 major international cities, including Chennai and Mumbai in India, Chengdu, and Vancouver. Canada leads the G8, according to the PricewaterhouseCoopers' study. The Economist Intelligence Unit ranks Canada as the best place for doing business in the G7, and fifth out of 82 countries over a forecast period between 2013 and 2017.

It is clear that doing business in Canada is attractive to the international community. We are well on our way to becoming the most attractive province for investment in the country. But becoming completely competitive here in Ontario also includes creating more incentives for small businesses. These small business owners and entrepreneurs are looking for us to lead.

This is what Bill 105 seeks to do. Bill 105 proposes amendments to the employer health act. Should it pass, tens of thousands of small businesses in Ontario will benefit vastly. Under the current legislation, there is no exemption threshold. Should the amendment pass, businesses with payrolls under \$5 million will be exempt from paying the employer health tax on the first \$450,000 of their payroll each and every year. The current exemption is on the first \$400,000. This amendment—I want to thank Minister Sousa for bringing it forward—greatly benefits small business owners and entrepreneurs. Furthermore, it creates incentives for people who want to start their own businesses, like many of the youth and young families in Scarborough–Guildwood.

I know that we're putting other measures in place to incent our young people to start businesses, and this reduction is going to help them along in that decision. This government is committed to investing in people, to investing in our infrastructure and to investing in a dynamic and innovative business climate, and this legislation is one of the ways by which we are doing that.

Small businesses create jobs. Eighty-five percent of all new jobs, as mentioned earlier by the member from Parkdale–High Park, are created by our small businesses. So many new jobs come from that sector, and this government sees the value and the potential in supporting small businesses. That is why the Ontario government is supporting them with Bill 105.

When I think about the small business owners in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood, I think about how hard-working they are and how well they treat their employees. But I also think about how tax cuts could benefit them. They could invest in more marketing opportunities, in new equipment or in research. They could afford to hire more employees to meet growing demands. They might even be able to hire more employees so that they might be able to take some time off, and we all know that small business owners rarely get time off. They could renovate and expand their businesses. They could improve their inventory. They could pay their

employees even just that little bit more for their hard work. There are so many benefits to cutting taxes for small business owners, and I am proud to stand here with this government and try to implement these cuts. For these reasons, I support Bill 105, and I hope it will pass for the benefit of the small business owners in Ontario.

In fact, this very week we are recognizing small business in Canada; I believe this is the week that we are acknowledging that. Of the rankings that were produced, 15 out of 34 of those communities that really support small businesses are right here in Ontario.

We have to do a much better job of supporting our small business owners so that they will continue to flourish and continue to drive and support our economy and create jobs right here in Ontario, to support both their families and their communities, such as mine in Scarborough–Guildwood.

I want to thank you, Speaker, for this opportunity to rise in this House and address this Legislature on this very important Bill 105 in support of small businesses in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to join the other members in congratulating the member from Scarborough–Guildwood on her maiden speech on an important bill, Bill 105. It was pleasant to hear her link the purpose of this small business discussion to her own experience—both her grandfather in her place of birth, as she mentioned, as well as her own experiences as a university student getting a grant from the provincial government. I hope it was under Ernie Eves back then, because you've had a few years working in your community. You're right: We all stand here to support small business. Again, I want to leave that as the genuine sentiment I felt listening to your remarks.

To interject a bit of humour into it—not to be critical of your remarks—I always think that in Ontario today, if you want to create a small business under a Liberal government, you start with a large business. They start imposing taxes and regulations, and it eventually becomes a small business.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's meant in sort of a light-hearted way. I hope you get the opportunity to serve in opposition, because our role here, as the name implies, is to oppose things. We have to bring forward comments that reflect that we have a different point of view.

Our leader, Tim Hudak, has provided an opportunity for our Premier, Kathleen Wynne, to bring forward a jobs plan. What did they bring forward? A minor little tinkering with the with the employer health tax, which is just a tax grab. With all due respect, if you wanted to serve the people of your riding, you did say one thing—I think this is important to put on the record. She did say that tax cuts benefit people, and small business specifically. I agree with that sentiment as well.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I would like to, first of all, welcome—a little late—the member from Scarborough–Guildwood to the Legislature and congratulate her on her election. It’s very exciting to stand up and, for the first time, talk about yourself, about your riding and, of course, weigh in a little bit on the bill that we’re talking about right now.

I was interested to hear some of your comments about—a bit of an admission—the cost of doing business, and it being kind of high in Ontario. I agree with a number of the areas that the member identified as being prohibitive to business in Ontario. But one of the things that I noticed that the member didn’t raise is, actually, the price of hydro and how that relates and how that really impacts small business in particular, but really all business, even large industrial users, as we see in my riding of Kenora–Rainy River.

What we have seen is that businesses in Ontario are paying hydro bills that are two times the rate of those in Manitoba, which—I’m not sure if you know exactly where Kenora–Rainy River is, but it straddles the Manitoba border, and it’s really, really frustrating for people to look, maybe, 100 kilometres or 50 kilometres to the west of us and to have to come to that realization that they are not getting the same kinds of breaks.

Other than that, I just wanted to say welcome, and I appreciate that you’ve brought a critical perspective. I look forward to hearing more from you as time goes on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: This is a time to welcome a new member to the Legislative Assembly. This is a woman who has a strong track record of speaking out on behalf of her community in Scarborough. This is something that only happens to us once: when we stand up and make our maiden speech. As members, this isn’t the time to say “I’m a Liberal,” “I’m a Conservative,” “I’m a New Democrat,” “I agree with you,” “I don’t agree with you.” This is a time to remember that each and every one of us are members of provincial Parliament who are all sent here by our ridings, and for whatever the member may do in the future, this is the time to say congratulations on your first set of remarks that are going down on Hansard. Congratulations on having delivered them with some style and with some grace.

You’ve done a lot of research. You’ve spoken movingly about the people who’ve sent you here. You’ve talked about the reason that you came. You’ve talked about the motivation for putting your name on the ballot and you’ve talked about why, for the next however many years, you have the good fortune and the motivation to come here to work. You’re going to get up early in the morning—you’re going to spend a lot of time getting up before dark and you won’t get home to your house and your family and all of the things that you like to do until it’s after dark. But in that time you’ll be down here being a member of provincial Parliament with a group of other dedicated men and women, regardless of whether they were sent here as Liberals, as Conservatives or as New Democrats, and they will all be your colleagues.

We’re very proud of the new member for Scarborough–Guildwood. We welcome her as a member of our caucus, just as we’ve stood to welcome the new members of the NDP and Progressive Conservative caucus. Speaker, this is the province of Ontario. These are the 107 members who the 13 million people of our Ontario family have sent to govern us, and we welcome a new one with her maiden speech.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It’s a pleasure to offer some words to our member from Scarborough–Guildwood. Welcome. I look forward to working with you. And I’m going to say this one in jest, but there is a bit of a messaging here. Your brother has an MBA, and if he’s not working yet, I think there’s a potential career for him to start a new business. He could perhaps start a business in Debt Financing 101 for all the youths of our country, because after the last couple of years that we’ve seen, we may need a lot of that.

Mr. Speaker, it’s a pleasure to bring remarks, and I think the member has done an admirable job getting up to speed and learning the ropes so far.

Interjections.

Mr. Bill Walker: Your speaker can’t hear. I’m trying to give compliments to one of your colleagues.

This is similar: the catchy title and there’s nothing after that but a bunch of blah, blah, blah. We need substance. If they really wanted to help small business, as I’ve said in here probably three or four or five times today, they could stop tweaking at the edges, as my colleague from Huron–Bruce said. They need to stop making a catchy title and tweaking. They need to have some fundamental change. They need to ensure that those businesses have hope at the end of the day, that they have less taxes, that they have less red tape, that they have less administrative burden on all those small businesses, which typically are the mom-and-pop shops who have to do all the work across the spectrum. They don’t have staff. They don’t have a lot of other people. They’re typically, from start to finish, that whole business. We overburden them with paperwork and reports and things that aren’t value-added to them or to their consumer.

What we need is to get a lot of that out of the way so those businesses can thrive, so they can hire more people, so children want to take over the family business at the end of the day. We need lower energy rates so that it’s attractive to come to Ontario, to remain in Ontario, to build our businesses and expand our businesses.

We really have to get back to the fundamentals, and I believe the member opposite is on the same wavelength, that we need to have some fundamental change to support small business, as we are.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. The member for Scarborough–Guildwood has two minutes to reply, if she wishes.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. It’s such a pleasure to speak to my colleagues and to work with all

of you. From my background, you can see that I am someone who is collaborative and very open in my approach. I work with all individuals. I have always done that throughout my career. All of you have actually made me feel very welcome in this House, and I'm appreciative of that.

I want to thank the member from Durham. I should acknowledge that in my very early years, when my family came to Ontario, we settled in Durham, in the town of Pickering. It's a community that I'm also very fond of.

Tax cuts do benefit people and communities. What I believe is that they really allow small business owners to reinvest those cuts into things they prioritize, as I mentioned in my remarks.

I also want to thank the member from Kenora–Rainy River. I do appreciate the needs in her community, and I very much respect her ability to stand and speak very eloquently about that and about the cost of doing business.

I want to thank, as well, the member from Mississauga–Streetsville. I am absolutely proud to join our Premier and this Liberal caucus and the work we do and the values we share to make things better for Ontarians.

I am also going to just respond to the offer of the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. My brother Andrew Hunter, upon graduation, actually received multiple offers and is going to be starting his career in a parts manufacturing company just outside of London, in the community of St. Thomas. Thank you for that offer. I will pass that along to him—and absolutely resonating that businesses need hope and we need to get rid of the unnecessary burden so that we can advance the economy in this province.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: I must say, first of all, although this is not the time for questions and comments, that I would like to add my voice in congratulating our new friend from Scarborough–Guildwood on her excellent maiden speech. I want you to trust me when I say that when you're a few years down the road and a little longer in the tooth, you won't be so wide-eyed, but I think those are good precepts to keep in mind. If we could all come to work every day here and be a little less jaded, I guess it would be a better place.

In any event, I got a call at my office last week from the people who are responsible for legislative affairs in our party, asking if I would be interested in speaking for a few moments on Bill 105, and I thought to myself, why would I really want to waste my breath on Bill 105? It's a sop to small business.

1700

The answer actually is, I want to speak to it for that very reason: because all it is is a sop to small business. Since I spent a goodly number of years—about 14—owning and operating my own small business, there is a place for small business not only in the hearts and minds of the 85% of Ontarians who are employed by small

business, earn their living in small business, but also those of us who have had the fortune, sometimes misfortune, of being involved in small business and depending on the government, more than anything else, to create structures that allow us to operate freely, to make a buck, to be able to pay our employees and to not be burdened with red tape to the point where it snows us under.

I've got to say that, like many people in small business, I took something that was tiny and built it not into a monster corporation, but into something that I could be proud of and that went from employing about 12 people to employing 120 people. So I fit right into the category that is primarily covered by Bill 105—the kind of company that didn't have a payroll in excess of \$5 million, albeit there is something in there that addresses that issue, but one that did have a payroll in the millions of dollars that looked to the exemption that, at the time I ran my business, didn't exist, but was brought in during that period by the Harris government of the Progressive Conservative Party. That was an exemption of the first \$400,000 of annual payroll to the employer's health tax, and that was welcomed. This bill wants to increase that next year by \$50,000.

On the face of it, that sounds fine. Yes, I'll put myself on the record right now and say I'm going to vote for this because there's nothing that suggests that I shouldn't. It's harmless. But it is at the same time not particularly helpful, and that's where I want to focus my comments.

If you take a look at the fact that, really, it is 85% of the province that works in something called SME, small and medium enterprises, and therefore is involved in small business on an everyday basis, you want your small business to be in a position to be prosperous. What does an additional \$50,000 exemption on the employer health tax mean on the bottom line? I've done the math, and the math is precisely \$975. That's what happens at the end of the day when you apply the additional \$50,000, if you're in one of the approximately 60,000 qualifying companies.

If you have payroll that's somewhere in the \$400,000 to \$450,000 per annum range, or up to \$5 million, which is inclusive, the \$975 is never going to be the difference between whether you stay in business or go out of business. It's just not enough money. In fact, if I want to be really honest about it, the \$975, if it drops to the bottom line, is then subject to 11.5% income tax. It really is more like 850 disposable dollars. That's not enough, if you awarded it to yourself as the owner to take a bonus, to take you and your significant other to Florida and pay the airfare. So we're not talking about a heck of a lot of money.

What does that mean? It means that, at a cost of \$5 million per year—the estimates given to us by the government that is putting this bill on the table—in the overall scheme of things, it's not a whole heck of a lot of money. It wants to take credit for doing something fantastic for small business when it's not doing something that helps small business in any real way at all. That's the

problem we've got. That's the problem that our party tries to address every single day.

The legislation kind of exemplifies what's wrong with the government of the day. We're looking, as people who are trying to address the small business and, indeed, the large business situation, at a government that seems to be paying no heed to hydro rates that are skyrocketing, to increases in the premiums paid for WSIB, to taxes paid to the College of Trades, to outdated apprenticeship ratios and to so much red tape that even people with five or 10 employees are snowed under trying to complete forms or go online and file returns on various different types of taxes or practices, and they get caught in that web. For their trouble, they get a bill that comes to this Legislative Assembly that ultimately results in \$975 gross, \$850 net per year in their pockets. We're now into the sixth or seventh hour of debate on this thing.

To put that in perspective, if you, Speaker, take all of the members of provincial Parliament who are here, the electricity that we're expending on these beautiful chandeliers in this august chamber, the cost to heat the building, the cost for the cleaners to come in here and do the carpets, the cost for the legislative security force that protects the building and allows debate to continue unfettered so we don't get shouted down by angry citizens—because I believe we would, were they not there—and all of the other support staff who work here, I'm sure that the cost of this debate at this point has been in excess of \$5 million. That's the problem that we've got.

Hon. John Milloy: Let it go on.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'm not the one who is proliferating the debate. If you guys on the other side want to keep on debating, that's fine, because this is a careless bill, and a careless bill that doesn't even begin to address what it is that businesses actually need to succeed.

What do they need? They need, perhaps, accelerated depreciation. They need, perhaps, a fix to how small business loans are dealt with at the banking level. They need, certainly, the reduction in red tape that I talked about. They need some kind of incentive to be able to increase employment. We watched the NDP prop up that government to create a youth employment program, and yet unemployment still runs the highest in the land, save for PEI, and that's for five to six years.

The bottom line is that what we're dealing with in this bill is a public relations ploy. What's it there for? It's to occupy our time—and those of you who are watching me on television and the rest of us, to occupy your time—to take your minds off of the fact that we have just finished an exercise where the Auditor General has told us that we have spent \$1.1 billion on gas plants that were not wanted in the end and were half-built, \$1.1 billion that they threw down the drain. What? To pave the way so that we could debate a bill that they're going to spend \$5 million on to stimulate small business.

People—I'm talking to you, Liberals—if you really want to stimulate small business, see how much of an attack you get from this side for spending \$1 billion

doing that and \$5 million to stop gas plants. But it's in reverse—it's in reverse, Speaker—and it applies on a number of levels. We talk about gas plants, but we could be talking about eHealth. We could be talking about Ornge. We could be talking about all of these things that, in the parlance of this place, have turned out to be boondoggles in the sense of actually administering the people's money in the proper way. That's what this bill really underscores for me.

What I'd like to see is a legitimate plan on the part of this government, the kind that was discussed in question period this morning by our leader, Tim Hudak, and by our finance critic, Mr. Fedeli: the concept of giving us an overall approach to how we create jobs in this province—not by dribs and drabs of under \$1,000 per year of largesse on the part of this government for 60,000 small businesses, but a paving of the way for those small businesses to grow and develop and become large businesses by getting opportunities that the government puts in place by getting itself out of the way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Michael Prue: To the member from Thornhill: I enjoyed your speech very much today, as I most always do. It's a shame that I'm not going to be spending as much time with you in the finance committee in the future, but I look forward to some day that you might come back for your wit and wisdom and, I think, for the work that you do. I thought what you said today was an excellent analysis of the money that actually will go to small business. As you said and as I think we all realize, moving that sum of money from \$400,000 to \$450,000 was not a great deal. It was a little bit of a sop to small business, but as you correctly point out—and I don't have any reason to doubt your figures—it's \$975 maximum. That, although it will be welcome—I'm sure it will be welcomed by many small businesses, particularly the tiny ones that are mom-and-pop shops or have one or two employees; it will make a difference. For many of the other small businesses with less than \$5 million in revenue, it certainly won't make the difference between success and failure.

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I also noted in your speech that you're frustrated by the debate. There are ways around the debate. I was quite surprised when the Deputy Premier stood up and wanted to continue the debate. I thought most everything that needed to have been said was, but I welcome your contribution all the same.

There are many other pressing issues that confront this Legislature. We have many things that are serious to debate, where there are genuine differences of opinion between and amongst the three parties. This is not one of them. Every single speaker to date has spoken in favour of this bill, and I think that we as a Legislature need to move it expeditiously to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to respond, but very quickly I'd like to say congratulations to the member from

Scarborough–Guildwood on her maiden speech. It was a great speech. It's a pleasure to sit beside her every day, and I want to say that I'm really proud to be her seatmate and part of the class of five.

Mr. Michael Prue: The gang of five.

Mr. John Fraser: Or the group of five; whatever they call us.

My background is small business. That's where I come from. I have worked in small businesses since I was 17 years old, in small and medium-sized grocery stores. I did that for 22 years, so I know how hard people work to make ends meet and how hard it is to get a day off in a small business.

I think what we're doing here in this bill by increasing the exemption is something that is good for small business. I think we can all agree on that. I agree with the member that we should be moving forward on this, but I would like to respond in terms of what small businesses need and to go back to what our government has done. With the introduction of the HST, we've taken about \$4.6 billion a year off of embedded taxes in businesses, but more importantly, what we did is, we reduced costs in terms of compliance.

When you're in a small business and you're having to deal with two different levels of government to remit tax, that's not only a significant cost; it's a significant time consumption if you're a small business. That was a really big thing for small businesses, and I think I'd like to remind the member of that.

We also eliminated the capital tax for corporations, whether or not they had a profit. We cut the corporate income tax rate. To say that we have not done those things which are important for small business is not accurate, so I wanted to make sure that the member was aware of that. I am speaking in support of the bill, obviously.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. John O'Toole: I did listen carefully to the member from Thornhill, who has a great history, as he described himself, but I would like to say, for the record, that he was an excellent finance critic here in the Tim Hudak opposition party. In fact, he still contributes with substance, because the way he analyzed Bill 105—the best tribute to that remark was made from the member from Beaches–East York, who is the NDP critic, when he said that he listened thoroughly and appreciated his analysis. Really, when he broke it down and he talked about the real giveback by the government being less than \$1,000—the member from Thornhill said that you couldn't take your family to vacation in Florida. In fact, if you just go out for dinner in Toronto, you would've spent the money. I really do believe that he also put on the table some really workable tools, whether it's the rapid acceleration on capital cost allowances or other measures. We've been looking for the McGuinty-Wynne government to come forward with a real action plan for Ontario.

I would say that the member that commented on behalf of the Liberal government didn't put in focus the

corporate tax back-down that the Wynne government did in the last budget. They backed away from their former promise of lowering corporate tax. That was because of pressure by the NDP, so the coalition of the NDP and the Liberals is alive and well. I'd expect that even in the next budget, potentially, they could be supporting that.

I know the member from Thornhill, in his response or his rebuttal, will bring some focus to the debate.

We support the bill. This government could call the bill and call the vote. We would be supporting it, but it's so little, and it's too little, too late. That's the real issue here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Thornhill. I do sometimes feel that it's a little bit of a walking contradiction in some regards, because some of the ideas that he said should happen, we've actually proposed. The people of this province sent a minority government to this place, so we genuinely feel that trying to make the Liberal Party, the Liberal government, do the right thing is a full-time job. It would be great if they joined us in some of that work, because who knows what we might accomplish?

He calls this piece of legislation careless. I think it's careless, actually, to come here and do nothing. People expect us to get some work done.

In fact, we proposed a job creation tax credit which would incentivize employers to create jobs. It has been proven in other jurisdictions, and it works.

We've proposed a wage subsidy for youth employment, and that idea is rolling out right now.

So we can point to tangible, actionable items that we've been able to accomplish, instead of just trying to play Let's Make a Deal with EllisDon, for instance. The Let's Make a Deal game isn't in the best interests of the people of this province. People expect you to put your considerable knowledge into play and stop playing games here with the budget.

There is so much to get accomplished. There is no reason whatsoever that we should still be debating this piece of legislation. I think that we are in full agreement. Why the delay tactics? I don't understand. There are other priorities that need to come to the fore. We want to make this piece of legislation stronger when it gets to committee. That's our job. That's what we get paid for. I look forward to getting down to work.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's it for questions and comments. I return to the member for Thornhill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you very much, Speaker. Thank you, too, to my colleague from Beaches–East York. I must say that I, too, will miss our friendly debates, sometimes rivalry and sometimes arm-in-arm embraces, in the Standing Committee on Finance. But you're right; you never know. I never say never.

The member from Ottawa South: We haven't really engaged before, other than to say hello in the halls. You also have a background in small business, and so I know

you understand. But I don't think it behooves you to stand in this Legislature and take credit for the HST and expect any great sympathy from the folks out there.

My friend from Durham always has nice things to say about me, so I'll leave that one alone.

To my friend from Kitchener–Waterloo, what I have to say to you is that you can't point your finger over there and talk about bad government at the same time as saying that you're going to continue to play ball to make things better. It just doesn't work.

Let me conclude—I have 60 seconds left—by giving you an example. When I had my small business, my payroll—it was a very payroll-intensive business—was about \$250,000 per month. We billed for our services. So I was out \$250,000, or, more correctly, the bank credit line was, before I ever billed. It was net 30-day billing, so if everybody paid on time, I was out \$500,000 before I ever saw dollar one. If you take 3%, the employer health tax, and multiply that, you get \$15,000 by two months. Take a sixth of that—two months is a sixth of the year. That's \$2,500 cost to the bank, and I get to pay that every two months. So it's \$15,000 per year, and I'm getting back \$975. That's my quick math lesson.

So small business needs benefits, but this is too little, too late.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again, it's a pleasure rising on behalf of constituents and people in Algoma–Manitoulin to speak to Bill 105, the Supporting Small Businesses Act.

I must say, it's refreshing, Mr. Speaker, to be here today to discuss this bill aimed at protecting small business rather than the recent happenings in the House, which aim to protect the interests of a rather large corporation. We see with this, I would say, a different coalition between the Conservatives and Liberals, in regard to the EllisDon bill.

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This bill aims to eliminate the loophole that allows large companies not to pay the employee health tax on the first \$400,000 in employee payroll. This is the sort of welcome assistance we can give to small businesses across the province. Many of these businesses are struggling to keep afloat, and this exemption is something that will make a real difference in their day-to-day operating costs.

We are all elected to come here and make decisions that will support and help working families across Ontario, and that includes small business. A bill like this will provide that support for small and emerging businesses—a small step indeed, but a step in the right direction.

During our budget negotiations last year, we argued that while the exemption is appropriate for these small companies making under \$400,000, we don't believe that companies with \$5 million in payroll need an exemption from the employee health tax on the first \$400,000. That doesn't make any sense. It is a revenue that this province

certainly needs, especially as of late with the recent happenings. But providing such a break to small business owners is a very useful thing and a very good thing because we know and we realize that so many smaller companies are creating a lot of good jobs, and we need to support them.

In our current economic climate, we believe that giving banks and large corporations a break just doesn't make any sense. We brought up these concerns with the Liberals and made it clear that we should support small business and let big business survive on their own. We even talked about bringing in a jobs creation tax credit, one that actually would incent businesses to create jobs and also provide a return. If you're going to be provided with a tax incentive, then you need to be creating a job, something that we absolutely need, instead of giving the large donations to their banks and their coffers and not getting anything back for small communities, small northern communities, small Ontario communities and small businesses across this province. Therefore, one of the budget demands we made was to have companies with \$5 million in payroll or more no longer be eligible for that exemption, and that is included in this legislation—something that we very much enjoyed seeing there. We think this is okay. This is why many of our colleagues, such as myself and a lot in this room, are looking forward to supporting and moving this bill into discussions.

We note that this bill will also increase the exemption amount to \$450,000 for the 2014 to 2018 calendar years. Starting in 2019, the exemption amount is adjusted for inflation every five years. The consequences of this small change will mean that the government will lose what would be a significant amount of money in difficult economic times. However, we will focus today on the gains to be made by small business owners. As I said earlier, I'm very happy that the government has come forward with this bill to give a hand to small business in Ontario rather than supporting their business friends with deep pockets.

The riding of Algoma–Manitoulin is comprised of thousands of small businesses. We don't have the numbers of large corporations you see in metropolitan Toronto. Families are struggling in the north. Many of the primary industries have been hit with economic hardship and are struggling to survive. I can't begin to name all the cuts we have had in the north. These affect businesses of all sizes and have drastic economic impacts on each and every town and on families living within the north.

However, there is some good news that I'd like to share with you that is a happening in northern Algoma–Manitoulin, starting in the particular community of Hornepayne, where there was a huge investment that was put into biomass generation which will secure and provide long-term economic opportunities for that community and the individuals who work in the mill within the forestry sector. We're looking at securing roughly anywhere between 100 to 120 jobs. That's very important.

This weekend, at the Gitchi Animki hydroelectric project, which is a joint venture between Pic Mobert and

Regional Power—they joined together to start a project which will secure hundreds of jobs during the construction phase, but it's going to mean a viable opportunity for that community in Pic Mobert First Nation, which has been struggling over the course of the years but has redefined and regenerated themselves and are looking towards providing a better future for their community. So that's going to be very interesting to see move forward.

Also, their neighbour, along with the community of White River and the leadership that has been there—White River and Pic Mobert have gone into a joint venture to open up old sawmill that had been closed for the last six years. It's called White River Forest Products. Again, they've started up just recently, as far as the last four weeks. They delivered their first lumber a couple of weeks ago, which was very exciting and welcome news for that community.

Things are progressing in northern Ontario, but we still need to help those small communities, because now what's happened is, the small businesses that were in those communities have lost their workforce. Now they're going to be looking for individuals to come into their places of business so they can continue to survive and thrive, so a good news story has actually created another challenge for those communities. I just wanted to bring that to your attention: that it's not all bad, but the good that is happening is because of the hard work that has been moving forward.

Then again, we see more and more government agencies closing shop and moving to larger cities, like the serious cuts to ServiceOntario. Many small family-run businesses are already experiencing cutbacks to top-ups which made their businesses available to operate. Many of these businesses have these kiosks that offer health cards, fishing licences and outdoor licences, and a lot of them are losing their services for their small communities and pushing the services outside of their communities.

I need to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that some of these services, where you have a small car dealership within its community—it basically means they can't close a sale on a Friday afternoon or on a Monday, because the ServiceOntario office is closed. This is going to have a huge impact on them. A small dealership losing an opportunity to sell a \$30,000, \$40,000 or \$50,000 vehicle is a huge impact for them, because those individuals are going to move on to another centre and actually get the sale where it's going to actually close.

Mr. Speaker, as mining critic, I've had a lot of meetings over the past few years related to the Ring of Fire especially and mining in general in northern Ontario. As we all have been told, about 500 kilometres north of Thunder Bay, in the area coined as the Ring of Fire, we have a world-class chromite deposit, one said to be worth billions of dollars. We have met with many companies, some large foreign companies and many junior companies from right here in Ontario. One thing that everyone has indicated is that the wealth that could be derived from the Ring of Fire is unprecedented in Ontario.

Many of these companies have clearly illustrated how thousands and thousands of jobs could be created. We have a prospect of revenue sharing with First Nations in this region. We have the possibility of refining and manufacturing and many, many other jobs that would be available. But what blows my mind is that this government has come up with a very sophisticated taxing system which provides loopholes for the wealthy, but they have no plan for the Ring of Fire. No plan for infrastructure; no plan at all. It seems like just a pipe dream in the air. I don't know what's going to happen or when it's going to be moving forward, and no one else in this province seems to know what's going on.

Again, I am pleased to see that small business owners will get a small tax break at the moment. This is a good thing—again, a good step in the right direction. But there is a bigger scheme here; there's a bigger plan that we need for the province. But rather than create loophole after loophole for those who are doing more than fine, I would like to see this government work with us on a real job creation plan. The province does extend further north than Bay Street. I would like to see this government work with us to create a job creation plan for northern Ontario.

With the recent slashing to the jobs in the MNR, the ServiceOntario kiosks, numerous programs and services we have lost in the north, northerners need a break, too. While I applaud this move to help small businesses, I will end by urging this government to work to support emerging business development in this province. Northern Ontario and the mining sector is a good place to start and a potential dramatic increase that we could create jobs. We can create jobs, build businesses in the north and not only boost the economy in the north, but across this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

1730

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I'm very pleased, again, to speak on Bill 105, the Supporting Small Businesses Act.

Before I do that, I would like to congratulate the new member from Scarborough–Guildwood. She's a wonderful new addition to our caucus. I got to know her when she was working for a not-for-profit organization, and soon I saw the potential in that person, but I never knew that one day she would come and join us in our caucus. But I'm very pleased to see her here with us and also to get to know her better.

I didn't know that she started her career as a small business person. But it's wonderful to see that the government can support those young people graduating from university who have good ideas, and they just need a bit of seed money to start their organization. We have too many young people who are looking for jobs.

While I'm saying this, if you compare us to countries in Europe like France and other countries in Europe, the unemployment of youth under 30 years old is a lot higher than here. But we need to pay attention as government. It's nice that we are supporting them and that we can see a young woman going from university to opening her

own business, and a few years later, she's here with us in the chamber.

So I wanted to encourage young people to seize the opportunity to start their own business and to be a successful business person later on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to offer remarks in regard to the comments made by our colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin. He finished it off by saying that this is a small move in the right direction, and I don't disagree with that. But it truly is; it's a minuscule step, considering the other big things that should be being done and the necessary things that need to be done to get this province back moving again, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to paraphrase, but I think what he was saying is very similar to my colleagues from Thornhill and Durham: that it's too little too late, and we're tweaking it on the edges, not getting down to the fundamentals.

He talked a lot about the small businesses on Manitoulin Island. They're very similar to my riding. At the end of my riding, you take the Chi-Cheemaun across the water and go into his riding, and it's very similar. We're made up significantly by small businesses.

They're the driver of our economy. They're a driver of jobs. They're a driver of anything positive that is going to happen in our community. We need to be doing things that are going to support them and ensure that they remain in business, that they thrive in business, that new businesses open and that people have that hope and willingness to open a small business and take the risk. I think it's fundamental that we all look in this House for those types of things that we can do to support and enhance.

He talked at length about the Ring of Fire, and I think he was sounding very much like my Conservative caucus colleagues.

There is no job creation plan that we've had evidence of yet. Premier Wynne has been in government and in office as Premier for nine to 10 months now. We keep hearing all of the rhetoric about, "We're going to be different; we're going to change," but we still don't see that plan coming forward. We see tweaking on the edges, we see smart titles that maybe the public is picking up on. But I think at the end of the day, Speaker, people are seeing through that.

We need a plan. We need to reduce red tape and bureaucracy. We need to reduce and decrease taxes. We need to ensure that the hydro costs for all of those businesses out there are affordable so that once again we can lead the economic engine of Canada, as we should.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: It's a pleasure to rise and have the opportunity to comment on some of the remarks that were made by the colleague, the member from Algoma-Manitoulin, who I know is a very hard-working northerner who fights for all the right things, which is his constituents. You can pay me the five bucks later for that.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Dinner. You've got a dinner coming.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Okay, there we go: dinner. That would be great, especially if you've gone hunting recently. That would be even better.

As he said in his remarks, it's not all bad. It's not all doom and gloom in the province of Ontario. There are some exceptions. There are some people, some businesses and some communities that are flourishing. Really, they're flourishing in spite of this government's policies.

He talks at length about the Ring of Fire and the fact that we really don't have any indication as to what's happening in the Ring of Fire. Ever since I was elected, it was this buzzword that was always called upon to assure people from one end of the province to the other end: "Jobs are coming. Prosperity is coming. We're working on it; we're working on it very closely." But we have seen time and time again that there actually isn't a lot of work going on there.

I think, not just as the critic for aboriginal affairs but also as a person who lives in Kenora-Rainy River that has 49 First Nations communities, that a big part of that boils down to the fact that this government hasn't been taking its relationship with First Nation communities seriously. What needs to happen is that there needs to be a relationship of respect, of dialogue, not just emphasis on consultation but an emphasis on consent.

There's more that I would like to talk about because I spent this past constituency week meeting with some of those First Nation communities. It's something that I've heard time and again.

Government has a responsibility to have a vision and to come up with a job creation plan. In order to do that, what they need to do is sit down, they need to listen, and they need to work together with all partners across the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to be able to speak briefly to Bill 105, the Supporting Small Businesses Act, and respond to the remarks by the member from Manitoulin-Algoma—or the other way around? Algoma-Manitoulin, okay.

I think it's important for small businesses. It doesn't matter whether they're located here in the GTA, whether they're in our neck of the woods out in Guelph and Wellington, rural Ontario, central Ontario, northern Ontario—no matter where you go in Ontario, small businesses are the predominant employers. When we think about growing jobs in the economy, we know that it's really important that we support our small business owners.

What this bill does is give small business owners a bit of a break with respect to the employer health tax. It says that small business owners with a payroll of under \$5 million—frankly that covers a lot of small businesses, that their annual payroll is less than \$5 million—would be exempt from paying the employer health tax on the

first \$450,000 of their payroll each year. That makes a big difference to a small business owner.

Somebody earlier over there said, "So what?" But if you're a small business owner, you're not counting in the hundreds of thousands. In many cases, you're counting in the thousands or the tens of thousands when you're looking at what's your annual income and what's your profit on your business. So this can make a huge difference, and I'm very pleased that we've taken this initiative. I hope both sides will be willing to support this initiative.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments, and we return to the member for Algoma–Manitoulin for his reply.

Mr. Michael Mantha: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, I want to thank her for her comments that she made in regard to the inaugural speech from the member for Scarborough–Guildwood. I would have wished that she could have made a comment toward the comments that I had made, but maybe we can have a chat later on.

To the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, you're right. It is a small step. I understand the position that the Conservatives are taking that it's a little step a little too late. I understand it; I don't agree with it. Don't get me wrong. I choose to look at it another way: It's never too late to do the right thing. However small that step is, we have to be able to take that step in the right direction. Always saying no or saying, "You're too late," is not going to be good for Ontarians. We really need to take those steps when we have the opportunity to take those steps and move forward with issues and work together.

To the member and my good friend from Kenora–Rainy River where we both come from, very similar areas and similar ridings, yes, my friend, I do have partridge, and I've got lots of moose. Also, I might interest you in some smoked turkey, because my brother-in-law just brought me a delicious smoked turkey. You wouldn't believe how delicious that tastes.

But to your comments in regard to the Ring of Fire, I look forward to working with you and getting to your communities as well so that we can hear from a First Nations perspective, from all the First Nations in your area that are affected, so that we can move forward, so that we can actually implement a plan, something that is lacking from this government.

1740

To the Minister of Education, the point that I was trying to make in the comments I was making, specifically—you're absolutely right, this is going to benefit a lot of small businesses in Ontario. But the point I was trying to make as well was that the actions this government has taken with cuts to MNR and the cuts to ServiceOntario are devastating to northern Ontario, and they are hurting small business across northern Ontario.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to rise and have a few comments on Bill 105. The title of the bill actually is an

Act to amend the Employer Health Tax Act. But I have to comment and compliment the Liberal spin machine because, as many people have mentioned today, the short title of the act, section 6 of the bill, is the Supporting Small Businesses Act. That's what many people have called this bill.

I have to say, let's face it, there's a world of difference between introducing a bill and saying you support small business and actually supporting small business. When it comes to being supporters of the men and women whose businesses are really the backbone of Ontario's economy, the government has been, I suggest, the opposite of supportive. Their policies, whether you talk about energy, red tape or taxes, have made life more difficult, I suggest, for Ontario's small business owners.

We just finished a constituency week. When you're back in your ridings, people see you. They don't call it a constituency week; they call it a break week. I don't know that I had much of a break. I'm sure many of the government members went out and went to events in their ridings and talked to some small business owners. I know I was bombarded with a number of issues, and I have to say that the number one issue that I had with small business and with constituents was the latest hydro increase that the government has proposed. In the emails from small businesses and homeowners already struggling to pay their bills really, it was something I heard over and over again from people in my riding. Whether you're a small business owner, a farmer or a senior on a fixed income, the latest increase to pay for the sins of this government's outrageous gas plant scandal and outrageous green energy debacle has people just outraged. I wanted to make sure that I gave those people their due because I was just overrun with those comments. People stopped me at events, stopped me on the street corner and when I was in businesses. I have to say that there are a number of very positive constituents, people who are very optimistic, and even those people have turned sour on this government.

I want to quote one, because he sent me an email. His name is A.J. Benoit. He's a small business person from Brockville. Usually, when I get an email from A.J., it's to invite me to his latest community fundraising event or a concert he's involved in, but not so. Last week he wrote this:

"Steve,

"As a businessman, I get very upset at the way our provincial government continues to run the business at hand here in Ontario. Incompetent leadership, mismanagement and outright lies have been a common thread we have been living with over the past 10 years!"

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to ask the member for Leeds–Grenville to withdraw his unparliamentary remark.

Mr. Steve Clark: I apologize. I withdraw, Speaker.

"But this 'billion dollar' bill that the Ontario taxpayer is on the hook for is incomprehensible. If I or any other business person ran our business the way the provincial government does, we would be bankrupt in a week!

“It’s inexcusable to expect the taxpayers to pay for the Liberals’ incompetence. It is inexcusable for the Premier of this province to publicly state she takes full responsibility and accountability for the government’s action, and our only compensation is an apology!”

The email continues: “Anyone in the private sector would have been fired! This government has no idea at all what accountability is. Accountability is to own up to the mistake and make it right. In other words, I want my money back. I am tired of paying for government incompetence.

“The ‘Liberal’ Party should be paying for this gross mistake, not the taxpayer. This is the straw that breaks the camel’s back! It has been quite some time now I have been seriously considering leaving Ontario to live somewhere else, where the government has a better handle on running the province.

“The only thing keeping me here is the love of my community. If it weren’t for the fact that I was born and raised in Brockville and have a love for my hometown, I’d leave Ontario in a heartbeat!

“I am a very, very unhappy Ontarian; in fact, it is embarrassing to even admit I’m from Ontario!”

That’s from my constituent. That’s from a guy who’s so positive about the community he’s a community builder, and even he has lost confidence in this government.

The mood is reflected, also, in the Ontario Chamber of Commerce’s recent What Ontario Business Thinks quarterly survey. Less than half of the province’s businesses surveyed are confident in Ontario’s economy. We’re talking about small businesses this afternoon, so it’s interesting to note that the smaller the business, the less confident entrepreneurs are. While 49% of businesses with 100 or more employees are confident, that falls to 45% for those with 11 to 99 employees, and just 41% for those with fewer than 10 employees.

Now, you won’t find a more optimistic group, I think, in communities than people who are involved in small businesses, so this survey, to me, was a real eye-opener. Even those sort of half-full people are not optimistic about this government and the way the economy is. But again, I can sympathize with them, because after 10 years of Liberal mismanagement, a track record of scandal and waste that has culminated in the shameful billion-dollar gas plant debacle, I can understand why some people have felt the way that they have and why businesses have now turned from that half-full mentality to not having confidence in this government or their ability to manage the economy.

We’re dealing with small businesses, and I thought that I should set the table on a discussion about Bill 105 with some of those comments from small businesses. I think there’s a recognition that, as some members have already stated, we’re going to support this bill.

I happen to agree with my colleague from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound: It’s a half measure. It’s tinkering around the edges, but I think there is a recognition in 105 that there needs to be some tax relief for Ontario’s

businesses. They desperately need some good news. I’m not going to go into the details because I think many members have today talked about the exemption, what it does to those businesses with payrolls under \$5 million and the fact that the exemptions change.

I only have a few minutes left. I do want to talk about some other issues in another letter that is quite long. The concern that that constituent has was the decision that, in January, independent contractors and owners of construction companies—small businesses—were forced to pay their own WSIB coverage.

I promised Sandra Howe of Athens, whose husband Keith is a general contractor, that I’d share their story and how it’s affecting their family. Here’s some of what she wrote to me:

“After a very emotional chat with my husband yesterday after work, I called workman’s comp this morning, and they referred me to you.

“I was advised to email you to let you know not only our thoughts, but the thoughts of every self-employed contractor we speak to in the area.

“We were floored last year to get the info regarding WSIB and the amount that a general contractor has to pay. We understand that something had to be done because of all the ‘under-the-table’ activity, but the amount that comes out of our pockets quarterly is nothing less than robbery to those who have a small business.

“My husband came home yesterday and said every bit of profit we made this summer goes to WSIB. He was distraught, to say the least. I was shocked and sick to my stomach.

“The whole summer he worked for nothing. What is happening? He does everything right, and this? He said to me he will probably have to quit after all of these years of being self-employed and work again for someone else. He said if he doesn’t take the commercial jobs there just is not enough work to keep going.

“When I called WSIB this morning, she listened to what I had to say and told me they get calls every day with the very same complaint, and this is not at all new—that the contractor’s profit margin is totally eaten up with this payment, and that people are now going to their local MPP to ask for help.

“She said lobbying is or is going to be taking place and that at some point soon, hopefully the government is going to have to address this and seriously implement a new plan to help us.”

This is from the folks at WSIB, saying this to one of my constituents.

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Sandra goes on:

“Something has to be done for the small or family businesses who are self-employed because they simply cannot lose this much out of their pocket. It is actually causing people to lose their livelihood.

“My husband was speaking to a contractor as recent as yesterday who actually has to turn work down on a daily basis because it is commercial. He is losing his shirt as well. It seems it is always the common thread in conversations.

“Please read this, Mr. Clark, and consider it. What can be done? \$9.10 on \$100.00 is far too much! We cannot afford to do any commercial work but can't afford not to.

“There has to be a solution for this.”

Speaker, I know I'm going to take my two-minute summation. I'm going to get to more of this. Thank you for giving me this initial opportunity to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I certainly understand and sometimes even empathize with some of the frustration that the member from Leeds–Grenville has shared. But we are now two full years into this term of this Legislature and we've heard a lot of complaining, we've heard a lot of disgruntlement and a lot of frustration, but not too many solutions and not too many options to actually change or course correct. We started to hear a little bit of course correction talk when Bill 74 was thrown into the loop—the ominous bill, which is how we refer to it—but I think it's actually time for us to be very clear about where we are right now. You can either be part of the solution or you can stand on the sidelines. You can bring solutions to the table or you can stand and complain on the sidelines. What the people of the province expect is that we actually get something done. While Bill 105 is not perfect, once we get it to committee, in a minority setting, we are actually empowered—each one of us on that committee—to change it, to make it better, to make it stronger and to address all the issues that you've brought to the table.

It's frustrating because your leader is actually going out to the province saying there's a confidence motion and you can somehow make something happen. The only way that we're going to move forward is actually making sure something happens in the next few months before the budget, because it has a budget motion or a supply motion where this government may or may not fall.

I think it's incumbent on us to come to work and actually do the work, and get something done in committee session. That's where our energy is.

While some of us are very frustrated, it's becoming equally frustrating for the people of this province to see you do nothing, and us make them do their job. Let's do it together. Let's get something done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. John Milloy: I listened with great interest to the speech from the member from Leeds–Grenville. You know what struck me, Mr. Speaker, is that there are lots of differences between this side of the House that side of the House. There are a lot of policy differences, there are a lot of ideological differences, but when it comes down to it, it's one of the themes that he talked about, and that's optimism. Over on this side of the House, we're optimistic about the future of this province. We're optimistic about our small business sector. We're optimistic about the economy and we want to partner with them. We see government as having a force for good.

When I heard that member's speech, when I hear that member and other members in question period and debates go on about this province, they talk about this province, which has been built and continues to be built by a lot of hard-working people, with the most pessimistic, dire tones you could hear. The fact of the matter is that we have a great small business sector in the province of Ontario. We should be celebrating it and we should be helping it.

That's what this bill does. This bill is targeted at helping more than 60,000 Ontario small businesses by lowering their taxes and promoting jobs and growth. I've had to sit here for the last 10 years and listen to that party go on and on and on about cutting taxes. Well, guess what? That's what this bill does.

It's time that we sent this bill to committee. We have now had eight hours of debate; 16 members have spoken at length. I think it's time that we sent this bill to committee, that we pass this bill and that we come together to make sure that small businesses get a break in this province.

We're sick of hearing the rhetoric over on that side of the House. We want some action. Help us send this bill to committee, help us pass this bill and help us support a strong small business sector in this province that, at least on this side of the House, we're very optimistic about.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: The member from Leeds–Grenville makes mention of what I consider the baby step that we see in Bill 105. It adds \$50,000 to a tax exemption that was introduced by Mike Harris, I think it was back in 1996.

We've been debating a baby step, and I know they want to try and wrap this up. I am looking forward to my opportunity to debate this legislation. The reason for that: We see no plan here beyond a baby step. There's no substantial plan or course of action—no mention of real tax policy. We've seen the tax policy of tax hikes over the last 10 years.

To be optimistic, we have a policy on taxation which encompasses not only business taxes but also income taxes and also consumption taxes, the HST. We're opposed to the Ontario College of Trades tax. We're very optimistic that changes can be made to labour legislation, changes that have been well overdue, going back probably to the 1940s; we're dealing with outdated apprenticeship ratios.

We're probably going to see a hike in WSIB premiums. We're probably going to see a hike in the minimum wage. We have seen a hike in the tax rate on what I describe as the maximum wage, where both parties got together and decided to, as they describe it, tax the rich at a rate of 49.5%. That's one of the highest tax rates in North America.

To be optimistic, we asked for an energy policy beyond blowing \$1.1 billion on the two gas plants. We would ask this government, after 10 years, stop creating rules and regulations and red tape that are suffocating small business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I wanted to contribute to the debate from the member for Leeds–Grenville. I’ve listened to the Liberals and the Conservatives. They’re optimistic, and they’re pessimistic. I think New Democrats have been sent here to actually do the job that we’re required to do.

When we talk about what has been accomplished in the last 10 years—you’re going back and forth. Liberals haven’t been listening to Conservatives for 10 years, and Conservatives haven’t been listening to the government for 10 years. Nobody’s listening to solutions of how to make people’s lives better. But there were some things that we implemented in this budget in the last two sessions that did make life better for Ontarians.

When we’re talking about taxes, one of the things that we introduced in the last session was that income earners of \$500,000 or more would have an increased tax amount—I think it was a 3% surtax. We didn’t hear a lot of grumbling back from those income earners because they wanted to contribute to the economy. They knew that they had to do their fair share, just like every hard-working Ontarian in Ontario is expected to do. Therefore, bringing this bill forward is a small step for small business to have some tax relief. It is going to help small businesses.

One member earlier alluded to having that and taking a trip to Florida. Not everybody’s priority is taking a tax credit and going to Florida. It could be paying off a bill that the small business has that is overdue. It could be having a very small amount where they could hire somebody part-time for a short time to get ahead of some of the paperwork or some of the duties that are in their small business office or shop.

Even though we’ve been debating this bill for—I heard—eight hours, it’s a democracy. We live with a democratic government. We have the right to debate as long as people want to stand up and speak about the bills before this House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments, so we return to the member for Leeds–Grenville to sum up.

Mr. Steve Clark: I’d like to thank the members who contributed in questions and comments: the member for Kitchener–Waterloo, the government House leader, the member for Haldimand–Norfolk and the member for London–Fanshawe.

I want to thank Mr. Barrett, the member for Haldimand–Norfolk because he used the words “red tape that suffocates small business.” Certainly, that’s some of the comments that I heard from small businesses in my community over the constituency week. That was something that came out.

I think it was the member for Kitchener–Waterloo who spoke and talked about why we come to this place. We had a policy conference in London. I know we came back to this place and decided that we would take the Premier up on her offer to have a number of bills that we support and to clear the decks so that the government could present us their jobs plan.

I think this morning our leader, Tim Hudak, and our finance critic, Vic Fedeli, did a great job in question period again, challenging the government to put forward their jobs plan. The members opposite can talk about who is optimistic or pessimistic, but we’ve actually listened to what constituents told us during the last election and put up some policies for discussion. I think we proved, after our conference, that we wanted to clear the decks so that the government could show us if they had a plan.

I wanted, today, to put forward comments from A.J. Benoit and Sandra Howe about small businesses, but I’m afraid that the solution just isn’t Bill 105, or a government that pays lip service to supporting small business. I think the solution is to bring this tax-and-spend Liberal regime down and to put in place an Ontario PC government that’s going to truly respect business, large and small, that built this great province.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
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Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
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Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Agriculture and Food / Ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Government / Chef du gouvernement Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
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Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

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Chair / Président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Rick Bartolucci
Laura Albanese, Rick Bartolucci
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Percy Hatfield
Mitzie Hunter, Jim McDonell
Randy Pettapiece, Monique Taylor
Lisa M. Thompson
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Phil McNeely
Teresa J. Armstrong, Steven Del Duca
Bob Delaney, Frank Klees
Jack MacLaren, Phil McNeely
Rob E. Milligan, Shafiq Qadri
Jonah Schein
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tamara Pomanski

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Bas Balkissoon, Grant Crack
Vic Dhillon, Garfield Dunlop
Cindy Forster, Lisa MacLeod
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Todd Smith
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Norm Miller
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Toby Barrett
Toby Barrett, Lorenzo Berardinetti
France Gélinas, Helena Jaczek
Bill Mauro, Phil McNeely
Norm Miller, John O'Toole
Jagmeet Singh
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Vanthof
Donna H. Cansfield, Dipika Damerla
John Fraser, Monte Kwinter
Jane McKenna, Rick Nicholls
Peter Tabuns, John Vanthof
Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tamara Pomanski

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Bas Balkissoon, Ted Chudleigh
Mike Colle, Vic Dhillon
Cheri DiNovo, Ernie Hardeman
Rod Jackson, Helena Jaczek
Paul Miller
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Select Committee on Developmental Services / Comité spécial sur les services aux personnes ayant une déficience intellectuelle

Chair / Président: Vacant

Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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