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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 28 October 2013

Lundi 28 octobre 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Monday 28 October 2013

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Lundi 28 octobre 2013

The House met at 1030.

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

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to welcome one of my constituents, Lee Griffi from Caressant Care, to Queen's Park today. He's here as part of the Ontario Long Term Care Association day, and I want to recognize all that he does for the industry and our seniors in Oxford county. I say welcome to Lee Griffi.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I just want to introduce the woman who keeps me humble and gives me the opportunity of doing this job: my wife, Pauline Mantha.

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's my pleasure to introduce the following people here today. Our young Mr. Hauber, who's the captain of the pages today, has many people here: Michelene Hauber, mother—by the way, who was a page here, I think, in 1982, and I introduced them at that time—Peter Hauber, the father; Thomas Hauber, brother; Simon Hauber, brother; Malcolm Hauber, brother; Doris Hauber, grandparent; Daniel Hauber, grandparent; and Tom and Annette Urlocker, who were here when their daughter was here in 1982, and I was introducing them at that time. Welcome to the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It's my pleasure today to introduce Darren Micallef, director of operations for the Sprucedale Care Centre in Strathroy, to Queen's Park today. Welcome, Darren.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I am pleased to welcome in the gallery Deborah Pindur, the director of new product solutions and innovations for Ryder transportation services.

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: I would like to introduce Alicia Milner, president of the Canadian Natural Gas Vehicle Alliance, who has joined us today. I'd like to invite all members to come to a reception they're holding following question period.

Mr. Frank Klees: It's my pleasure to introduce Staff Sergeant Edmond Villamere of Aurora, Ontario; his wife, Gillian; and son Benjamin. Staff Sergeant Villamere is an officer with York Regional Police, 4 district B platoon, stationed in Richmond Hill. Benjamin is a grade 5 student who's very interested in politics and looks forward to being a page here in the Legislature at some point.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'd like to welcome Bath-El Balay, Hasna Syed and Justin Wei-Yu Tai to the Legislature this afternoon—or this morning. Welcome. It's been a long day already.

Hon. Michael Chan: I want to welcome my constituent Mr. Paul Rushforth, who's a member of the Ontario Long Term Care Association's board of directors. He's the chief operating officer at Leisureworld Senior Care Corp. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'd like to welcome representatives from the Ontario Long Term Care Association today: Candace Chartier, the CEO, and also Adrienne Spafford, Patrick McCarthy and Colleen Laing. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to welcome Lisa Gretzky from the Greater Essex District School Board to Queen's Park today.

Hon. David Oraziotti: It's my pleasure today to introduce a group of MNR staff from the Ontario Parks southeast region, as well as from the enforcement branch.

Mr. Rob Leone: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature Jason Spencer from Con Cast Pipe; Gerry Mulhern from the Ontario Concrete Pipe Association; and Wes Mazur from Grand River Occupational Health and Safety.

I'd also like to welcome the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek to his new seat in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not appropriate.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I hope all members of the Legislature will welcome the director of government relations from Lakehead University visiting us today, Mr. Richard Longtin.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'd like to welcome Roy Purdy and Carol Carder, visiting from Lindsay on a Queen's Park tour and for lunch. Welcome to the Legislature.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, Speaker, I'm very delighted to welcome members of the Ontario Long Term Care Association. Patrick McCarthy, Candace Chartier, Chris McKey, Adrienne Spafford and others are joining us today and look forward to seeing all of us at the reception later this afternoon.

I'd also like to welcome the Queen's University mentoring program. This program is sponsored by the legislative press gallery and is intended to give students an understanding of the roles of journalists and politicians here at Queen's Park. I look forward to meeting with you later this afternoon.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's my pleasure to welcome Elisa Bousada, the business development adviser for Shell Canada, who's here today with the Canadian Natural Gas Vehicle Alliance; also Mr. John Scotland, CEO of Steeves & Rozema long-term-care group.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I would like to welcome Ruth McFarlane, who's vice-president, non-profit, for the

Ontario Long Term Care Association. She's a member from my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood, and I want to welcome her here today.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to introduce a constituent from my riding of St. Paul's, Mr. Bill Dillane, who's the secretary treasurer of the Ontario Long Term Care Association and president, Responsive Health Management.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): With us today in the Speaker's gallery is a person who is familiar to all of us, from Elgin–Middlesex–London, in the 37th, 38th and Speaker in the 39th Parliament, Mr. Steve Peters. Welcome.

WEARING OF POPPIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before we begin, there is a tradition that we wear poppies in the House at this time. As you can see, all sides were provided with poppies.

A reminder that they are to be worn on the left-hand side of the lapel closest to the heart and no other pin or item is above the poppy, just for everyone's sake.

ORAL QUESTIONS

PROVINCIAL DEBT

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Tomorrow marks the fourth anniversary of the Standard & Poor's downgrade, one of three such downgrades Ontario has suffered under this Liberal government. These downgrades impact not only the province's cost of borrowing but that of other linked entities, such as University of Toronto, the city of North Bay, OPG, among many others. In only 10 years, you've doubled our debt and interest is now the third-largest expenditure, and interest is set to rise another \$4 billion by 2017-18 when you claim to balance the budget.

Premier, what is the government's current projection for the amount of debt Ontario will accumulate between now and 2017-18?

1040

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question, and I just want to take this opportunity to advise the House that on Thursday, November 7, we will be providing our financial economic statement update. At that point—

Interjection: Our fall economic statement.

Hon. Charles Sousa:—our fall economic statement will talk about the things that matter most to Ontarians—
Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will come to order, the member from Simcoe North will come to order and the member from Prince Edward–Hastings will come to order.

Hon. Charles Sousa: As mentioned, we will be providing our fall economic—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex will come to order.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Okay, I'll try again. We are going to be bringing our fall economic statement on Thursday, November 7, to talk about the things that matter most to Ontarians—talking about investing in our people. We're going to talk about investing in infrastructure strategically, as we've been doing, and we're talking about how we're going to support and continue to support an innovative business climate.

To the member opposite, the rating agencies have recognized the tremendous value of Ontario and the strong economic—

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'm saddened, Speaker, that he couldn't even answer the simple question, but sadder is the fact that the debt they've run up is now threatening the very things we care about. We're adding another \$20 billion to our debt this year alone, and that amount is set to rise next year.

You have put Ontario on a very slippery slope. Your own budget tells us that even a one percentage point increase in interest rates would add 400 additional million dollars to our borrowing costs. Their inability to make the tough decisions needed to reduce spending leaves a spectre of another credit downgrade hanging over Ontario's head. Tell us today, does the government's—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Mississauga–Streetsville will come to order. Thank you.

Just throw somebody to order to give you a chance.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker; much appreciated.

I'll ask again: Does the government's fiscal plan take into account a further credit rating downgrade?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The member opposite hasn't read the budget apparently, and he is not concerned about the well-being of Ontario by the way he's asking these questions, because the rating agencies have recognized all too well how strong Ontario's fundamentals are. It is why, through the work that we've done, we have now been the first government in over a decade in all of Canada to actually reduce spending, year over year.

We have a target in our plan for a net debt to debt ratio of 27%. That was brought in our throne speech, and we're working towards that, and we're exceeding those targets as well. In fact, we are the one and only government in all of Canada to have now brought in over 180% of those jobs, 477,000 net new jobs to the province, and we're working towards doing even more.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: To illustrate just how serious the crisis we're in is, in the four minutes that we've both been standing talking, our debt has increased \$89,040— in these last four minutes.

They have shown that when it comes to making the tough decisions, they chose what's best for the Liberal Party instead of what's best for Ontario. When Ontario

needed a wage freeze, you gave eight of every 10 contracts you negotiated a raise. You're giving seven-figure bonuses to Pan Am executives when you cut physio services for seniors. You waste \$1.1 billion to save Liberal seats while residents in Vaughan and south Niagara wait for new hospitals. Why should anyone believe you can or have any desire to balance the budget by 2017-18?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Charles Sousa: Ontarians believe in what we are doing because they're investing in Ontario. Ontarians believe in where we are going because they are making efforts to invest and to provide more jobs in our great province. In fact, our deficit has gone down by \$5.6 billion more than last anticipated. The rating agencies have affirmed that. When I was down in New York, they bought up our paper—and gladly so—because they see Ontario as a good place to invest.

As mentioned, we're the first government since 1996 to actually reduce its spending. We are the lowest-cost government in all of Canada, in all orders of government, for the work that we've done. We know that the member opposite and his party want to go to a slash-and-burn policy, put us at risk and reduce our economic growth even further. Now that is haphazard and reckless, and we won't go there.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Rod Jackson: My question is to the minister responsible for the Pan Am Games. Minister, last week you excused yourself from planning and budgeting for security and transportation because you've decided it's too early—1.5 years out. But the billion-dollar Pan Am budget was set out four years ago. Did you just forget about security and transportation, the same way you forgot about the athletes' village, the diesel air-rail link, the secretariat partying and paperwork budget or the Pan Am trail? Speaker, this minister thinks he's on a pay-as-you-go plan for the Pan Am Games.

Minister, what is the cost of security and transportation?

Hon. Michael Chan: I thank the member for the question. Speaker, last week, I think the member opposite mentioned a number for security and on transportation, which is \$235 million. That number is not correct. That number is wrong. That is a fantasized number.

At the moment, we are talking to municipalities in terms of transportation. We are talking to different municipalities in terms of security. These are big games. It's a big plan to be discussed. Right now, I don't have a final number. When that number comes out, certainly, I will let the member know.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rod Jackson: You don't have a number. Let's put an end to the fantasy once and for all. Why don't you try again on that one, Minister? Tell Ontarians what Pan Am security and transportation will cost and how much both will impact our lives. Your platitudes are ludicrous,

and they prove that no open government can be had with the Liberals. There absolutely must be a budget because the Pan Am security officials have indicated this mystery budget is already overblown. There must be a plan because the plans to cut corners by granting security guards special police powers exist.

Minister, I'm not asking you to get creative. I know you know. What is the budget for security and transportation? Please tell us once and for all. If you don't have a number, tell us that too.

Hon. Michael Chan: The member opposite has a number. He has an untrue number, which is \$235 million, on transportation and security. Speaker, the Minister of Transportation and TO2015 are leading the development of an integrated transportation plan for the games. Transportation planning for an event of this size is complex, takes time and involves many organizations, including the province, municipalities and transit system and security planners. We are working closely with the OPP and municipal police to ensure that transportation will be safe and secure.

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

Mr. Rod Jackson: Minister, I suggest you sit down with the CEO of TO2015 and ask him what the security budget is. He told me it's included in the \$235-million essential services plan. If you don't know that by now, Minister, you probably should be looking for a different job.

Under your leadership, we've discovered that the \$1.4-billion budget is just a talking point. Pan Am expenditures will be at least double what you say they will. You have no control over your bureaucrats. Your organizing committee is taking taxpayers for a ride, and you refuse to be open about the cost of security and transportation.

Honestly, is this the behaviour of a minister who is actually responsible for the Pan Am Games? Minister, prove you're not just a placeholder in a B-team cabinet led by an unelected Premier. Will you be honest today or step down from your job?

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Michael Chan: The safety of athletes, coaches, officials, visitors and the general public is a critical element in the planning of the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games. Speaker, we are prepared to take any measures necessary to ensure the safety of citizens. We will not take risks with people's safety. Learning from large-scale games like the Vancouver Olympics, we have made a concerted effort to incorporate security in the initial planning stages of the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

New question.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I tried to do it with a gentle “Order, please.” If I have to be specific, I will.

Member from Toronto–Danforth, new question.

ENERGY RATES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. People and businesses in Ontario are paying the highest electricity bills in the country. It’s making it harder for families to make ends meet. It’s making it tougher for businesses to grow and create jobs. People and businesses in Ontario are paying bills that are two times higher than they are across the border.

Does the Premier realize that having the highest energy bills in Canada, and letting those sky-high bills grow faster than the rate of inflation, is a serious problem for business and for households?

1050

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the Minister of Energy is going to want to comment on our overall plan, but I want to just be clear that when we came into office, we were facing an energy system that was in disarray. There was a huge need for investment in transmission; there was a need for investment in generation. That is what we have done.

We now have a stable energy system in terms of green energy, the money that has been put into transmission. That is what is paramount for the people in this province. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that having a stable, reliable energy system is exactly what we need. And the fact is, we have put in place rebates and supports for businesses and for seniors to make sure that they have an affordable supply, because stability and affordability are the cornerstones.

We needed a stable system. The NDP has not supported the initiatives that we’ve taken, Mr. Speaker, but nonetheless, we have got that stable system in place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, for over 10 years, the Liberal Party has treated government as a tool to help the political interests of the Liberal Party. Whether the government is ignoring warnings about gas plants and then later cancelling them and costing families over \$1 billion just to save a few seats, or signing nuclear contracts worth almost \$1 billion before a project is even approved or anyone knows the final cost, does the Premier understand that people see this cynical politicking for what it is, and for once, they want to see their interests come first?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: When this government took office 10 years ago, there was a deficit in terms of infrastructure, energy and supply. We invested \$21 billion in new generation. We invested \$10 billion in new transmission. Those investments have put pressure on the rates. But what we did for the rates, which that NDP party voted against, was the Ontario Clean Energy Benefit, which gives a 10% discount off the bottom line in prices. We created an energy and property tax credit to help

those who need it. We’ve created the Northern Ontario Energy Credit, the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program. They voted against all of this.

We are mitigating the rate increases. The pressure on rates came from our tremendously huge investments—because that opposition party let the system decline.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, back to the Premier: People are frustrated when they see that the Liberal government is focused on helping out well-connected insiders, not helping out the families that are working hard to pay the bills.

Media reports that when the Premier went to Calgary, she met with the head of TransCanada Energy, the company behind the Oakville gas plant. The Premier didn’t even bring up the fact that Ontarians are paying TransCanada more money now than the Oakville gas plant is cancelled than they would have before. Families got handed a bigger bill so that a private power company could get a bigger cheque.

Why is the Premier’s energy plan more focused on helping private power companies make more money than it is on helping families make ends meet?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Several days ago, we announced that we were deferring new nuclear. One of the main reasons for doing that is (1) we have a surplus of supply, and (2) we were not going to invest \$15 billion and put more pressures on rates for building power we don’t need. This critic said he agrees with that decision, so there’s something we agree on.

But, Mr. Speaker, they have no plan for the energy sector. They will stand up, they will criticize, they will malign, they will do everything. If they believe they have a right to govern, they have an obligation to put forward a plan. They have never done so, and I challenge them to do so.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier—and Premier, I’m certain you’ll want to acknowledge our thoughts and our best wishes to the family of Jim Belanger and his wife, who were involved in an accident last night, returning from Ottawa to Sudbury, involving their horse trailer. They had to euthanize a horse. I just want to send our thoughts and best wishes to the family of Jim Belanger.

Horse people and track workers in Fort Erie and Sudbury and across Ontario don’t think they’re getting a fair shake from this Premier, and I don’t blame them. She insisted that the Slots at Racetracks Program had to go because it allowed insiders at marquis tracks like Woodbine to pay themselves sky-high salaries instead of putting money back into horses. But in its place, they brought in a plan that cuts out not-for-profit tracks and rewards the same for-profit insiders that abused SARP in the first place.

Why won’t the Ontario government play fair with rural Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: My thoughts are with the family, and my heart goes out to them.

What the member opposite has said is the furthest thing from the truth, Mr. Speaker. Following on the footsteps of my predecessor, who put in place the panel of Elmer Buchanan, John Snobelen and John Wilkinson to give us some advice on how we could make the horse racing industry in the province sustainable, we have got a plan in place.

The leader of the NDP has stated that she'd like to reinstate the Slots at Racetracks Program. That was an unaccountable program. All the members of the panel said that that was not a program that could be sustainable, it was not going to make the horse racing industry sustainable and it was not accountable to the people of Ontario. So we will not be reinstating that program, Mr. Speaker. Instead, we will be investing \$400 million in a five-year plan to keep the horse racing industry. All of the tracks have an opportunity to be sustainable—

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Speaker, the Premier talks about accountability, but the government—this government—is about as transparent as a brick wall.

Horse people in places like Fort Erie, Sudbury and all across the province are having a hard time making an impression on this government. Even as this government is putting not-for-profit tracks out of business, they're going all in on Woodbine, which, since the end of SARP, has conveniently gone for-profit. Is this the government's idea of making horse racing sustainable for rural Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, our idea is that we want to make sure that all the tracks in the province have a way to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to tell some members of the NDP and some members of the Tories to take it outside.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Our proposal is that all the tracks in the province have an opportunity to take part in a sustainable horse racing industry into the future. In order to do that, we have put the onus on the OLG to make sure there is an integration of horse racing with the overall gaming strategy.

The folks I have spoken to, and many I have spoken to in the horse racing industry, are pleased with that. That integration was missing. They wanted to feel they were part of that overall strategy. That is what will make them sustainable, and that is our objective.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: The fact is that this government is betting the farm on the Woodbine Racetrack, and horse people in Fort Erie and Sudbury are losing their shirts.

This deal isn't about making horse racing sustainable; it's about handing more market share to a for-profit giant.

Why is this government picking a big winner and putting smaller tracks out to pasture?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, what the member opposite is saying is just not true. Grand River and Western Fair are non-profit tracks, and they are going to have a sustainable future.

What we want is that the success of the tracks is attached to the success of the industry, the success of the customers coming in. That's what the plan is putting in place, Mr. Speaker.

I think that the NDP is very intent on a political goal right here. What we're trying to do is put in place the right policy so that all the tracks in the province have an opportunity to work with the ORC to have that future that will provide those jobs in rural Ontario. That is our objective, and that's what the plan is designed to do, Mr. Speaker.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Premier. Last week, you visited the Niagara region without ever really addressing the need for a new hospital in that area. When pushed about whether you would build a new hospital in south Niagara, all you stated was that your government would look at it.

The existing hospitals in Niagara Falls, Welland, Port Colborne and Fort Erie are all in need of major renovations in order to provide care. A new hospital would actually save taxpayers money in terms of operations.

Premier, will you stand here today and commit to building a new hospital in south Niagara, as recommended by your expert Dr. Kevin Smith?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the Minister of Health will want to speak to the specifics of this question, but I just want to say that it is a bit rich, coming from a member of this party, talking to us about closing hospitals, because that is the party that closed hospitals.

The point I want to make is that we are the party that has built and opened hospitals and maintained hospitals. The reality is—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Yes, it is.

Thank you.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The reality is that the plan that—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Dufferin-Caledon will come to order.

1100

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The reality of the plans, the documents, that the party opposite has put forward is that the exact same result would happen: There would be services cut across the board in education, in health care. We're not going there. That is where they would like to take us—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —we've been there. We've seen that picture. We're not going back to that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: The Liberals can keep repeating that old myth as much as they want, but it's never going to make it so.

The reality is, the people of Niagara deserve a new hospital and not costly, temporary fixes on the old ones. Temporary fixes on existing hospitals will end up costing taxpayers more. In fact, Dr. Kevin Smith noted in his report that building a new hospital will save the health system \$10 million annually in operating costs.

You've already wasted billions of dollars on scandals, and you're cutting health services to Ontarians. We can't afford to keep doing this. We need a long-term investment in health care for all Ontarians, including those in Niagara.

Will you commit today to doing the right thing and giving people in south Niagara the hospital that they deserve?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: There has been an astonishing change of attitude from the party opposite. It wasn't very long ago—May 2012—that the Leader of the Opposition said that hospital infrastructure would have to wait until after the books were balanced. But we're hearing a new tune now.

We have been very busy building hospitals. The member from Simcoe North, I'm sure, would be happy to tell you about Waypoint. The member from Barrie would tell you about the Royal Victoria. The member from Cambridge would tell you about the Cambridge hospital. The member from Burlington would talk about Joe Brant. The member from Halton could talk about Milton. The member from Leeds–Grenville could talk about Brockville. The member from Elgin–Middlesex–London could talk to you about St. Thomas. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke could talk to you about the Renfrew Victoria Hospital. And I'm sure the member from Wellington–Halton Hills would be more than happy to talk about Groves Memorial.

Speaker, we have been more aggressive in building hospital infrastructure than any government ever has, because of the neglect that was—

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

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is again to the Premier. This government has repeatedly said that it has environmental, community and First Nations concerns regarding the proposed Line 9 reversal project. To quote the Premier, these "questions ... need to have answers. We need to understand exactly what the risks are."

If the Premier is so concerned about getting answers to these serious questions, why is she rejecting a provincial environmental assessment of the Line 9 reversal project?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Of course, the decision is a national government decision, the National Energy Board. We have intervened. We've taken a strong position, number one, that paramount interest should be given to public safety and environmental protection; and number two, there should be absolute consultation with the people directly involved, with First Nations and Métis communities, moving forward. There should be protection for liability for whatever damage they might cause, if something happens in the future.

We made a strong case before the National Energy Board. We will continue to advocate those principles moving forward. Indeed, we demanded that there be stress testing of the whole system to ensure public safety. I'm not sure what the outcome of that is, but we've been very responsible to a government agency in another level of government, which makes the ultimate decision.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm surprised to hear that this government has so much confidence in the Harper government's approach to environmental protection.

Ontario's Environmental Commissioner, Gord Miller, said he has concerns about the kind of oil, called diluted bitumen, or dilbit, that will flow through the reversed pipeline. The commissioner says if there's a spill, dilbit doesn't float on water like regular light crude, that can mostly be recovered from the surface.

Many Ontarians have concerns about the Line 9 project. Why won't the Premier allow a provincial environmental assessment to ensure that the pipeline project meets the highest environmental standards?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The National Energy Board has a very rigorous process to ensure safety and environmental standards are met.

He talks about doing an environmental assessment and overriding the constitution of this country, where the National Energy Board has the authority to look after this particular issue.

If the situation was reversed and we were doing something in the environmental area, or we were having a hearing and the federal government came down and told us what to do, you know what we would tell them and where they should go.

We're dealing with this, with respecting the constitutional areas of jurisdiction, and we have the highest standard that we're advocating on behalf of the people of Ontario.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Bob Delaney: This question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment. Minister, Friday, October 25, was the date to highlight Small Business Month in Canada. Small businesses invest time and create good jobs in rural and urban communities in Ontario. It's important to recognize the contribution small businesses make across Ontario.

To build on Ontario's investment in people, infrastructure and the creation of innovative and dynamic

business environments, the province has introduced Bill 105, the Supporting Small Businesses Act, aimed at ensuring small businesses receive the support they need to succeed and grow. Would the minister please provide the House with an update on what the status of the bill is?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you to the member for his question. We've recently introduced Bill 105, as the member has indicated, the Supporting Small Businesses Act, which will be further debated this afternoon. This important bill is one that I believe all members can get behind, and we need to work together in order to pass it quickly.

Bill 105 will support small business in Ontario and will ensure that 60,000 small businesses pay less of the employer health tax. Bill 105 will eliminate that tax altogether for 12,000 small businesses right across the province.

The strength of our small businesses in Ontario was highlighted last week when two Ontario small business owners, Printables.Me and Truth Beauty Company, were recipients of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business's annual Shop Small Biz awards.

Ontario, of course, has already permanently cut the small business corporate income tax from 5.5% to 4.5%. We've reduced the regulatory burden. We know we have more to do. This important bill is part of that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Minister, it's important that Ontario encourage and support small businesses across the province. In 2012, there were 385,405 small and medium-sized firms in this province. This figure represents 99% of the total businesses in Ontario, and it provides a significant source of employment for the men and women across our province.

Minister, expand on the kind of support small businesses need in this recovering economy and how the province can continue to play a strong role in helping small businesses increase employment and build solid careers across Ontario.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Again, I thank the member for this important question on employment and small business. Communities across this province, both rural and urban, benefit from the jobs that our small businesses create.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business's survey results indicate that small business confidence in Canada and here in Ontario continues to climb. This means that when we support our small businesses, we're creating the right business climate for job creation.

Ontario currently has 57 small business enterprise centres helping to support our small businesses and entrepreneurs right across the province. Supports like the Ontario Network of Entrepreneurs help to bring knowledge and experience, supporting our entrepreneurs and small businesses. Our unprecedented \$295-million youth jobs strategy, which is creating 30,000 new jobs for youth, and our recently announced social enterprise strategy and our new trade strategy will also help create thousands of new jobs.

By supporting small businesses in Ontario, we're creating jobs. This is again why I'm urging everybody to support this bill, Bill 105, this afternoon.

TRADE DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Jane McKenna: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Tomorrow, Prime Minister Harper will table the agreement in principle on the Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement with the European Union. This gives Ontario a tremendous opportunity to grow our economy and create good, well-paying, middle-class jobs. After CETA's ratification, Canada will be the only G8 nation with preferential access to markets in both the EU and the US.

Investors need certainty. Our debt, deficit and energy rates are far higher than anywhere else in the country. How are you going to convince foreign investors that Ontario is where they want to be?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Oh, come on, Charles—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean–Carleton, come to order. She also knows I don't like it when somebody is called by anything other than their title or their riding.

Carry on, please.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Dufferin, do not help me. Do not help me.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: —have the opportunity to speak to CETA, to the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, with the European Union. Ontario, of course, was pleased, just over a week ago, to lend its support to the fact that an agreement in principle has been reached in the Canada-EU trade negotiations.

I think all of us know that the EU is actually the largest economic trading block in the entire world and has a GDP of close to \$17 trillion. This agreement between Canada and the EU is going to be so important, leading to more stable commercial relations, forming a solid base for our economic and trade relations. Of course, with Ontario being an intensive trade jurisdiction, this is extremely important. We have significant trade already with the EU, but this gives us much upside potential to increase that trade even further.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Jane McKenna: This we know: It's leadership and vision at its best.

Speaker, it sounds like the Liberals still do not have a plan. While the Premier and her minister continue to dither, hundreds of thousands of Ontarians continue to wait for the endless parade of consultation and conversation to finish. Ontarians have had enough talk. They want action.

Our leader has a plan. We will provide a clear, predictable and measurable path to return to a balanced budget, restore the credit rating agency's faith in Ontario and build an economic climate that makes Ontario the choice destination for foreign investors.

One last time, Minister: Does your government have a real plan to help Ontario businesses capitalize on the benefits from CETA?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, I think I would be remiss if I didn't address part of the first question that came from the member opposite about encouraging foreign direct investment in this province. She may not know that, in fact, Ontario is the leader in all of North America for foreign direct investment on a per capita basis, and even when you don't take population into account, after California and New York, we come third. Foreign investment is coming to this province and is having an impact.

On this side of the House, we're interested in creating jobs. We released a new trade strategy just a few weeks ago. The PC jobs plan, as we know, is the opposite. It's firing education workers—as many as 10,000—firing 2,000 health care workers, driving down wages with harmful right-to-work—we don't work that way. On this side of the House, we believe in encouraging trade and investment.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. On Friday, Northern Superior Resources launched a lawsuit against the Ontario government over its failure to set real guidelines on the mining process in Ontario. NSR is the fourth mining company since 2009 to bring legal action against the government over the exact same issue. The failure to get consultations under way demonstrates the misguided priority of the Liberal government and is paving the path for further disputes.

Will this province take an active role and develop a real plan for resource development and jobs in the north?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I appreciate the question. First of all, we take our duty to consult extremely seriously. The success of that is reflected by the fact that there are well over 110 agreements in place between aboriginal communities and industry, and many other partnerships as well.

With respect to this particular matter, may I say that we remain committed to working with both parties to help foster a positive relationship, and certainly ensuring that Sachigo Lake First Nation is appropriately consulted. Our ministry staff have made significant efforts to engage with both the company and the First Nation. We've offered to facilitate discussions between them. Certainly,

we've invited the company as well to make use of our new regulatory process. We take this very seriously. We're very encouraged by the many agreements that are in place as a result of our duty-to-consult obligations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again, to the minister: The Liberal government claims they are ready to develop good value-added mining jobs, but the reality is that they're only ready to issue press releases about jobs instead of putting in the work to create them.

Last week, another company, Cliffs Natural Resources, said that it may pull out of the Ring of Fire because the Liberal government hasn't really set any guidelines on development. If the government continues to mismanage mining development in the north, we will see the lawsuits pile up and we will lose the opportunities.

Will the minister act now to actually develop a plan for good, value-added job creation that treats First Nations as partners?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: This is an absolute priority for our government, and the member knows it very, very well. In fact, he referenced it in his remarks on Friday, how important it was to develop good relations with First Nations in terms of the opportunities in the Ring of Fire. That's the work that we're doing with the table that has been set up between Mr. Rae, representing the Matawa First Nations, and also Frank Iacobucci, with the province. The investments that we've made in skills upgrading and training are another important part of that.

We also understand how important infrastructure is as well, in terms of that project moving forward, which is why we're looking at various options that we're going to assess. What's the best benefit to the province? What's the best benefit to northern Ontarians, the best benefit to the companies that are involved in this project? And obviously, what's the best benefit to the First Nations that can benefit so much from this extraordinarily important project?

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. Speaker, my constituents rely on public transit every day to get to work and to school on time. Public transit also helps to reduce congestion, keeping cars off the road, helping to keep our air clean.

In communities across Ottawa South, residents are happy to know that construction of the Ottawa LRT has begun. The project is one of many investments by this government to grow our transportation infrastructure across the province and to lead to more economic opportunities. Like several major projects, it is crucial that it comes in on time and on budget. This government has a strong track record on this. However, we all know that on occasion, projects of this scale can face cost overruns and potentially be delayed by various factors.

Can the minister please tell us of the measures that this government has taken to ensure that large-scale transit projects come in on time and on budget?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: One of the things that has been one of the quiet successes of this government is the fact that all of our rapid transit projects across this province have been on time and on budget. I want to thank my predecessor, the former minister, the MPP for Ottawa West–Nepean, for his leadership, because he and the Premier set a very great foundation for good, solid planning and project management.

Unlike other orders of government that have seen cost overruns, we haven't. Part of that is sharing and stabilizing our purchasing by grouping the Kitchener-Waterloo line with the projects in Toronto to get bigger contracts that allow us more flexibility to stage and acquire LRT vehicles. This is why, when the leader of the official opposition wants to cancel all LRT, he endangers all of the projects across the province, because there are many municipalities that are delivering great LRT projects that I think the people of Waterloo don't want to be trying to buy on their base. That would really wreck that project.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you to the minister for sharing that information. It's good to know that our government is being wise when making large investments, and it is good to know that we're working closely with municipalities across Ontario to help bring them better transit options sooner.

Residents across Ottawa are pleased to hear that we're working hard to turn investments into real transit that will help them in their everyday lives. Like in Ottawa, there are many other cities that are interested in having LRT technology introduced to help their residents get to where they are going faster—for example, Mississauga and Hamilton.

I was troubled to hear this past weekend that the Leader of the Opposition proposed to cancel these planned transit investments. As a member who represents a community that is anxious for its LRT project to be completed, I worry about the opposition's reckless plan to cancel LRT contracts and remove light rail track.

I would be interested to hear of light rail transit projects in other cities, like Mississauga and Hamilton, because these projects are part of Metrolinx's Big Move—the next wave—and are contingent upon our government's investment.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: The leader of the official opposition used to hate subways, because when he was a minister in the previous government, he had a passion for filling them in. Well, the good news is that he now loves subways. As a matter of fact, he has a passion for them so much, he only wants to build subways. Now he seems to hate GO and LRT and every other form of rapid transit, because he wants to do to them what he did to subways the last time he was in power.

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What he announced yesterday is that Hamilton will never see an LRT project, after decades of waiting. What he has announced—and I'm sure the MPPs from Durham and Whitby–Oshawa are really happy to see their bus rapid transit system and their LRT programs cut. I'm sure

the member for Newmarket–Aurora is really happy to see all future Viva and GO expansion—and is happy with a single track all the way to Barrie. I'm sure the member from Barrie is going to have fun explaining why that single track is never going to be twinned and why two-way all-day service—why Hamilton's, why Waterloo's LRT is compromised, why Finch West rail—

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

INVASIVE SPECIES

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Premier: People are concerned about serious threats to our Great Lakes, and your government seems paralyzed as far as taking any action. I don't see any action. You talk about your strategy, your goals, your intentions, setting up panels but no action where immediate action in conjunction with Great Lakes states and the federal government is crucial and long overdue.

You have tabled yet another environmental bill, previously killed by prorogation, a bill setting up more panels, a guardian council.

Premier, this all does nothing to deal with the clear and present danger of an invasion of Asian carp. Grass carp and bighead carp are already in Lake Erie. Silver carp—these are the ones that jump 10 feet out of the water—and black carp are on their way. What have you done about those?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of the Environment.

Hon. James J. Bradley: In regard to the second part, I'll refer that to the Minister of Natural Resources. But this is quite rich coming from a political party and a caucus that voted against the Great Lakes Protection Act, widely hailed by a good cross-section of the people of the province of Ontario as yet another positive step in protecting the Great Lakes. Two of the parties in this House, the Liberal Party—the government—and the New Democratic Party, voted in favour of the legislation, bringing it to committee for further consideration and representation. I find it passing strange that the member would ask a question about the Great Lakes when, in fact, his party is opposing a major initiative designed to protect the Great Lakes in the province of Ontario. It once again demonstrates how difficult it is to be part of a party that wants you—

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: Premier, with all due respect, this is an MNR issue; this isn't an environmental issue. Two Asian carp, the grass carp, have now been found in my riding at the mouth of Grand River, down on Lake Erie. Three Asian bighead carp have been found in western Lake Erie. These and the silver carp, the jumpers, and the black carp can access Lake Michigan through the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal. Asian carp can also get directly into Lake Erie from Eagle Marsh. This invasion of Asian carp will be devastating to our Great Lakes. They eat everything.

Premier, billions and billions of tourism fishery dollars are at stake. We need action, not more environmental laws, strategies, panels or dithering. This is an MNR issue, not Environment. Why will you not marshal the resources, take action, work with the Great Lakes states, work with both levels of federal government on both sides of the border—

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: Put your MNR guy to work—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. When I stand, everyone sits.

Minister.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. David Oraziotti: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. This is something that we do take very seriously with respect to the protection of our natural resources with respect to the Great Lakes. I should tell you that the Premier met with the Great Lakes governors, probably the first time this meeting has taken place in nearly a decade, on Mackinac Island in the Mackinac straits just recently. I can tell you that our government is working closely with the federal government and with border enforcement officers as well.

In fact, we have intercepted 39,000 pounds of Asian carp destined for Ontario markets at the border. We have established an Invasive Species Research Centre, and we are deploying staff and resources necessary to help prevent the spread of Asian carp in our lakes. As well, MNR has implemented an Asian carp response plan in partnership with DFO.

We deployed field crews to the Grand River, and the testing on this carp was that the carp was sterile and non-productive. We're going to continue to monitor—

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

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Percy Hatfield: My question today is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Good morning, Minister. On October 10, my friend and colleague the member from Essex met with the senior engineer for Ontario and other senior officials involved with the Herb Gray Parkway. We were told that within two weeks, they were going to be completing specialized testing on the interior rods and the durability of the concrete in those defective girders—and decisions made on whether to haul them out of there.

Minister, that was nearly three weeks ago. When will the results of those tests be available? When will the people in my part of this province get the answers to the questions they've been asking for quite some time now?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Again, I want to thank the member for his diligence on this file. I appreciate his continuing to raise this issue.

We have been very concerned, Mr. Speaker, as you know. When I initiated the independent review in July, I also gave direction that the Ministry of Transportation

must intercede and do independent testing of the work that was done by the [*inaudible*]. I want to be very candid: It took us longer than we had hoped to get access to the girders. We've had access to the girders now for several weeks. Those tests are now in their final stages. Some of that work, because of the specialized nature of it around ductility, was sent to the US. I expect it will be within a week or two, if not days, before we have the result.

I made a very clear commitment that as soon as I had that report and the chief engineer had it, we will arrange a briefing so that—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: —you do that.

I continue to be very, very concerned about this project and about the safety. As I've said, we will not allow a single girder in there that doesn't meet standard.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Minister, the mayor of the city of Windsor and city councillors are writing a letter. They want answers. I've asked for a public meeting about future safety for the motorists who will be using that parkway and driving under those defective girders. I've asked for a public meeting. The contractor is going to hold the public meeting, but they're not going to talk about the girders; they're going to talk about the landscaping on top of the girders. That doesn't satisfy the people in my part of this province.

Why isn't the minister demanding a public meeting so that the people in Windsor and Essex county most affected by these decisions finally have an opportunity to get answers on this ongoing controversy on the biggest infrastructure project in the province's history?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I again want to emphasize there is nothing that I disagree with in what the member is saying. I think we are of one mind on that.

I walk a balance between trying to ensure aggressive enforcement of our standards—which I think we've done. The independent review being called by a minister was, I think, unprecedented in about a quarter century. We have been working with Mr. Cripps, who's the chief engineer. I try very hard not to politically interfere. I think we've done that successfully in walking that balance between letting the engineers and the planners make the determinations and giving them the time, the space and, quite frankly, the financial resources, which they've had considerable amounts of, to make these determinations.

Later this week, Mr. Cripps will come and brief me, and brief you shortly after, with his best determination of how we can do that. We've also offered him up to the city of Windsor to do a briefing for city council and for the public. I'm happy to work with the member to create an appropriate venue to ensure that information can be exchanged, and share his concern that this must continue to be a public and transparent process.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Mitzi Hunter: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. As our population ages,

more and more families in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood are faced with finding the right long-term-care homes for their loved ones. Residents want to know that they can live comfortably in their new homes, and their families need to know that they will be properly cared for.

Many families in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood who are undergoing this transition are worried about their loved ones' care and safety. Through you, Speaker: Could the minister tell this House what she's doing to protect residents of long-term-care homes and to ensure people get the best possible care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member from Scarborough–Guildwood for this important question. Today, we're joined by representatives of the Ontario Long Term Care Association. I want to thank them for the very important work that they do.

Speaker, our seniors worked long and hard to build this great province. They deserve comfort and care as they move into their later years. That's why our government set a new standard in 2010 with strong legislation to ensure better care and safety in long-term-care homes.

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To assist with this, resident and family councils are now providing residents and loved ones a direct say in long-term-care home operations, and Health Quality Ontario publicly posts performance indicators so we can measure our success and so we can focus on those areas that still need improvement.

Going forward, I will continue to work with long-term-care homes, the CCACs and LHINs to implement recommendations of the sector-led long-term-care task force.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Minister. I know that will help to give some peace of mind to the families in Scarborough–Guildwood who have loved ones in long-term-care homes. We all know that when it comes down to it, quality of care really depends on the relationship between the caregiver and the resident.

I know that there are thousands of front-line workers giving specialized, personalized care in long-term-care facilities in my riding and across Ontario. Could the minister please tell this House what she is doing to support workers in Ontario's long-term-care facilities?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: That is a very good question, and I want to thank the member again for that question. One of the great joys in my job is the ability to visit long-term-care homes. I recently had the opportunity to visit Bloomington Cove with my parliamentary assistant, the member for Oak Ridges–Markham. Together, we witnessed the passion for providing resident-centred care and the focus on quality of life that front-line workers bring with them each and every day.

People who work in long-term-care homes are the angels of our health care system. I want to thank the thousands of dedicated Ontarians who work hard every single day to bring comfort and care to residents of long-term-care homes.

We have funded more than 10,000 new full-time long-term-care staff since 2003. Residents First is providing front-line staff the knowledge and skills they need to provide safer and better care, and Behavioural Supports Ontario is helping staff to better care for patients with dementia.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Minister of Finance; good morning, Minister.

Minister, there has been much talk about the 15% auto insurance premium reduction. We, of course, have been on record as saying that you will not achieve this reduction without a plan of action. However, I recently heard that a number of non-standard auto insurance companies have been brought in by the Financial Services Commission of Ontario and directed to submit filings with rate reductions.

Are you pleased with this progress?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you for the question. It gives me the opportunity to again reinforce the commitment made by this government over these past many years to tackle fraud and go after the expensive cost of claims that affects high premiums in our province relative to other parts of Canada. As a result of those endeavours and those efforts, and the work done by many of my colleagues, rates have now started to go down.

More importantly than that, we now have more regulatory oversight by FSCO, enabling those insurance companies the opportunity to now file for lower rates. I'm pleased to say that because of the competitive nature of the industry, a number of those companies have now advertised lower rates, and I encourage everyone to shop around.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Minister, your plan of inaction is clearly showing. I find it interesting that the government is giving priority to non-standard insurance companies. Non-standard insurance companies in Ontario are defined, according to one website of a company, as "specializes in providing personal automobile insurance for private passenger vehicles used for non-commercial purposes, to individuals who do not qualify for the standard insurance market."

To translate, it means that non-standard companies insure the worst drivers on the roads: the drunk drivers, the speeders, the drivers with multiple accidents—those who endanger our lives on the roads. And yet, your government has decided to start your rate reductions with these drivers, while leaving the good drivers—the ones who make our roads safer—out in the cold.

You acted without a plan, playing bumper-sticker politics with the third party in order that they would prop you up in the budget. Minister, why do you think bad drivers deserve a better rate reduction than good drivers?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The point of our exercise and the work that's being done is to reduce rates, on average, for drivers in our province and to benefit those good

drivers who deserve lower rates. The member opposite and his party have done nothing to support this cause, and now they are asking questions about an issue that is taking hold and that we are acting upon, and we will continue to work on behalf of the people of Ontario. We will continue to champion consumers who deserve lower rates with or without your support.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Children with autism in Ontario can wait years after being assessed as suitable to receive the IBI treatment that they need. When they finally get into a program, their parents often see their child make great strides forward in their development. Unfortunately, we have heard many stories for years of parents being left in the dark when their child gets cut off from these services with no explanation.

Will the minister come clean on autism treatment in Ontario and promise these parents full transparency regarding how decisions are made with respect to the treatment of their children?

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: I thank the member for the question with respect to a very important topic with my ministry, and that is services for children with autism. It's an area that we've been doing quite a bit of work on. We have an expert committee that's reviewing all our IBI and all our programming for autism. It's very difficult for families. I've met with many families that have children with these challenges. We are absolutely determined to assist the families in this province to get the services for their children. In fact, earlier this summer, we announced an additional \$5 million for autism intervention programs to get more children into service and to help more families. So, certainly, we are working towards autism and have many programs in place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm going to go back to the minister. Doug Ward has watched his severely autistic son, Mitchell, go from pointing and gesturing to stringing together full sentences, thanks to IBI therapy. But now, Kinark family services has told the Wards that Mitchell is being cut off of IBI with little explanation.

Minister, your government finally created the independent review mechanism earlier this year after promising in 2010 that it would be in place in the fall of 2011. This was meant to be a process for families to appeal decisions like this. Mr. Ward reports that only now, months after hearing that they're going to be cut off, did Kinark finally tell him about the independent review mechanism. Minister, can you please explain to me, to Mr. Ward and to the countless other families just exactly how decisions are made with regard to the treatment of their children with autism?

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Again, to the member, I'm not familiar with this particular case in terms of this specific one, but when it comes to services—to IBI services, in fact—we removed the previous age six cut-off for IBI.

We have been investing in autism services. We did introduce the independent review mechanism if there are issues with decisions that are made.

These are clinical decisions. These aren't decisions that we make independently. They're independent. They're by individual to individual in terms of what their needs are, and there's a spectrum of supports that are available. So in terms of what supports are available or at what times and what transitions are required from IBI to other autism behavioural-type programs, to transitioning into school and into other types of transitions—these are clinical decisions that are made between the clinician and the family and the child and the service organization. So that's where we're at with them.

TEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of Labour. In my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt, there is a large population of newcomers. Many of them find work through a temporary help agency. For the most part, these agencies are very helpful in helping my constituents find gainful employment. But at the same time, I hear concerns about their employment standards and the health and safety issues they're facing in the workplace. I hear concerns about hours of work, vacation pay and worries about hazards in the workplace.

We all know that vulnerable workers are the least likely to speak out about violations in fear of losing their jobs. Our workers must be confident that their workplace must be held accountable for obeying the rules and that our government is protecting them at work.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, what are you doing to ensure the rights of all Ontario workers are being upheld?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I thank the member for a very important question. Absolutely, all our constituents can rest assured that the Ministry of Labour is out there in workplaces across the province, ensuring that workers know their rights and that employers are living up to their responsibilities.

Speaker, I want to give special recognition to the member from Brampton–Springdale and the member from Brampton West. Both of them have worked very hard on the issues of regulation of temp agencies. In fact, it was the member from Brampton West who brought in a private member's bill in 2006 that resulted in a law that was passed through this Legislature in 2009, the first province in Canada to regulate temporary agencies across the province. It made sure that employees were not unfairly prevented from being hired directly by employers, prohibited agencies from charging fees to workers for such things as resumé writing and interview preparation, and made sure that workers know their rights under the Employment Standards Act.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Finance on a point of order.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I ask for your indulgence and that of the House to please join me in welcoming our page Victoria Meola's parents, who are in the public gallery here to support their daughter. Victoria's mother, Diana Meola, and father, Luc Meola, are here. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1141 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome Aaron Gao, who is the vice-president of ENN. The head office of ENN is in my riding. Welcome to Queen's Park.

I would like to also invite all members to come to the reception taking place after—oh, sorry.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CAMPBELLFORD LIONS CLUB

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It was a great pleasure yesterday to attend the Campbellford Lions 60th anniversary in beautiful Campbellford, nestled among the rolling hills of Northumberland in the municipality of Trent Hills.

I don't have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, how significant volunteer organizations like the Campbellford Lions are to making our communities not only great places to live, work and play, but grow as a community. For 60 years, the Lions have initiated and implemented a vast number of projects, including the Lions beach along the Trent-Severn in Campbellford. It is a lovely beach and picnic area, which has enhanced our community. In fact, the annual polar bear dip takes place at the Lions beach, helping to raise money for the local hospital.

In attendance for the celebration were, of course, the Campbellford Lions and a very strong turnout from other Lions chapters from Trenton, Brighton, Cobourg, Stirling, Peterborough and Norwood. The icing on the cake, however, was the presence of Mr. Bob Bennett, one of the original Campbellford Lions.

I congratulate the Campbellford Lions on reaching this great milestone and wish them all the very best moving forward.

PANORAMA ITALIANCANADIAN

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I would like today to extend my personal congratulations to Panorama ItalianCanadian on celebrating 10 years of publication. For a decade now, this magazine has played a vital role in honouring Italian-Canadian culture, heritage and accomplishments. It helps Italian Canadians stay in touch with their roots while celebrating the achievements the community has made here in Canada.

The magazine has become a staple of Italian-Canadian households, including my own. Residents in York South-Weston and beyond enjoy reading each edition to keep current with topics and events important to the community. It is a great and very made-in-Ontario example of the important role cultural community media plays in building our multicultural society.

I personally would like to thank Enzo Di Mauro and Roberto Bandiera for their service, hard work and successful efforts to ensure that the community has a strong voice. I would also like to thank their families, as this is a family endeavour.

I congratulate both of the editors on their efforts over the last 10 years, and I wish them continued success in the decades to come.

LANDFILL

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, this morning I delivered almost 13,000 letters to the Minister of the Environment from people in my riding. They are people who are gravely concerned about the proposal to put a landfill site in a quarry in Beachville, people who are concerned about the impact on our environment, especially our water.

I share their worry about locating a landfill that close to the Thames River and on fractured limestone. While people have a right to apply for a landfill, the minister has the duty to turn that application down if it will put groundwater at risk.

I want to commend everyone who took time to share their concerns, from the lawn signs, the sign rallies, the petitions I've read in the Legislature to the letters and emails they've sent to the minister, including the 13,000 I delivered today.

I want to applaud the work of the community organizations: Oxford People Against the Landfill, Oxford Coalition for Social Justice, the Ingersoll District Nature Club and Oxford Green Watch. I've been pleased to meet with many of them, and I know they have worked hard, not only to raise serious concerns about the landfill, but to make the community aware of the proposal and how everyone will have a say.

Comments on the draft terms of reference are due by October 30, so we need to ensure that our community's concerns are heard loud and clear. Today I want to add my voice to theirs and ask the Ministry of the Environment to ensure that a landfill is not allowed to jeopardize Oxford county's access to safe, clean water.

EID AL-ADHA

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I just wanted to say Eid Mubarak and happy Eid al-Adha to the Association of Progressive Muslims, who are here today and shared with us a wonderful lunch.

Also, some background as to the festival: There are people now returning from the hajj in Mecca, and we welcome them back home, and people celebrating the

Muslim faith with their families; we wish them well. Of course, it's based on the sacrifice of Ibrahim—or Abraham, depending on your faith—and Ishmael. What's interesting about that story, which sounds very gory to someone who perhaps is not part of a worshipping community, is that it really is a story about giving of what's best of yourself, giving that which is most precious of yours, to God. That is what this festival is all about. We celebrate their generosity, their commitment and their contributions to our community and we wish them a joyous time.

Right after 9/11, our church welcomed the Jami Mosque, which is the oldest mosque in Toronto, to come worship with us; it's in my riding. I want to send a particular set of congratulations to them and to their families, and again wish all Muslims well at this time of celebration.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: This week marks the end of Small Business Month in Ontario. Small businesses are the backbone of our economy. Small and medium-sized businesses in our province represent over 99% of all businesses in Ontario. They are important partners for Ontario in building vibrant and strong communities, and we are poised to continue this trend, which is why our government recently introduced Bill 105, the Supporting Small Businesses Act. This bill will help over 60,000 small businesses in Ontario, helping to ensure that they pay less employer health tax, and will also eliminate the tax for 12,000 small businesses across the province.

This province has already taken significant measures to reduce costs for small businesses. We have permanently cut the small business corporate income tax rate from 5.5% to 4.5%. We have eliminated the small business deduction surtax. Since 2008, we've cut red tape, removing over 80,000 regulatory burdens for small business. The ONE network gives entrepreneurs access to business advisers, strategists and market analysts in 86 offices across Ontario and includes business services like business advisory services, access to regional innovation centres for tech-based entrepreneurs, helping with skills development, and our small business enterprise centres, which are partnerships between the province of Ontario and local municipalities focusing on main street businesses supporting the local economy.

ABILITIES CENTRE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm very pleased to advise the House of a significant award won last week by the Abilities Centre, which is of course located in my riding of Whitby–Oshawa. The Abilities Centre is a 125,000-square-foot sports, recreation and arts facility that can be enjoyed by everyone but was specifically designed for use by people of differing abilities. Fitness equipment can be used by people in wheelchairs. Braille signs and specialized flooring assist people with low vision, and

pictorial signs help people who cannot read wayfind. These are only a few of the features incorporated into the building design.

Last week, an international award for accessibility was presented to the Abilities Centre in Cologne, Germany, by the president of the International Paralympic Committee, Sir Philip Craven, on behalf of the IPC and the International Association for Sports and Leisure Facilities. These awards have been described as the leading global awards for accessibility. There were 125 submissions received in this competition from over 30 countries, and the Abilities Centre won one of only five awards of distinction. The jury noted that the centre was built to the highest standards of accessibility, far exceeding the regulatory requirements.

The award was co-presented to the building's architects, Bregman and Hamann, and the project architect, Mark Berest, was in Cologne to receive it along with Abilities Centre representatives.

While the architecture is both beautiful and fully accessible, what goes on inside the Abilities Centre is equally as inspiring. The staff are working tirelessly on developing cutting-edge programs to ensure that all members of our community have an opportunity to participate in the programs.

1310

In conclusion, this is an amazing award for the Abilities Centre and truly puts Whitby on the world stage in developing an inclusive community. Congratulations to the centre.

HALLOWEEN

M^{me} France Gélinas: Halloween is almost here, and I'm sure the pages are excited about this, because there are ghosts in this House. Ask Mr. Speaker.

On October 18, I had the pleasure to visit one of the communities in my riding, called Cartier. The Cartier Community Centre, with the help of parents, has organized Halloween festivities for the last 20 years that include a costume competition and walk through a haunted house, and the older kids get to stay up for a dance. I commend the Cartier Community Centre and all the volunteers for their efforts. I will admit that I was a little bit spooked going through the haunted house, which included a huge aquarium with octopus and the whole thing.

Another Halloween attraction in my riding is the Terror Train, which has attracted 3,800 people so far. It is in its third year. It is hosted by the Northern Ontario Railroad Museum in Capreol, and well worth going. The outdoor maze is a railyard haunted by clowns. It provides a very good fright, and many don't make it through. This is mainly thanks to the students from Bishop Carter Alexander Catholic Secondary School, Confederation Secondary School and St. Anne Elementary School.

If you're in the west end of my riding, in Walden, you can go to the Anderson Farm Museum, which will also have a haunted house.

I want to end by welcoming back my assistant, Damien Waddell. He's back at work today after a near-death accident. Welcome back, Damien.

HISTOIRE D'ORLÉANS

M. Phil McNeely: Monsieur le Président, comme vous le savez, l'année 2013 fut une année forte en émotions pour la communauté d'Orléans. Une page d'histoire s'est tournée en célébrant le 400^e anniversaire du passage de Champlain à la hauteur de l'Île Petrie.

Je salue donc l'initiative de la société francophone du patrimoine et de l'histoire d'Orléans, de la Zone d'amélioration commerciale du Coeur d'Orléans et de leurs collaborateurs, qui procédaient, dimanche dernier, au dévoilement d'un recueil de capsules historiques devant un public de près de 400 personnes dans notre superbe centre Shenkman.

Ces capsules, qui seront d'ailleurs reproduites sur des plaques et installées en plein coeur d'Orléans, sur le boulevard St. Joseph, nous permettront de remonter le temps à la découverte de l'histoire du boulevard St. Joseph, de 1950 à 1960. Une des capsules du recueil porte d'ailleurs sur la ferme McNeely, et j'en suis fort honoré.

J'aimerais souligner le travail exceptionnel de la présidente de la SFOPHO, M^{me} Nicole Fortier, et des membres du comité organisateur, soit : Colette Côté, Pierre Chartrand, Marcelle Duford, Nicole Fortier, Gynette Lacasse, Guy Legault, Françoise Miller et Nicole Patry.

Je veux aussi saluer tous les descendants des familles honorées par ces plaques historiques qui se sont joints à la célébration. Merci.

GARRY COOKE

Mr. John O'Toole: It's my privilege to pay tribute to my friend and constituent Garry Cooke, who recently received a distinguished award, the Ontario Medal for Good Citizenship. Garry is one of only eight Ontario residents to receive this award presented by His Honour Lieutenant Governor David Onley on Thursday, October 17.

As a volunteer, Garry Cooke has been active in the business community and in organizations such as the Navy League and the Royal Canadian Legion. Garry is best known, however, in Ontario for his commitment of almost 50 years with the Ontario Association for Community Living. Garry is a former president of Community Living Ontario. He's also involved in the Canadian organization. He is a leader and advocate for community living in his hometown of Bowmanville in the Durham region, and indeed all of Ontario will benefit.

Garry's leadership helped create the Clarington Project, offering recreational and educational activities for disabled people in Durham region.

Thank you, Garry, for working so hard to support and encourage people with developmental disabilities in Durham and throughout Ontario.

I also want to publicly congratulate and thank Christine Elliott and Jim Flaherty and the Abilities Centre Durham organizers—a great facility that indeed will be very helpful to persons suffering with developmental disabilities.

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

NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I wish to inform the House that the late show standing in the name of Mr. Jackson, addressed to the minister responsible for the Pan/Parapan Am Games, has been withdrawn.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Haldimand–Norfolk has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of the Environment concerning Asian carp in the Great Lakes. This matter will be debated tomorrow at 6 p.m.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to move a motion without notice concerning the order of precedence for private members' bills.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do we have agreement to present a motion without notice? Agreed? Agreed.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I move that the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business for Thursday, October 31, 2013, be changed such that Mr. Balkissoon assumes ballot item number 52 and Mr. Vanthof assumes ballot item number 54.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Agreed? Carried.
Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

TIRE DISPOSAL

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition that was sent to me on behalf of my constituents, and it's on Bill 91.

"Whereas the Ontario government has approved massive increases to Ontario Tire Stewardship's eco fees for agricultural tires, increasing some fees from \$15.29 to \$352.80, \$546.84 or \$1,311.24;

"Whereas Ontario imposes tire eco fees that are dramatically higher than those in other provinces;

"Whereas other provincial governments either exempt agricultural tires from recycling programs or charge" a minimal fee of up to perhaps \$75;

“Whereas these new fees will result in increased costs for our farmers and lost sales for our farm equipment dealerships;

“Whereas the PC caucus has proposed a new plan that holds manufacturers and importers of tires responsible for recycling, but gives them the freedom” and flexibility “to work with other businesses to find the best way possible to carry out that responsibility;

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

“Please suspend the decision to significantly increase Ontario Tire Stewardship’s fees on agricultural and off-the-road tires pending a thorough impact study and implementation of proposals to lower costs.”

I’m pleased to sign, support and send it to the desk with Christina, one of the pages.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, on behalf of my colleague from Ottawa Centre.

“Whereas the people of Ontario deserve to be able to look after their sick or injured family members without fearing that they will lose their jobs at such a vulnerable time;

“Whereas the people of Ontario deserve to be able to spend time looking for a child that has disappeared, or take time off to grieve the death of a child that was murdered without fearing that they will lose their jobs;

“Whereas the federal government has recently extended similar leaves and economic supports to federal employees;

“Whereas the government of Ontario, and the Premier of Ontario, support Ontario families and wish to foster mental and physical well-being by allowing those closest to sick or injured family members the time to provide support free of work-related concerns;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass and enact, during spring of 2013, Bill 21, the Leaves to Help Families Act.”

I fully support this and I give it to page Arianna.

1320

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Ontario’s Drive Clean Program was implemented only as a temporary measure to reduce high levels of vehicle emissions and smog; and

“Whereas vehicle emissions have declined so significantly from 1998 to 2010 that they are no longer among the major domestic contributors of smog in Ontario; and

“Whereas the overwhelming majority of reductions in vehicle emissions were, in fact, the result of factors other than the Drive Clean program, such as tighter manu-

facturing standards for emission-control technologies; and

“Whereas from 1999 to 2010 the percentage of vehicles that failed emissions testing under the Drive Clean program steadily declined from 16% to 5%; and ...

“Whereas the new Drive Clean test has caused the failure rate to double in less than two months as a result of technical problems with the new emissions testing method; and

“Whereas this new emissions test has caused numerous false ‘fails’, which have resulted in the overcharging of testing fees for Ontario drivers and car dealerships, thereby causing unwarranted economic hardship and stress;

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

“That the Minister of the Environment must take immediate steps to begin phasing out the Drive Clean program.”

I proudly support my constituents and sign this.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: “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. I’m signing this, and I’m going to give it to Evan to be delivered.

WASTE REDUCTION

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: “Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

“Whereas protecting the environment should be everyone’s responsibility, including manufacturing and material producing companies; and

“Whereas it is important to require producers to be financially and environmentally responsible for recycling the goods and packaging they sell in Ontario, and to divert these wastes from landfill to recycling to drive innovation, generate new jobs, and new Ontario-made products; and

“Whereas new approaches are needed that reflect ideas and recommendations from the recycling sector that are designed to improve current recycling systems, to increase recycling and diversion rates, and better protect our environment;

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

“That members of the Legislative Assembly pass Bill 91, the Waste Reduction Act, 2013, introduced on June 6, 2013, by the Ontario Minister of Environment.”

I support the petition, and I affix my signature and hand it over to Victoria.

LYME DISEASE

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the tick-borne illness known as chronic Lyme disease, which mimics many catastrophic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, Crohn’s, Alzheimer’s, arthritic diabetes, depression, chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia, is increasingly endemic in Canada, but scientifically validated diagnostic tests and treatment choices are currently not available in Ontario, forcing patients to seek these in the USA and Europe;

“Whereas the Canadian Medical Association informed the public, governments and the medical profession in the May 30, 2000, edition of their professional journal that Lyme disease is endemic throughout Canada, particularly in southern Ontario; and

“Whereas the Ontario public health system and the Ontario health insurance plan currently do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process of establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives at 45% to 95% of the time;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to direct that the Ontario public health system and OHIP include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme disease in Ontario and to have everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians.”

I’m pleased to affix my signature and send it to the table with page Phoebe.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. John Fraser: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. I’m presenting it on behalf of my colleague the member from Ottawa Centre.

“Whereas the agri-food industry is now, and has historically been, one of the primary economic drivers in Ontario; and

“Whereas the people of Ontario support local processors and producers in Ontario through purchasing and

consuming locally grown and raised fruits, vegetables, meat and processed food products; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario, and the Premier of Ontario, support Ontario farmers and Ontario food producers by leading by example; and

“Whereas the province of Ontario celebrates local Ontario producers and processors and promotes the good things grown, harvested and made in Ontario;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass and enact, during spring of 2013, Bill 36, the Local Food Act.”

Speaker, I fully support it, and I am giving it to page Jack.

DARLINGTON NUCLEAR GENERATING STATION

Mr. John O’Toole: This is in response to the cancellation of the nuclear plants in Darlington. It reads as follows:

“Whereas approximately 20% of Ontario’s electricity is produced at the Darlington generating station” in my riding of Durham; and

“Whereas in addition to refurbishing the four existing reactors at the Darlington the building of new capacity is important for the future of Ontario’s manufacturing sector and for jobs and investment in our Ontario;

“Whereas a study by the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters in 2012 concluded the building of a new two-reactor plant at Darlington would directly employ more than 10,000 people and would support employment for an additional 10,000 others in Canada for approximately a five-year period;

“Whereas Ontario’s Ministry of Energy says Ontario Power Generation has already spent an estimated \$180 million in preparation proceeding with the two new Darlington reactors;

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

“That Ontario’s elected MPPs and the provincial government reaffirm their commitment to the complete refurbishment of all four units at the Darlington generating station and that the Ontario government reinstate the original plan for the completion of two new reactors at the Darlington generating station.”

I’m pleased to sign and support it and present it to page Christina for the second time today.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Toby Barrett: Signatures collected over the Thanksgiving weekend: It’s a petition titled “Stop the Gravy Train—Call an Election.”

“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 agree and sign my name.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ontario government admits power prices will increase an additional 46% by 2015; and

“Whereas a recent study found the Liberal government’s renewable energy subsidy program is adding \$5.2 billion in costs to Ontarians on their tax and hydro bills, while the political decision to cancel the Mississauga and Oakville gas plants on the eve of the 2011 provincial election will further drive up rates; and

“Whereas the soaring cost of electricity is straining family budgets, particularly in rural Ontario, and hurting the ability of manufacturers and businesses in the province to compete and create new jobs; and

“Whereas home heating and electricity are essential utilities for families in rural Ontario;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to bring an end to the current government’s scandalous mismanagement of Ontario’s energy sector by enacting policies that will put the province’s consumers, farmers and employers ahead of special interests.”

It’s a pleasure for me to affix my signature, Speaker, and send it to the table with page Evan.

CELLULAR TRANSMISSION EQUIPMENT

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I’ve got a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas cellular communications towers are proposed to be built in the vicinity of Bronte in Oakville;

“Whereas Industry Canada has ultimate authority to approve the location of cellular communications towers under the federal Radiocommunication Act;

“Whereas the province of Ontario has no jurisdiction in the placement of cell towers;

“Whereas the town of Oakville has very limited jurisdiction in the placement of cellular towers;

“Whereas many area residents and local elected officials have expressed concerns with the proposed location and proximity to residential areas;

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

“That the province of Ontario request that the government of Canada grant municipalities the right to have enhanced participation in the placement of cellular communications towers in residential areas; and

“That the province of Ontario request that the government of Canada place a moratorium on the construction of cellular towers within 500 metres of residential homes until the implementation of an improved municipal approval process.”

Speaker, I agree with this, will sign it and send it down to the table with Sarhan.

1330

RURAL SCHOOLS

Mr. John O’Toole: This is another petition from the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

“Whereas Cartwright High School is an important part of the Blackstock and area community; and

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised in the 2007 election that he would keep rural schools open when he declared that, ‘Rural schools help to keep communities strong’; and

“Whereas schools in rural areas are community places; and

“Whereas Cartwright students, families, friends and staff have created an effective learning experience that emphasizes a community atmosphere, individual attention and full participation by students in school activities; and

“Whereas the framework of rural schools is different from urban schools and therefore deserves to be governed by a rural school policy; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government found \$12 million to keep school swimming pools open in Toronto but hasn’t found any money to keep rural schools open in communities such as Blackstock;

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

“That Dalton McGuinty and the Minister of Education support the Cartwright High School community and suspend plans to close Cartwright High School under the school board’s accommodation review process until the province develops a rural school policy that respects the value of smaller schools in rural communities of Ontario.”

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

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Auditor General of Ontario defines the global adjustment charge on hydro bills as ‘mostly consisting of the difference between the market price and the price paid to generators as set by the board for OPG or under contract with the government or the OPA’; and

“Whereas the Auditor General says the global adjustment has been rising steadily over the last few years and is expected to continue to rise from \$700 million (prior to the 2009 passage of the Green Energy Act) to \$8.1 billion by 2014; and

“Whereas the Liberal government’s 2010 fall economic statement stated that hydro bills are expected to rise 46% by 2015, and that new renewable power generation would account for 56% of that increase; and

“Whereas small to mid-sized businesses across Ontario are seeing the global adjustment portion of their monthly hydro bills increase significantly to the point that it is now larger than the actual energy portion of their bills; and

“Whereas many of those businesses are now delaying investment or hiring, or both, and considering either closing or moving outside of the province of Ontario as a result of delivered-to-market industrial energy rates that are now the highest in North America;

“We, the undersigned, do hereby petition the government of Ontario to reverse course on its expensive energy policy by cancelling the feed-in tariff (FIT) subsidies and treating Ontario’s energy as an economic development tool so that it once again is a competitive advantage for Ontario in retaining and attracting jobs and investment.”

I’m pleased to affix my signature and send it to the table with the page.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The time for petitions is over.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FAIRNESS AND COMPETITIVENESS IN ONTARIO’S CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR L’ÉQUITÉ ET LA COMPÉTITIVITÉ DANS L’INDUSTRIE ONTARIENNE DE LA CONSTRUCTION

Mr. McNaughton moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 74, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 to alter bargaining rights conferred by pre-1980 working agreements in the construction industry / Projet de loi 74, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail pour modifier le droit de négocier conféré par des accords de fait conclus avant 1980 dans l’industrie de la construction.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. McNaughton.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I’m pleased to rise this afternoon to speak to my bill, Bill 74, entitled the Fairness and Competitiveness in Ontario’s Construction Industry Act. That is really what this bill is all about: fairness and competitiveness. I am extremely proud of Bill 74, Speaker.

As you know, as a result of an Ontario Labour Relations Board decision, an Ontario construction company, EllisDon, is facing a significant competitive disadvantage in bidding for construction projects across the province of Ontario.

In the spring, this very House supported legislation that would remove this unfair uncertainty and settle the issue permanently. This important bill went to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. We had hearings and debate, and it has returned to the House without amendment and is now ready to be passed into law.

I’m sure I don’t need to remind anyone that over the past decade, Ontario has experienced extraordinary economic decline. The facts speak for themselves, Speaker: 600,000 men and women unemployed, rapidly escalating energy prices, historic deficits, and a doubling of Ontario’s debt that will both stifle job creation and burden future generations.

While we all know these facts well, more troubling trends are becoming apparent. Over the past decade, Ontario has experienced a net loss of leading global companies. We are now seeing homegrown Ontario companies opening factories and plants in the United States and elsewhere outside of Ontario. Despite prolonged unemployment, the province faces unprecedented skilled labour shortages. Ineffective economic development programs continue, even though they have failed to deliver results. This is the McGuinty-Wynne government’s record, and this is Ontario’s future if we stay on the same path that we’re on today.

You see, Speaker, we now face a critical choice about Ontario’s future. Either we implement the sensible policies that will help create jobs and bring prosperity, or we accept a future of high debt, declining public services and living well below our economic potential.

Our party, the official opposition, has brought forward a series of sensible policies in our Paths to Prosperity series of white papers, and I encourage folks to take a look and review some of the ideas contained within.

But of course, today, Speaker, we’re here to talk about my Bill 74, which I have brought before this House in order to address a newly uncovered loophole that has recently been found, and to stand up for a local job creator in my backyard. This loophole is putting EllisDon, an established Ontario construction firm, at a decided disadvantage in bidding for industrial, commercial and institutional contracts outside of the city of Toronto.

London’s EllisDon is an employee-owned company, employing over 1,000 workers, both union and non-unionized, throughout Ontario, and is an all-around success story.

Speaker, I envision a province known for its inventiveness and innovation, but to achieve that, we must work with our entrepreneurial hubs and support those who are driving growth and innovation. We must support those who are creating jobs and helping to grow Ontario’s economy, and that is why I’m pleased to be standing up for this important piece of legislation and this important business here today.

EllisDon is under threat. This is a company that is widely known as a community leader in London and a company that has earned significant acclaim, including being named 2013’s number-two best employer in Can-

ada, a platinum member of Canada's 50 best-managed companies and one of Canada's top 100 employers in 2013 by Mediacorp Canada.

In fact, on Friday night, EllisDon CEO and president Geoff Smith was named 2013's Entrepreneur of the Year. This award celebrates the contribution and spirit of entrepreneurs everywhere and is in its 20th year of honouring the country's most impressive entrepreneurs from all areas of business.

You see, Speaker, unfortunately, a single working agreement that was made all the way back in 1958 has been dredged up, and a recent, unfair decision by the Ontario Labour Relations Board puts EllisDon's future at risk and threatens the viability of this important contractor and job creator.

This agreement from 1958 puts EllisDon at a significant disadvantage compared to foreign competitors who are neither bound nor obligated to follow through with these types of agreements, and it's this un-level and uneven playing field that my bill seeks to address. Simply put, we need to update the system before this ancient labour law chases jobs out of Ontario.

Speaker, I have commented in this House often about the need for a level playing field for business to succeed on their own merits, and I have said that it's time for government to stop picking and choosing winners and losers and to get away from government corporate welfare and subsidies. This bill furthers this goal and will help ensure a level playing field for all general contractors operating in Ontario, including, specifically, EllisDon. The way it stands right now, foreign competition from Spain and the United States has a significant advantage against our own Ontario-based company, and to me, Speaker, it simply makes no sense. Why would we, as legislators, favour foreign competitors against our own homegrown job creators?

The Ontario Labour Relations Board has set a deadline to comply with their ruling. This timeline gave the company just enough time to seek a legislative remedy to this unfair situation, and that is what we are trying to do with Bill 74.

1340

My message to Premier Wynne is this: Premier, you know and understand all of this. In fact, as you know, you have taken every side and played all angles in this debate. First, you supported my bill, and you stood here in the House and advocated on behalf of these necessary and important changes. In fact, on June 6, Premier, members of your caucus and members of your cabinet stood in this House and proudly voted in support of my bill, the exact, same bill we will vote on again tomorrow.

Then, Premier, you hedged your bet, and finally, at the request of a single union boss, you have flipped and flopped and, as I understand, are now going to oppose this bill and oppose Ontario jobs and Ontario job creators like EllisDon.

Premier Wynne, let me be crystal clear with you here this afternoon. Ontario law is on the verge of crippling this Ontario-based job creator. EllisDon is being forced

to abide by an unfair OLRB ruling that affects all their operations across Ontario and will ultimately cost good, well-paying Ontario jobs. The winners will be new and foreign companies that will be able to bid on contracts at a much cheaper rate. This will not only impact construction jobs, but will also impact head office jobs as well.

Speaker, I don't think I need to remind you or anyone in this House that EllisDon has a head office in London, where we are currently facing high unemployment. Not only do we need to create jobs and grow the economy in London and across southwestern Ontario, but we also need to keep and maintain the important jobs we currently have.

I've looked for support from London MPPs Armstrong and Sattler, but they seem willing to risk London jobs and the London success story for political gains here in Toronto. Quite clearly, it is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'd ask the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex not to refer to members by their last names or surnames. In fact, he must refer to them by their riding names or, if they are ministers, by their minister's names. I'd ask him to observe that rule of the House.

The member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's just extremely frustrating for me that two MPPs who represent London ridings are willing to risk London jobs—jobs in their own ridings—and put a London business success story at risk. It's quite frustrating.

Quite clearly, Speaker, it's in the best interests of the province to ensure that all businesses operate on a level playing field against new and foreign competitors. Bill 74 ensures that everyone in the industry is playing on a level playing field. With a fair environment to operate in, EllisDon will continue its operations in Ontario and will continue to create good jobs across the province, while also taking a leading and active role supporting our communities and, importantly, the city of London.

Speaker, it's important that the companies that provide good jobs for the hard-working men and women of Ontario are not crippled by unfair legislation and odd legal loopholes, but rather placed in an environment that is fair for all. This is something that I'm certain both the Liberals and NDP can agree with me on.

Deep down, I know that this Premier knows and agrees with all of this. But, of course, she is beholden to a single union leader and dances to the tune of the Working Families Coalition. That is why we saw the Premier swing from strongly supporting my bill to now, all of a sudden, opposing it. That is why, on September 9, the Premier called this bill levelling the playing field, as that is exactly what we are trying to accomplish with my bill, Bill 74.

That is also why the Premier included my bill in her hand-selected list of bills to move forward as part of the programming motion, but in just a couple of weeks has done a complete 180 and is now opposing Bill 74. That's why media outlets reported in early October that our Premier is "at the beck and call of unions." To quote from the Toronto Sun on October 2:

“A powerful union boss told Premier Kathleen Wynne to jump this week.

“She asked, ‘How high?’—and meekly did just that.”

What about the NDP, Speaker? While they speak of their political purity and the evils of political donations, of course we know that the NDP has taken \$500,000 in union donations this year alone. That’s right, Mr. Speaker: The NDP and their leader, Andrea Horwath, have taken \$500,000 in donations from unions this year alone.

We have heard the NDP talking about political donations before. Of course, they never speak about taking half a million this year from unions and, ultimately, from Ontario workers. If this Legislature fails to pass this legislation, this Ontario company could be forced out of its core business, ultimately resulting in more job losses in Ontario and more unemployed people, adding to the 600,000 men and women currently unemployed in Ontario today.

That’s 600,000 people who woke up this morning with no job to go to, no paycheque coming home to their bank account—but that’s not all. Over the past decade, Ontario has lost 300,000 good jobs in the manufacturing sector, but at the same time we saw 300,000 more added to an already bloated government payroll. Soon, the only industry left in Ontario will be government, and we won’t have to worry about the EllisDons of the world, at least not here in the province of Ontario.

If you look at the StatsCan data from the last year, the government sector has grown by 48,000 additional jobs, but we haven’t seen a single net new job to the private sector. Fewer people are working outside the government, paying for more people working inside the government with higher wages, benefits and pensions than those who are paying the taxes. We must do everything we can to preserve jobs in the private sector and grow Ontario’s economy.

We cannot allow for local companies to be placed at a decided disadvantage due to unfair legislation, and we cannot allow foreign and new companies to play by a completely different set of rules. Speaker, the only way forward is to move confidently and boldly in the direction you know is right. Ignoring the issues Ontario is facing is not solving the problem. With my bill here today, this House has an opportunity to solve a problem and help keep jobs here in Ontario.

Of course, that’s exactly what the government is trying to do here today in opposing this bill. We now know that the Premier would like to take the easy way out and say that the Divisional Court ruling has achieved the same goal as this bill. The fact remains that the Divisional Court ruling is being appealed by two unions and will result in years of further legal wrangling, when my bill could quickly and decisively settle this issue once and for all.

Instead of taking our counsel from Pat Dillon and the Working Families Coalition, the approach of this House needs to be one that creates jobs and keeps Ontario businesses in Ontario. We must stand up for jobs and

protect the jobs and businesses that are in this great province. I believe that we can rebuild our economy for the 21st century and recreate a strong, growing and confident middle class.

Our big advantage is that Ontario has more of the greatest resource there is, and that’s people. It is these people’s knowledge, ideas and hard work that will take Ontario back to the top. At a time when Ontario is facing a major jobs crisis and stagnating economy, we must put forward solutions that will strengthen job creation and grow paycheques, not put both in jeopardy.

I did that in legislation named the Fairness and Competitiveness in Ontario’s Construction Industry Act. I was pleased when the bill received the support of the government, and am asking that those government members who proudly voted in favour of my legislation at second reading continue to stand firm and stand up on behalf of EllisDon and on behalf of Ontario companies and Ontario employees.

I’m pleased also to have unions representing 100,000 workers onside in supporting my bill too. The Carpenters’ Union and LiUNA have both strongly endorsed this piece of legislation. We heard from the Carpenters’ Union at the committee, and as a former director of training for LiUNA, I’m sure the NDP member from Essex is proud to expand on LiUNA’s strong support of my bill, as well. Of course, we also know that the Working Families Coalition and Pat Dillon oppose my bill, and we know that the Premier has a propensity to jump through the hoops that they set for her.

Colleagues, this bill is a simple solution to a specific problem, and I am asking that all members join with me in standing up for good jobs here in the province of Ontario. Bill 74 helps keep jobs in Ontario, at home where they belong. I’m asking that all members of the House join with me and vote in favour of Bill 74.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I’m pleased to join today’s important debate. Before I begin, I want to mention that I will be sharing my time with the member from Timmins—James Bay.

Also, I’d like to welcome and introduce some guests who are in the gallery today. James St. John is the business manager of the Central Ontario Building Trades. Jim Hogarth is president of the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario. Terry Snooks is the business manager of the United Association, Plumbers and Steamfitters, Local 46, and president of the Central Ontario Building Trades. I want to welcome them here today.

It’s interesting times, Mr. Speaker, here at the provincial Legislature, indeed, when we see a bill crafted for the singular purpose of one entity, the corporation of EllisDon, a long-standing company in the province of Ontario that builds important infrastructure projects and that has benefited from the general economy of Ontario to the tune of roughly \$3 billion in yearly revenue. That’s

quite an achievement, quite a success story. The member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex acknowledged some of the recent awards and accolades EllisDon received. I do not doubt that they are warranted. There's no question that their products and their company are to be revered. I would, however, suggest that a large portion of that success is due to the work and labour of the workers who work for EllisDon.

Projects don't get built at the boardroom table. They get built with boots on the ground and hammers and pouring cement and tying steel and all the wonderful things that go with being a labourer, a construction worker in the province of Ontario and evidently under the company of EllisDon.

That's why I wonder if the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex is prepared, if this bill should go forward, to explain to the spouses of the workers who are currently under contract with EllisDon about how tomorrow morning they'll wake up, and all the benefits that they've worked for, all the benefits that they've negotiated for, the health and safety benefits, dental, medical benefits, their wage packages—I wonder if he's ready and willing to knock on a door and say, "Hi, I'm the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. I'd like your vote because I eliminated your bargaining rights and your family's bargaining rights when it came to EllisDon." I don't know if anyone in this House would be prepared to open up the door with that opening line, but I certainly expect, given the enthusiasm of the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, that that will be his shining achievement in this House.

It's interesting, because I don't particularly think that the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex actually crafted the bill. I think he's simply the messenger. I know that he is simply the messenger. We know that the bill rose to prominence in this House because of some very serious lobbying efforts on behalf of EllisDon. It rose, bubbled to the top of the priority list.

That's an interesting story in and of itself, Mr. Speaker. Recently, we had a programming motion here. You would know it quite well. It fast-tracked several bills lumped together through the process, things that, I think, were worthy for our debate in this House. But lumped inside of that programming motion, the omnibus motion, was Bill 74, the EllisDon motion, which eliminates a long-standing collective agreement bargained by various trades that dates back to 1958.

Of course, we know this has been talked about in this House before. There was an attempt to eliminate it prior under the Mike Harris government. Those attempts evidently failed, given the OLRB ruling.

The OLRB ruling, for those of you who aren't aware of it, didn't say that the collective agreement between EllisDon and those trades was nullified. It actually said that the agreement was valid and in good standing. What OLRB did say was that they understand that EllisDon is applying some serious pressure on this Legislature. They're on a full frontal assault in terms of their lobbying efforts. It said that we will give you a two-year estoppel

to seek legislative remedy through this House to exit that collective agreement. That's unheard of, and I think that's a deeper issue that we should be talking about, certainly more important in terms of the structure of the OLRB, that it can identify one singular company and give it reprieve under collective bargaining law, under labour law, in this province. How does that happen? If I woke up tomorrow morning as a construction worker, as a labourer, a member of LiUNA Local 625, and knew that my company was able to seek legislative reprieve and eliminate all of my rights and all of my benefits, I would be incredibly angry. That's what's going to happen tomorrow if the government decides to follow through with this bill.

They signaled their endorsement from the outset of this bill, so much so that it received prominence within the programming motion. You took their bill and said, "We want that one." Of all the bills that maybe we could have found tripartite acceptance on, you chose that bill to eliminate collective bargaining rights for the trades that are encompassed under the umbrella of the 1958 agreement. Evidently, the Liberal Party is friends of the trades only when it suits them, but when a massive corporation comes knocking, cheque in hand, to try to move the yardstick, to try to eliminate their binding rights, then the door swings wide open to power and privilege in this House. It's really—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would remind the member of standing order 23(i), which states the Speaker shall call to order any member who "makes allegations against another member," or "imputes false or unavowed motives to another member." I would ask him to withdraw his unparliamentary remark.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'll withdraw, Mr. Speaker. I understand the point that you raised. I understand that that point has been made and called on by the Chair several times because it is a contentious issue, the timing, perhaps, the precedence, of this bill as well as the efforts made on behalf of the corporation to influence this bill. I understand it persuaded. I understand it's difficult, but it can't be ignored. It has to be discussed, because if we don't discuss that in this House, then there's free rein—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It is the responsibility of the Speaker to enforce the standing orders, and so you cannot bring that up again. I'm telling you that. If you do, I'm going to move on with debate.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I think my point has been made, and I appreciate you putting the emphasis on the point, Mr. Speaker.

The bill is called Fairness and Competitiveness in Ontario's Construction Industry. The inference of the need for fairness is that we have foreign conglomerates coming in to Ontario to bid on Ontario-based projects. This isn't new. There are foreign companies that are—one of them, a major Spanish firm, is building the Windsor-Essex parkway, Acciona, Dragados and Fluor from Texas. These are multinationals that come in and bid. I would contest and argue that legislation at the federal level, not only the temporary foreign workers—if

that is indeed what the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex is concerned about, and if that is indeed what EllisDon is concerned about, that foreign companies will be able to come in and bring in foreign workers, then I would say his argument and his angst should be against the federal jurisdiction bringing in or allowing temporary foreign workers to flood our jurisdiction, to flood this province.

I would also say that the recently celebrated Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between Canada and the European Union, one which the Liberal government has already signalled their intent to support wholeheartedly without seeing any of the context of the legislation, will indeed also open up the doors to massive foreign companies bidding on municipal projects and provincial projects, and absolutely destroy any benefit that EllisDon has.

1400

What we see here at the basis of this bill is strictly and solely an attack on those workers. I wish that the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex explains the intent of this bill. I hope to hear how he explains this to those workers, that through his own initiative he decided that it was important to alleviate EllisDon from their obligations under the collective agreement.

Here in the NDP, as New Democrats, yes, we support collective bargaining. We support the fundamental charter right of free association. I wonder, as Conservatives—I ask this question to my honourable colleague. You are the promoters of business, of free market and competition, yet many of the transactions that happen in the free market are binding, legal obligations between entities, between corporations. They sign real estate deals, sign purchasing agreements—the whole host of legally binding agreements that make our economy work. Yet when there is an agreement between a company and the worker, then it's open season on those. Those don't count as far as how the real economy works. I don't understand that. I don't understand that rationale. As much as I stand to defend the legally binding rights of one entity to bargain with another, to negotiate, whether it be in real estate or financial transactions or anything, you should also stand up for that legal right for unions to bargain their wages. It's pretty simple, it's fundamental and it's one that I think has led to the benefit of EllisDon over the last 58 years.

We had this bill come to committee for clause-by-clause just recently; it was last week. I sat in committee and watched as the Liberal government sat on its hands to not amend the bill. Obviously, they believe that the bill is good as it's crafted without an added comma or a subtracted sentence—anything. There was no amendment to the bill whatsoever, when we know in fact that a letter written to the Premier, and, I would imagine, written to all members of the assembly here, by James St. John, the business manager of the Central Ontario Building Trades, really showcased a massive pitfall that is encompassed in Bill 74 that brings in hundreds of other trades that will now be subject to Bill 74. Their collective bargaining

rights now will be affected or eliminated by the imposition of Bill 74. If you vote for this, if you support this bill, you are affecting hundreds of other trades that really have nothing to do with what the intent of the bill is.

I have to guess that given the Premier's about-face, given her flip-flop on this, initially saying that she was in support of it, that it needed immediate attention, that the remedy needed to happen in this House immediately—I would hope that she has signaled to her caucus and to the Liberal members that they should stand in their place and acknowledge that a mistake was made and to send this back to where it should be, which is in the courts, through the legally binding process. That's what I stand here today on behalf of the Ontario New Democratic Party to do: to defend the rule of law. Indeed, we have the ability here to change the law; that's our job. We stand and change, amend laws and regulations. But laws that are currently available are more than adequate to deal with the singular company EllisDon and their issues with the trades that are affected. We don't need to intervene.

My question is, who is next? Which trade? Which corporation will be coming knocking on the government's door and saying, “We need remedy. We need help. We have to get out of this collective agreement. We have to get out of our long-standing collective agreement. We have to eliminate the bargaining rights for the trades that we've”—will it be the CAW? Will it be Chrysler or Ford or GM? Those are massive companies. Will they say, “Well, Liberals, you did it for EllisDon. We're just as important”? I would imagine that they would think they're more important than EllisDon, in terms of their contribution to our economy in the province. How long will it be before they come knocking and say, “We need relief from our collective agreement”? You'll say, “Well, we can't do that.” But you have in the past. You've already signalled that you were willing to do that. What type of precedent does that set? It's unbelievable that this House, and our time here, is used to alleviate one singular company from its long-standing collective agreement.

This is a deal that was crafted between the Liberals and the Tories. There was an agreement made. “We will work together,” they said. Kathleen Wynne, the Premier, and the Leader of the Opposition—I don't know what his riding is—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Niagara West–Glanbrook.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: —Niagara West–Glanbrook—made a deal. They constructed a deal to prop each other's legislation up: “We'll support your legislation; you'll support ours.” They propped each other's legislation up. Tit for tat, is what it is. They get—

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: If you sense some—they don't like us talking about that. You can sense it. They don't like to be associated with the government, but indeed, in this fact, it's clear and evident. A Conservative bill got lumped in and found its way to the top of the legislative

agenda with the government, and it's made for one singular company, EllisDon, so important that it became the cornerstone of the programming motion.

The signals were everywhere that this was going to go sideways. We sounded the alarm quite early that this is not an area, not a jurisdiction, this House should be going into—

Interjection: Delving into.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: —delving into. Merci, monsieur. We signalled that this was setting a dangerous precedent.

In fact, the previous labour critic for the official opposition, the PCs, the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, expressed his deep, deep concern in a communiqué to the members of the PC caucus, I believe, through one of their caucus meetings, that the optics of this, where two parties come together for the singular motive of benefiting one company, send a really terrible signal out into the general public that they're not in it for the benefit of good public policy but for the benefit of a massive entity or corporation that has heavy lobbying levers to pull.

His communiqué to the PC Party was obviously met with some disdain, because he now sits in the back benches and has been stripped of his critic portfolio. And he's a good guy. I shouldn't mention that, but you know what? I have to say it, because it's part of the debate. For someone who stood up and said—in my workings with the member from Lanark, he's not the most progressive guy when it comes to labour law. But he even knew; he even could see the writing on the wall that this is going to look very bad. It was not going to look good when the general public—and the workers, who understand what the ramifications of Bill 74 are—finally figure out who the drivers of this bill are.

Mr. Speaker, suffice it to say that our party stands firmly on its principles in terms of protecting and maintaining bargaining rights—collective bargaining rights—under labour law in the province of Ontario for all workers who are encompassed under collective agreements. We will not intervene.

It's similar to when they joined in tandem again. It just hit me, Mr. Speaker: This happened before. I remember. It wasn't too long ago when they were working together. It was another bill. It was a couple of numbers off from 74; I believe it was 115, where teachers' collective bargaining rights were stripped away, might I say, for political purposes.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Oh yes, you may.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Right? And that didn't end up too well either. That didn't end up well at all.

1410

Hon. James J. Bradley: What about Rae days?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: And what did happen with Rae days? I'll hit Rae days right on the head here. Bob Rae joined the Liberal Party at some point in the last 15 years, and he has been a good Liberal ever since, I think. He has been a good Liberal and has finally shown his colours.

But when it comes to the fact that bargaining rights in this province cannot be guaranteed, either under the Liberal Party or under the Conservative Party—we stand alone in protecting bargaining rights.

Interjections.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: You hear me, Mr. Speaker. You're listening to me, so I'll speak directly to you. Speaker—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Could you stir us up a bit more?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Yes, they're all stirred up.

Interjection: You've hit a nerve, Taras. You've hit a nerve.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Evidently I've hit a nerve, because what I've done is I've connected the dots here. I've connected the dots between the parties. They're not willing to do it alone; they need a partner in dismantling. That's what happened with Bill 115, and that's what happened with Bill 74. It's what is happening now. It has exposed, deeply, the Liberal Party's—

Interjection: True colours.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Yes, true colours, but their ability to waffle when it benefits them, not necessarily to protect the rule of law. I stand here today very much in favour of the status quo, in favour of allowing the rule of law—

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Madame, j'apprécie votre attention, mais excusez-moi que je parlais quand—excuse me, when I was speaking and you were interrupting.

Speaker, we stand alone as the only party in this House that is ready, willing and able to defend the historic collective bargaining rights not only of the trades that are encompassed under Bill 74 but all other trades that would certainly be frightened at the prospects of the fact that they could be next.

I urge the Liberal members to all do an about-face, as the Premier has on this. Stand in your places, vote against this regressive piece of legislation, and get on with the work of ensuring that the workers in this province are able to afford a decent living, that they're able to work in a safe environment, and that all workers in the province of Ontario benefit from labour law.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, it's a privilege to join this particular debate, and I'll tell you why: The member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, in this bill, is trying to use the sledgehammer of the Legislature where, really, it's due process in the courts and the Ontario Labour Relations Board that is what's needed. This matter actually belongs in the Ontario Labour Relations Board or in Divisional Court.

The PC Party has always yielded to the temptation to make operational decisions, for either the public or the private sectors, on the floor of this Legislature, and that's the crux of what's at stake today. This bill attempts to circumvent due process to do exactly what the PC Party has been shouting out, through its policy white papers,

that it would implement, should it be in government, which is to gut the foundation of collective bargaining in favour of a tried-and-failed strategy of slash and burn, in a race to the economic bottom. I can't buy that.

Had the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex simply allowed due process to proceed, he would have realized that the bill really isn't needed. Let me just recap here.

The Divisional Court in Ontario has already made a ruling that quashed a decision of the Ontario Labour Relations Board. In other words, the company in question can continue to operate as it did prior to the matter being brought before the Ontario Labour Relations Board.

The member is aware that the Ministry of Labour lawyers have advised that this ruling achieves exactly the same outcome being sought with Bill 74. As a result, Speaker, we just no longer believe that this bill is needed, and we won't be supporting it. The urgency that was created by the Ontario Labour Relations Board decision has simply been removed by the courts.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'd ask the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex to withdraw that unparliamentary remark.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'll withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Mississauga–Streetsville has the floor.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, the member should realize that he can't listen with his mouth open.

Interjection.

Mr. Bob Delaney: That's another one.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I think so, too. I would ask the member for Lambton to withdraw his unparliamentary remark.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Mississauga–Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, my colleagues know that when I'm in debate, I follow the rules of debate. Their chance is going to be in their rebuttal, and they are welcome to it. In the meantime, what I have to say is important, and it's significant. I urge them to just be quiet and listen.

The company in question had filed an application for a judicial review of this ruling. The unions that were involved in the litigation had also filed an application for a judicial review, but on different grounds. The decision of the Ontario Labour Relations Board was quashed, and the underlying grievances were dismissed. That way, the company can continue to operate as it has done for decades.

This brings to mind, as this involves the building trades, some of the investments in public infrastructure that our government has made not only in the last 10 years but will continue to make in the next three years. For example, in the last 10 years, our government has put \$85 billion into public infrastructure. Over the next three years, \$35 billion are planned.

I would wonder what effect this member's bill would have on those investments. So let's talk about it. In western Mississauga 10 years ago, we had endured eight long, lost years of PC Party, US-style, right-wing, do-nothing slash and burn. It has taken us the better part of a decade to catch up.

We desperately needed a new GO train station in western Mississauga. None had been built in 25 years. We got that GO train station, and we did it in the way that this government has always operated: The project was delivered ahead of schedule and under budget. It opened on September 4, 2007, and today commuters in the Lisgar neighbourhood of western Mississauga no longer have to clog those roads, like Derry Road, Aquitaine and Britannia, with west-to-east traffic in the morning to drive to either Meadowvale or Streetsville. We now have our own GO train station, and we have that because of these investments in public infrastructure.

Now, that sort of thing is what this bill really isn't about. It's not about getting public infrastructure built. It's about a race to the bottom. In fact, it's an attempt to take the interests of a private corporation and to superimpose it on the public agenda. That's wrong.

The correct thing for the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex to do is to respect the ruling of the courts, to explain to the Legislature that the intent of his bill has now been completely and thoroughly met and to withdraw the bill. That would end the entire thing.

Why would the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex want to enact legislation to do exactly—precisely—what due process in the courts has already done? Why are we even having this debate at all? We're having it because the North American right wing has found an opportunity to take a precedent-setting shot at organized labour. That's why government members see no need to go any further on a bill whose stated purpose has been eclipsed by the normal course of events in a properly constituted judicial proceeding.

Let's be a little bit more direct: I do not support a US-style, Tea Party-inspired, Conservative private member's bill whose only remaining purpose is to set a precedent for dismantling the equilibrium of collective bargaining in the Ontario building trades. That's what this is all about.

1420

My friend and colleague from Essex, whose hockey skills, by the way, could have helped his goaltender's cause, although not changed the outcome last Thursday against the firefighters—I should also say that he served and served well with the Labourers' International Union of North America, or LiUNA, as it is known.

Some unions, as the member has pointed out, do support the bill, and apparently LiUNA claims to support the bill, as do several others, but as I have been describing, that's no longer the point. The point is that the dispute resolution process in the building trades and in labour law has worked properly. We don't need Bill 74, and we don't need anything like it.

Now, this right-wing-inspired, kneejerk reflex to austerity needs a little bit of discussion during this

debate, so I'm going to use a few brief passages from the May/June 2013 issue of the US policy journal called *Foreign Affairs*. It's written by Mark Blyth, professor of international political economy at Brown University, and it's excerpted from a recent book that he wrote that's called *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea*.

What Blyth dissects is the underlying core of this bill, the US-style Tea Party attempt to make western democracy ungovernable through a massive transfer of wealth from just about everybody to the ranks of the very few wealthy. Speaker, with your indulgence, I'll read just a few brief passages. He says:

"The eurozone countries, the United Kingdom, and the Baltic states have volunteered as subjects in a grand experiment that aims to find out if it is possible for an economically stagnant country to cut its way to prosperity. Austerity—the deliberate deflation of domestic wages and prices through cuts to public spending—is designed to reduce a state's debts and deficits, increase its economic competitiveness, and restore what is vaguely referred to as 'business confidence.'"

That of course is the underlying theme of what the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex has been talking about.

"The last point is key: Advocates of austerity believe that slashing spending spurs private investment, since it signals that the government will neither be crowding out the market for investment with its own stimulus ... nor be adding to its debt burden."

Now, Speaker, Professor Blyth says, "Much of Europe has been pursuing austerity consistently for the past four years." Here's the key part: "The results of the experiment are now in, and they are equally consistent: Austerity doesn't work. Most of the economies on the periphery of the eurozone have been in free fall since 2009, and in the fourth quarter of 2012, the eurozone as a whole contracted for the first time ever. Portugal's economy shrank by 1.8%, Italy's fell by 0.9%, and even the supposed powerhouse of the region, Germany, saw its economy contract by 0.6%. The United Kingdom, despite not being in the eurozone, only barely escaped having the developed world's first-ever triple-dip recession."

This is the agenda that the PC Party advocates to bring into the province of Ontario, and it's crazy.

Says Professor Blyth, "The only surprise is that any of this should come as a surprise. After all, the International Monetary Fund warned in July 2012 that simultaneous cuts to state spending across interlinked economies"—exactly what they're advocating—"during a recession when interest rates were already low would inevitably damage the prospects for growth."

He goes on. He points out that while the PC Party's ideas are very seductive due to their simplicity, in practice they have left every state that has tried them with more debt and not less, less prosperity and not more.

One of the key aspects of that is the steady erosion of the equilibrium and the framework for organized labour. That's what this bill really intends to do. It doesn't have a purpose anymore. It's been eclipsed entirely by the courts.

I think I have made this point: We will not be supporting Bill 74. Its purpose has already been achieved. The correct thing for the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex to do is to simply acknowledge that the point of his bill has already been achieved and simply withdraw the bill.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's been interesting to listen to some of the comments, certainly from the other side of the House, on this. I think that if anyone has actually been actively paying attention to this particular bill within the context of the omnibus bill, people would be duly confused as to what the Liberals are thinking, if they are thinking at all. They came to this House, they sat down with Monty Hall from *Let's Make a Deal*, and they said, "Listen, we want 74 embedded in this omnibus bill with all of those other things that we debated pre-prorogation and post-prorogation."

We have had these debates going on in this House—these very simple, straightforward bills that may actually make a difference once we get them to committee—and yet they embedded 74 in. It was hinging on course-correcting. I understand, at least, where the PC caucus was coming from on this issue. They wanted to be seen as getting something done. So they brought 74 to the table and made a deal with the Liberals. Now, I don't think that the Liberals fully understood how much this was going to blow up in their faces. They certainly—

Mr. Peter Shurman: Don't paint everybody with the same brush, Catherine.

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, no. Truly, truly, I understand where you're coming from.

But it blew up. It blew up because we remembered that other piece of legislation, Bill 115, which undermined collective bargaining rights in the province of Ontario like no other piece of legislation has ever done. It's a very personal piece of legislation for me, because it played out in the Kitchener–Waterloo by-election, and it played itself out in a very negative way, because that piece of legislation came into this House, again, with the support of the PC caucus. I understand where they were coming from on that. It undermined, like no other piece of legislation, the rights of all education workers in the province of Ontario. I know that they want to forget that, and I know that we will not let them forget that. I hope that the people who are in this House today never forget that collective bargaining rights were squashed, were undermined, by that piece of legislation. Not unlike Bill 74, when it came to this House it was like a wake-up call. It was like people woke up again. It was a good day, in many respects.

The member from Mississauga–Streetsville, it's a little alarming that you forget that you voted to send Bill 74 to committee. When it got to committee, we sat in that committee and the good people from across the province came into the room and they said, "Listen, this is why this is wrong."

The Carpenters' Union stands out for me. It stands out because when the president of the Carpenters' Union for the province of Ontario said, "I know it's uncomfortable, and it's a little strange for us to be coming here before this esteemed committee"—he might not have said "esteemed"; I might have put that part in. But he said, in front of this committee, and supporting a piece of legislation that undermines the collective bargaining rights of workers, "You don't understand. EllisDon is important." And we reminded him, in that committee session, that the people of this province are important; the history of bargaining—fair and open, transparent bargaining—is important in the province of Ontario. I think we made that point in that committee session.

But you know what? It was even more surprising—and the member from Mississauga–Streetsville dismisses and hopes that we'll forget what the Liberals have done on this piece, like a Ping-Pong game with collective bargaining rights. He hopes that we forget that in that session we found out that even the Carpenters' Union suggested amendments. Yet the esteemed member from Windsor-Essex has pointed out that even the Liberals didn't introduce clause-by-clause. You could have made changes. You could have changed the date on the legislation, which would have undone a lot of the damage, just leaving a special deal for EllisDon. That's why that piece of legislation came here. Yet you chose not to.

Now we hear today that you won't be supporting this piece of legislation, even though you had this Let's Make a Deal moment with the PC caucus, and even though in that omnibus bill there are some good pieces of legislation. So I think the people in the province of Ontario are looking and they're saying, "What is going on in this place? Do you support the workers in the province of Ontario, or do you not?" And yet there are so many reasons to actually dig down a little deeper, even when you look at issues the Liberal government should be paying attention to, like worker safety, for instance.

A young man in my riding of Kitchener–Waterloo fell to his death just before Oktoberfest because this government has chosen to leave basic worker safety off the agenda. It is not a priority. Even though Tony Dean made a recommendation way back in 2010 to make fall prevention a priority in all workplaces, 10 people have fallen to their death in the province of Ontario since June 2013. Somehow that trumps the health and the welfare of the people who are building the infrastructure in this province. Bill 74—

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Point of order.

1430

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, good, we've got someone saying something.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): On a point of order, the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I request the member opposite, under section 23, to speak to the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It's a valid point of order that members must speak to the bill at

hand. I return to the member for Kitchener–Waterloo and remind her to bring her remarks back to Bill 74.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you. I think that Bill 74, in the context of it being a priority for the people of this province and within the context of worker safety, actually is very relevant. So I understand, and I'll respect the Speaker because it's a delicate point of order, but I wish to tell you that, when I knock on doors in Kitchener–Waterloo or when members knock on doors in Hamilton or members knock on doors in Windsor-Essex, people are not asking, "What are you going to do about EllisDon? That poor EllisDon." Honestly, within the context of the priorities of this place, you dare to stand up and question a point of privilege when I'm talking about the core business of this province, which is worker safety?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would remind the member for Kitchener–Waterloo to refer her remarks to the Speaker, through the Chair, as is also the custom of this place. I would remind her again to talk about Bill 74, the bill that is before the House.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Let's review everything that's wrong with Bill 74. Let's talk about how, in recent days, building trades have argued two new points that strengthen the case against Bill 74. The wording of Bill 74 also undermines hundreds of existing collective agreements outside of even the Toronto area construction trades, which are signed with companies before 1978 and are not part of the province-wide agreements, not the big 11, which also includes, obviously, EllisDon. If EllisDon truly believes it is at a competitive disadvantage because of the 2012 OLRB decision, since overturned by the Superior Court, it can seek to negotiate terms other than those in the master agreement with individual unions such as IBEW and sheet metal workers. If the parties can't agree to amended terms, EllisDon can go to arbitration to settle matters. This is a key piece.

After all the delegations came to committee that day, and we were obviously talking about Bill 74, because that was before the House, I asked the lawyer for EllisDon—I just went up to him, and I said, "You've got a good company. EllisDon is a strong employer in the province of Ontario, and yet for some reason, you don't want to go through these channels," the channels that all of us have to go through as Ontarians. If we have a dispute, there is a legal course of action that we have to take, because, first of all, many of us have fought for those rights to pursue legal action, as have the unions, as have the companies. I asked the lawyer, "Is it worth it for you? Does it have to be so black and so white? Is there no way for you to mediate through this with the sheet metal workers, for instance?" The answer was just a flat-out no, because they have invested a lot of time. They have invested a lot of energy in going down this route.

In this party we firmly believe that collective agreements should not be negotiated on the floor of this Legislature, because those collective bargaining rights have been fought for for centuries—for decades. Sometimes it feels like centuries, right? This is an important piece of this puzzle. So we now see that the Liberal Party has

decided that they're not going to be part of this conversation anymore. Thankfully, there will be no panel. They're not going to strike another panel, another round table, another working table.

Miss Monique Taylor: Consultations.

Ms. Catherine Fife: We don't need to consult on it anymore.

Now they agree fully that, because the legal system is now siding with whatever they wanted in the first place, and we have one PC member here on this side of the House—thanks for sticking around—they still firmly believe that this special deal should be made, and they are obviously disappointed with the way things have fallen out.

I think I'm going to leave my points there, because where we are with Bill 74 is that it has been an interesting learning experience, I think, for all of us. Maybe even the Liberal Party has learned that you can't butter your toast on both sides and that if you are lost, maybe to be a little more cautious in the route that you take as a party.

But remember this: This party is always going to side with workers, with the economy, with creating new jobs. We are going to be bringing forward the priorities of people, which we have been consistently doing for the last two years, throughout the budget process. Yes, we read budgets, and then we try to make them stronger. We support legislation. We try to get it to committee. We try to make it better. People in this province, quite honestly, expect that of us. They expect us to show up and do the work. By doing so, they certainly are looking at us differently, which is encouraging. I think, actually, that the by-election results have shown that, because when we knock on a door, we can say, "We are fighting for you and for your family, and for those small and medium-sized businesses. We want to see the economy strengthen and grow, so that we can support those core values that we all have around education and around health care."

I think that by trying to play this sort of game, by throwing Bill 74 into an omnibus bill which, quite honestly, contains some good things, we've all learned a lesson. For us, it's just to be ever vigilant, to watch every step that you take and to make sure that we're really clear on what the PCs' motivation is. They genuinely sometimes just surprise us.

So here we are today, and I'm happy to hear that perhaps Bill 74 will go nowhere, because it never should have been before the House, we never should have had to debate it, and we are going to stay on the right side of this issue, which is on the left.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'm delighted to be able to stand in the House today and speak to this bill. I believe it's called the Fairness and Competitiveness in Ontario's Construction Industry Act, also known as the EllisDon bill, or more commonly known, perhaps, as the attempt by a few well-paid lobbyists to weasel out of a fairly bargained collective agreement act, updated in 2013.

Look, I've said it before in this House, and I'll say it again: I have absolutely nothing against EllisDon. I think they're a fabulous company. They do fantastic work with a superb workforce, many of whom are unionized. They do great work, and they have for years. I know they do it down in my part of the province, as well as everywhere else. And it's the employees—the workers—who, through their sweat and their labour, their skills and their training, are helping to build a better Ontario. We should be supporting other companies who do the same.

Their buildings don't fall down. No one is questioning them for cutting corners or using shoddy construction techniques. If you want to know what happens when you do that, I can remind you about what's happening on the Herb Gray Parkway in my part of the country, where we have all of these girders. You've heard me talk about the girders many times in the House, and the whole process that went into that. You put out a contract and you say, "As part of this multi-billion dollar huge infrastructure project, we're going to need some girders built, so we want you to build them." Companies bid, and they're not supposed to start construction until they are CSA-approved. Eight or nine months in, they're still not CSA-approved, they don't have an engineer on site, their welders aren't certified up to the standard they should be; and now we have all kinds of experts looking at what has gone on and questioning whether or not those girders should be hauled out of there.

1440

Hon. James J. Bradley: Is this Bill 74?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Yes, it's part of the bill, because we're talking about infrastructure, we're talking about construction in Ontario, and we're talking about qualified companies that do the work.

I think "perhaps" is the key word in that report. When they were asked, "Can these girders be fixed? Can we bring them back up to standard?", the expert panel unanimously said, "Perhaps." "Perhaps" isn't being very reassuring, especially not to the people in Windsor, LaSalle, Tecumseh and Essex county.

EllisDon has been in business in this province for more than 60 years. They have annual revenues of more than \$3 billion. Right now, they have \$11 billion in construction projects under way. They have international experience. They build, they construct, in more than 15 countries—amazing. What a great success story. They're Canada's largest health care builder. They're involved in more than 20 public-private partnerships. What a great company. So when you start talking about tearing up their contract and stripping away some collective bargaining rights—why? Why do they need this Legislature to do something that's before the courts? There's a judicial process under way. If it isn't in the courts, it's the Ontario Labour Relations Board. That's where this belongs, Speaker; not here. This has to be rejected at this level.

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

Pursuant to the order of the House dated Thursday, October 3, 2013, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. McNaughton has moved third reading of Bill 74, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 to alter bargaining rights conferred by pre-1980 working agreements in the construction industry.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say “aye.”

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

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

I wish to inform the House that I have received from the chief government whip a notice of deferral, requesting that the vote be deferred until the time of deferred votes tomorrow morning, Tuesday, October 29, 2013.

Third reading vote deferred.

SUPPORTING SMALL
BUSINESSES ACT, 2013
LOI DE 2013 VISANT À SOUTENIR
LES PETITES ENTREPRISES

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 24, 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. Robert Bailey: It's a great opportunity today to speak to Bill 105, An Act to amend the Employer Health Tax Act. The short title of the act is the Supporting Small Businesses Act, 2013. Again, I am privileged to speak on behalf of the people of Sarnia-Lambton and the many small business owners who do business there and with whom I meet on a regular basis.

I'd like to take the opportunity to thank all the members who were able to attend the Canadian Natural Gas Vehicle Alliance reception in room 230 over the noon hour. I've had the opportunity to work with this group recently in the development of my bill, Bill 97, the Natural Gas Superhighway Act. Bill 97, I like to say, was unanimously supported by the members of this Legislature—I'll take a moment just to promote myself a bit.

During the last constituency week, I actually had the opportunity to visit a first-of-its-kind ship-through conversion facility, another small business that was opened, actually, in Windsor West by a very forward-looking company, Westport Innovations. This shop is a perfect example of the sort of advanced manufacturing and value-added production that Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC Party have been championing for the province, because what Ontario workers and employers need is a government that believes in them and knows that our ability to build and sell innovative products is as good as anyone's.

This legislation, Bill 105, An Act to amend the Employer Health Tax Act, exemplifies exactly what is

wrong with this government and their approach to governing. It should be noted that it was the PC government of the day that first introduced the employer health act exemption as a way to assist small businesses in this province by reducing their overall tax burden. This act amends that to increase the amount that can be exempted from \$400,000 to \$450,000.

This is not an insignificant amount for some small businesses, and as such, I believe this act should be sent to committee, hopefully to see if some additional improvements can be made. However, it's disappointing that this government again failed to find it within themselves to send a meaningful signal to businesses in Ontario. Time and again over the last decade, they have been unwilling to go so far as to take the decisive action needed to provide real tax relief to Ontario business. This is more tinkering around the edges by this government, and will not do enough to solve the jobs crisis facing this province. This government has missed the mark.

This legislation comes at a time when Ontario's small businesses are struggling with:

- skyrocketing hydro rates, which have doubled under this government, the next rate increase to occur on November 1;

- Ontario's industrial electricity rates are now the second-highest in North America;

- the global adjustment charge, which seems to cover the cost of whatever the government wants to throw in, including the \$1-billion-plus cost of the cancelled Mississauga and Oakville power plants, is at a record high;

- increases to WSIB premiums, which are eating into the razor-thin profit margins of small business owners;

- the new College of Trades tax, which targets independent contractors; and

- outdated apprenticeship ratios, limiting the skilled trades' ability to create jobs.

In his introductory speech, the Minister of Finance noted that this act was part of the government's “job creation plan.” That may be news to the Premier, who has shown no evidence of a job creation plan during her nine months as Premier, and who just recently challenged the agri-food industry to create a plan for her. She couldn't do it, so she's asked the agri-food industry to do it for her. In the most recent edition of Today's Farmer, rather than talking about Bill 105 and its place in the secret Liberal job creation plan, the Premier instead asked the agri-food industry, many of whom are small business owners themselves, to come up with 120,000 jobs for her.

To underline the point I made earlier that this government has missed the mark with Bill 105 and its small increase to the employer health tax exemption, I want to read to you, and into the record, a letter from Kevin Marriott, a farmer, and also mayor of the township of Enniskillen, who wrote in response to the Premier's challenge to the Ontario Farmer:

“Dear editor:

“I read with some confusion and disbelief Premier Wynne's letter to the editor on October 22, ‘The Chal-

lence to Double Our Growth Rate in Agriculture,' in which she challenged 'Ontario's agri-food industry to double its growth rate and create more than 120,000 new jobs by 2020.'

"I'm glad to hear that the Premier will be meeting to identify what the government can do... There are many changes the government will need to make to bring Ontario back to being competitive in areas that will allow expansion of small business or any type of manufacturing, including food processing. Ontario has been losing manufacturing jobs; Wynne's talk of expansion will be impossible without these changes. Let's start by eliminating just some of the red tape that has become paramount in this province that discourages growth in manufacturing" and agriculture. "The layers of government bureaucracy that impede this, for example, are stringent environment and labour laws, along with the high cost of doing business because of considerations such as workmen's compensation and the highest electricity rates of any province in Canada (or, put another way, the second-highest in North America due in part to the Green Energy Act of 2009).

"If the agriculture sector had even a percentage of the subsidy dollars that the Green Energy Act has received in the past four years (in the billions and higher every day), we may have already been on our way to this lofty goal that the Premier has set out for 2020. It is also sad that most of these subsidies have been to foreign companies such as NextEra. The promise of 50,000 jobs was an exaggeration and, furthermore, the jobs created are, at best, temporary jobs. Worse yet is the recent announcement to pay some of the companies not to produce electricity after giving the generous subsidies! And it gets worse: Hydroelectric at Niagara Falls (the greenest of all electricity through history) is actually bypassing water because we do not need the electricity due to this exodus of manufacturing from Ontario. A recent conversation with some Michigan politicians told me, 'Whatever you are doing in Ontario, keep it up, as we are experiencing an influx of jobs from your jurisdiction.'

"If Ontario is adamantly committed to forging ahead with this waste of taxpayer dollars, (the lower-level tier) municipal governments should at least be able to have democratic powers reinstated, so as to have the right to refuse industrial wind turbines when some constituents are saying, 'No, we don't want them.' The provincial government should respect that not all municipalities want to be 'willing hosts.'"

This is signed by Kevin Marriott, who is a delegate, district 3, Grain Farmers of Ontario, and also the mayor of the township of Enniskillen.

1450

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Marriott is a small business owner himself, yet he doesn't mention the employer health tax exemption as one of the primary concerns for his business's success. I would bet that pretty much every small business owner, just like Mr. Marriott, would rather see the government address things like the out-of-control energy rates, climbing WSIB premiums and the thicket of

government red tape that they must deal with as their top priority.

Bill 105 and its increase in the employer health tax exemption rate from \$400,000 to \$450,000 just doesn't create confidence in the small business owners that this Liberal government grasps how difficult things are for small business or that they have any idea how to make things better.

We on this side of the House fully understand that what Ontario and small business need right now is for the province to have an economic plan that will stimulate investment and job growth. The Ontario PC Party has one; we have been laying it out in our 14 Paths to Prosperity white papers. There are about 200 ideas in those documents that we have offered to the Premier and her government. As my colleague, the venerable member from Nipissing and opposition critic of finance said in this House, "The solutions to Ontario's problems aren't hard to figure out; they're just not easy to do. Ontario needs a government that has a plan to reduce spending and create jobs, and the courage to implement it."

Bill 105 will require quite a bit of work to get it to a place where Ontario's small business can garner some benefit from it. It's my hope that after it's sent to committee—where we can hear from delegations, we can hear from other members from all three parties—we can make opportunities for suggestions to improve the bill, maybe make some deletions that people might feel on reflection aren't necessary, that would be important to do—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Smile for the cameras.

Mr. Robert Bailey: As the honourable member, the Minister of the Environment, tells me there are cameras here in the House, and I know that he's been here for so many years, that he has had the opportunity to appear before those cameras at many times, and always does a great job—

Interjection: Some good days, some bad.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Some good days, some bad. We all have those, right?

Anyway, Bill 105, as I say, is a step in the right direction. We don't feel that it has gone far enough. We really look forward to the bill getting to committee. We can try and make those improvements, Mr. Speaker, where all members can bring concerns to their constituents and small business people in their riding. They can bring them there and they can try and make those kinds of improvements.

Also, it's an important part of the debate, to hear from all the members from the different ridings across Ontario, and it's a pleasure for me to have had the opportunity to stand today. I hope that by having the bill referred to committee, we can see those improvements made in a forthwith and in a meaningful manner. I look forward to the rest of the debate today.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'm pleased to take two minutes to talk about this bill. I support small business. I do think

the government could be doing more to support small business people. I want to give you an example. I received a letter from a constituent, who speaks on behalf of her friend Pierre Paquette. He's a hard-working fellow. He owns his own family business; it's a family construction business. He's 55 years old and he's healthy, except he needs shoulder surgery. He was supposed to get the surgery done on the 18th in Windsor at Hôtel-Dieu hospital, but two weeks ago, he got a call from the hospital saying his surgery was cancelled due to a lack of funding.

So here's a guy, a small business man, who schedules surgery when his business is slow—it gives him time to recuperate—and he even took out extended health care benefits to provide himself with rehab post-surgery, and they cancelled his surgery.

Now, here's the problem: He's got a wife; he's got two sons in university. If he doesn't have his surgery soon, his entire livelihood will be threatened. He was doing everything he could within the system, as a small business man working within Ontario's small business rules and within the health care system.

I guess the problem is there's not enough money to pay for these surgeries in hospitals. If we can't give it to him in Windsor—I mean, there should be a system whereby he can either go to London or Toronto, or even to Detroit, to get it done, if it's going to keep his surgery going.

A small business man: He needs all the help he can get from this government. I certainly hope that we can do what we can, through talking about it during the bill on small business, to bring attention to his situation and, hopefully, Pierre Paquette can get the help that he needs.

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

Mr. Steven Del Duca: I've listened with interest to the discussion here this afternoon. I just want to say, from my perspective, that we have now had somewhere in the neighbourhood of nine hours and 40 minutes of debate on this particular bill. It's important that we move forward with getting this to committee so we can actually do what the bill is designed to do, which is to help move Ontario's economy forward. I call on all members to join with us to vote on this bill, get it to committee and keep moving our province forward.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: It's always a pleasure to respond to the member from Sarnia-Lambton. I do listen, as much as possible, to a person that—his actions speak louder than words; I should put it that way. He has been the sponsor of and successfully introduced three bills which are now law—I think the members of the House will appreciate his understanding of issues—Bill 8, which is the one call when digging for pipelines and the danger there to the public; the blue ribbon highway, Bill 97, that's before us; and the discussions ongoing with the tax credit for surplus food. I commend the member for Sarnia-Lambton on the work.

In his remarks today, he referred to the 14 papers that Tim Hudak and our caucus have out there right now on Pathways to Prosperity. It's worth the viewers of Ontario having a look at them. It is a new plan, but it's a plan on the right track. I can only assure you that the member made that a connection to the Bill 105 discussion about a plan poorly thought through.

This whole employer health tax—if you listen to the CFIB, Canadian Federation of Independent Business, they would tell you that immediately the first thing that comes to mind is the onerous amount of red tape. That's the first thing in almost all of their surveys.

These are small business people telling you, "What is our biggest headache?" Their biggest headache is Kathleen Wynne's—pardon me—the Premier's approach to most things, which is raising more tax and more revenues, so they can buy more gas plants or cancel nuclear plants in the riding of Durham.

I think that the red tape issue—but the 14 papers have some really excellent suggestions to get the economy going. This is what we need. I look around at the young people of Ontario with no future, or at least a very dim future, and I think that these papers provide innovative approaches to solutions that we have before us. This Bill 105, if you look through it, does really virtually nothing. It is about a \$900 tax break, which is what it is for a company. What they could do is eliminate some of the red tape, and it would cost you nothing.

The member from Sarnia-Lambton did a great job.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to address this bill this afternoon. I understand from my colleagues that there is an interest in having debate here, taking this matter to committee, where the bill can be examined, where we can actually see if there are improvements that can be put in place.

Mr. Speaker, as you're well aware and as the member from Sarnia was saying, there are many small businesses in this province facing a very difficult time. In my riding I have, apparently, the highest percentage of self-employed people in the province, who are operating and running small consulting businesses, small retailing operations. Efforts to assist them, efforts to help them build the economy of this province, are critical. Not everyone is going to work for Vale Inco; not everyone is going to work for US Steel; not everyone is going to work for Manulife. There are literally tens of thousands of small businesses that allow people to make their way within this very huge, very complex economy. Changing regulations so that it is easier for them, in the volatile environment that they operate in, to survive and thrive is a useful thing. We've had this debate within our own caucus. We want this bill to go forward to committee. We want the opportunity to hear from the public. We want to identify their challenges, and we want the opportunity to work through a bill that truly addresses their concerns.

1500

This is not the biggest step we are ever going to see. In fact, my colleague the MPP from Parkdale–High Park may refer to it as a baby step; I will not take the words out of her mouth, or try to jam some in, alternatively, but nonetheless, worth the debate here and worth going to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time we have for questions and comments, and I return to the member from Sarnia–Lambton for his reply.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It was a pleasure to listen to the comments from the members from Windsor–Tecumseh, Vaughan, Durham and Toronto–Danforth. As 90% of the jobs in Ontario are created by small business, it's certainly expedient that we do everything we can do to improve the sector for small business. They are the backbone of the economy.

My dad ran a small business many years ago. I know how important that was to him and our family, and I know there are many people out there today who also—my colleague from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex; I know he comes out of a small family business. They have 60-some employees; in a small town, that's a major employer. I know a number of other individuals who are in our caucus—and, I'm sure, all caucuses—are represented either in their own ridings or maybe come out of small businesses that their families did in their past as well. I think that there's a great opportunity for us to bring those memories, those experiences in life, here to try to improve things for others.

I would encourage every one of the viewers out there in television land who are tuned in to the Legislature today to go to our website, the Ontario PC Party, or the individual members who represent you. Take a look at our Paths to Prosperity, the 14 papers that have been released to date. There are a number of ideas that are not necessarily party policy yet for our election platform, but they are ideas or discussion papers. Those are created from thousands of meetings across the province, where people have had input either through email or through one-on-one meetings with members or with our leader. People have brought those ideas and those discussions to the table.

Again, I look forward to the rest of the debate this afternoon as we debate Bill 105, the employer health tax. As the member from Durham said, initially this was a PC caucus idea from years ago when the Conservatives were in power, so anything we can do to encourage small business in this province I am all for.

Mr. Steve Clark: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a point of order. I'm reading today's Orders and Notices paper, and I notice that I have two order paper questions that are overdue. I see that the Minister of the Environment is here, and both of them are directed at him. I tabled them six months ago. I am a very patient person, but I believe they are now over a month

and a half old. They relate to statistics around the Drive Clean program in Leeds–Grenville, and also a closed Athens village landfill site.

Perhaps the minister, since he's here, would like to give me a verbal answer in the House, since we are now looking at a notice that is well over a month and a half late. With the House's indulgence, perhaps the minister would like to address those.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We do find that you have a valid point of order. I must say to the minister I want to remind you that you are required, under standing order 99(d), to file a response within 24 sessional days. Your response is now overdue, and I would ask that you give the House some indication as to when the response will be forthcoming.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Certainly I would say that it will be at the very earliest opportunity. I know that the Conservative Party is out to destroy the Drive Clean program, which was brought in by Norm Sterling, one of my favourite Conservatives of all time, but we will try—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I am satisfied with your answer—your explanation. That concludes the point of order.

Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Holy smokes, Speaker. I'm so glad to stand up this afternoon. I think I was supposed to stand up a couple of times today and speak to this bill. I'm very pleased to speak to Bill 105, the Supporting Small Businesses Act, 2013, and I want to thank the current speakers and acknowledge their insight and comments on this bill as well.

This bill is very important for my riding of London–Fanshawe especially, because in my riding we have experienced and encountered more than our fair share of job losses, plant closures and unfair business practices. For my riding it is vital that we get this bill right, and unfortunately there are a number of larger concerns with this bill that we need to address.

Currently, there's an exemption for paying 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 exempt from the EHT. This is why the NDP called for companies with \$5 million in payroll or more to no longer be eligible for the exemption, and we are pleased that the government recognizes the importance of this element. We are also pleased to see that the government has chosen to increase the exemption amount from \$400,000 to \$450,000 for the period from the 2014 to the 2018 calendar years.

Starting in 2019, the exemption amount is adjusted for inflation every five years. This will more than wipe out the increased revenue that we had hoped to gain by removing the exemption for larger companies.

The government has also moved to close loopholes that allowed employers to segment their workforce to show smaller payrolls. Not allowing artificial segmenta-

tion—and I hope Hansard gets that right—of payrolls is especially important as it relates to the collection and the enforcement of tax dollars. The artificial segmenting of the workforce is a major concern, and we have already seen issues with RBC contriving their Canadian workforce numbers as recently as this past year. While RBC, Canada's largest bank, was posting record profits, the company came under intense public scrutiny because of its plan to axe jobs currently held by Canadian RBC employees in favour of foreign temporary workers.

In this instance, RBC employees who were given termination notice claimed they were required to train the foreign workers who would eventually be taking their jobs. All the while, RBC continued to state that their actions met the criteria set out through legislation. Finally, RBC's top executives apologized to the workers who were affected by the bank's outsourcing arrangement with the foreign company, saying RBC should have been more sensitive and helpful to them.

While we understand that the actions taken by RBC are related to the federal foreign worker program, it is clear that we can no longer sit back and hope that companies like RBC will simply do the right thing, nor can we continue to empower RBC as a lone company with our legislated tax loopholes. The government must be sure it has closed off all possible ways of segmenting the workforce for payroll reporting purposes, which has clearly been a problem in the past.

The employer health tax, or the EHT, is an exemption on the first \$400,000 of payroll, which applies to all employers, large or small. Employers pay the EHT as a percentage of their payrolls. While this exemption is arguably legitimate for smaller businesses, it makes no sense to exempt larger employers with thousands of employees from paying the tax on their first \$400,000 in payroll. The new payroll exemption threshold will be set at \$5 million, and at that threshold level we are likely looking at continuing the exemption for all employers with 100 or fewer employees. It's time for this government to correct their blatant favouritism towards large companies and begin putting forward ideas that make sense for small businesses.

Small businesses are the drivers of our economy, and for ridings like mine in London–Fanshawe, where the manufacturing sector has been all but decimated, we are looking to small and medium-sized businesses to help lead the revitalization of our city.

1510

The NDP sees the larger issues associated with this bill, that there are a range of other tax loopholes that could be changed to generally give smaller businesses the help they need to succeed, yet this government continues to look towards Ontario taxpayers as the answer to their economic failures.

The Liberals claim that the provincial government needs to hit household budgets with new taxes to raise the \$34 billion for transit infrastructure by 2031. 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 the Ontario treasury more than \$35 billion by the same date, 2031.

Why is it that this government is willing to open a \$1-billion corporate tax loophole that will give Ontario's largest tax corporations an HST rebate on expenses like expensive restaurants, meals and box seats? The priorities coming from this government are all wrong.

There are thousands of seniors in this province who can't afford to continue to supplement the dining and entertainment costs for larger companies, yet when my colleague from Algoma–Manitoulin introduced a motion that would give Ontario families a rebate on their home heating costs, this government used their powers to make sure this bill didn't move forward on to third reading and finally voted against it. Taking the HST off home heating would have saved a family with two children about \$100 a year, but this government refuses to see hard-working Ontarians as anything more than their own ATM.

Over the last decade, the Liberals have brought in a series of measures that hit household budgets. The HST and the regressive health tax now take \$6.7 billion out of household budgets every year. Meanwhile, the Liberals continue to offer never-ending tax loopholes and giveaways that now cost our treasury more than \$7 billion a year.

Andrea Horwath and the NDP believe this bill can and must be fairer to the small and medium-sized businesses that need our help. By making the delayed HST tax credit permanently delayed, we could net our treasury more than \$1.3 billion, and by increasing corporate tax compliance rather than allowing companies to shift profits and losses from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, even Donald Drummond estimated that this measure would bring in \$50 million in its first year and another \$200 million by 2017.

Lastly, by eliminating the employer health tax exemption on the first \$400,000 in payroll for all companies with payrolls over \$5 million, we would add another \$90 million to the treasury.

These straightforward and balanced measures could allow for Ontario to truly help small businesses in a real way. The real issue is whether or not the government will recognize that prioritizing larger companies is not the way forward for Ontario.

My NDP colleagues and I have put forward very simple, yet financially sound ideas to help this bill reach its intended goal. We hope to be able to count on the support of other members opposite and those across the way in the Legislature to improve our supports to small business as key players in driving our economy.

Speaker, I hope this bill has the approval of all members in this House to pass to committee because we did make some very good suggestions as to how we can improve this bill, because we know that when we have a healthy business community, we have a healthy economic environment. When our local small businesses don't thrive, we'll see that shops close up their doors, their windows are boarded up and we end up having vacant

properties. That's not a healthy neighbourhood for any city or province across the country.

I hope that the Conservatives and the Liberals see fit that we pass this bill into committee so that we can truly make improvements and adjust this bill, as needed, to actually firmly support small businesses.

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I appreciated hearing the comments from the previous speaker. I think she did a very good job of outlining her concerns and what should happen with this bill. I think we've had adequate debate at this point on Bill 105, and certainly I and I think other members from this side would like to see it proceed.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's nice to hear the member from London-Fanshawe's remarks. Again, I'm going to just urge people, yes, let's get this bill to committee. We want to have it at committee so we can improve this bill. We think there are lots of improvements that can be made to it. We've already outlined what we think are some of our concerns with it, with our 14 white papers, which we think would go a long way to increasing opportunities in the small business and larger business sectors, as far as that goes in the province of Ontario.

A week ago, I think it was, the member from Thornhill pointed out that what this tax cut will really amount to is about \$900. I think at the end of the day, it may be even less than that. He said it would hardly be enough to take your work team out to dinner for Christmas, or if you took them out for a Christmas dinner, it would hardly pay for that. Anyway, I'm sure every small business appreciates everything we can do.

There are so many other pieces of red tape that businesses have to go through every day whether it's federal, provincial or municipal inspectors that come. They've all got their own myriad rules. Slaughterhouses are a good example where they've come up with some arcane rulings, and we're down to very, very few plants where you can actually butcher meat in Ontario. That's why there are some problems with bacteria and that, because this food is being butchered and slaughtered in larger and larger plants. In the old days, when there was a small plant in each small community, if there was an issue raised, it was more localized. Now we're having these major recalls of products. That's one of the reasons small businesses have been forced out of business, and now you have these large plants. They may be more efficient; there are always opportunities, though, for risk.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the rest of the afternoon and the debate. Let's get this bill to committee.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to speak on Bill 105, the Supporting Small Businesses Act. I would like to make a point to inform the members that I'm proud to be the husband of a woman who is a fourth-generation business owner in her family business. Her family has

owned a car dealership in the small town of LaSalle for 83 years, and they've been selling vehicles in LaSalle—an unbelievable legacy of small business in small southwestern Ontario. And why is that? Well, you know, I ask Jenny all the time, "What's happening? How is it going? What's the sentiment out there?" And one of the biggest things is consumer confidence. That's what really helps her business succeed and helps her employ people and to grow her business. What does consumer confidence mean? That means people have good-paying jobs to have disposable income to be able to make those purchases: buy a car, buy a home, put new wheels on the car, do some tune-ups. All that type of economic stimulus happens when we have an economy that fuels good-paying jobs, not bottom-of-the-rung, temporary, part-time, minimum-wage jobs, the type of jobs that, yes, my friends to the right of me would love to see dominate our economy here.

Absolutely, when you come into Ontario and purport that the panacea for all of our economic woes is right-to-work legislation that drives wages down to the bottom line, I say to you that that is the recipe for disaster, and we see it in the southern United States. We see it going all around the United States where it does nothing to help small-town Ontario. It simply devastates regional economies and contributes to those empty storefronts that we see.

Let's stand up for good-paying jobs. Let's stand up for small businesses. This is one way to do it, and there are very many others that we could get to work on in this House.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: This is the second time in less than half an hour I've had an opportunity to agree with my colleague from Essex, whose comments were very well made.

You know, Speaker, in our western Mississauga neighbourhoods of Lisgar, Meadowvale and Streetsville, small businesses want and need to have the benefits in this bill out working for them, and the best way to help them do that is to get this bill to committee. The best way to get it to the committee is to stop dragging it out and just let debate collapse and send it to committee.

1520

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. I'll now return to the member for London-Fanshawe for her reply.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you to the members who commented on this bill, because it is very important. It's good to hear that we can find some common ground—when we hear the member from Mississauga-Streetsville saying this is the second time today that he has agreed on something in this House that we were discussing.

Speaker, it's absolutely, unequivocally a fact that small to medium businesses are the drivers of our economy. They employ so many people. Because of those small businesses and medium-sized businesses, our com-

munities are successful. So it's paramount that we look at this bill.

I know the member had said that we should shut down debate if we all agree. I'm always a proponent of democracy. If anybody has anything to say on this bill, if we've heard it before—because your voice is your constituents'. Even though I have spoken on the bill and maybe have said things that other members have said, it's very important that everyone has an opportunity to speak up for their ridings and express the voices of their constituents on this bill.

I know that in my area, we have the BIA—in my part of London, the Argyle community—and the BIA is instrumental in making sure that that community thrives. As long as those businesses can be successful, I know that our neighbourhoods are going to be healthy. We're going to promote small business and make sure those jobs are there for those kids who need those summer jobs and the people who need those part-time jobs, who may not be looking for full-time jobs.

Absolutely, as the member from Essex has said, there's no substitute for good-paying jobs with benefits, with retirement packages, so that we can make sure that when people work for 20 years in an industry, they retire in dignity.

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 105, which amends the Employer Health Tax Act.

Last week was Small Business Week, and it is fitting that we're discussing a bill that attempts to relieve the burdens which this government has placed on them.

Having been the small business and red tape critic for our party in the past, I know what difficulties these businesses face. To be frank, this bill does not achieve nearly enough in the way of assisting small businesses. This bill moves the bar of eligibility for business from \$400,000 to \$450,000 and does nothing to relieve the burdens which continue to hamper our economy and restrict job creation. In fact, I think the benefit can be calculated, after taxes, to represent about \$850.

Small and medium-sized businesses are the backbone of our economy, as they represent 99% of all Canadian companies and employ nearly two thirds of private sector workers.

In 1996, when our party introduced amendments to the employer health tax, we designed it with small businesses in mind. Our strategy focused on minimizing the burdens on small business. In contrast, this government is looking to provide some relief, through this tax exemption, but it is in turn shifting the burden to larger businesses so that those who make \$5-million-plus will have to pay more. In essence, what they are giving to one, they are taking from the other, and this hardly makes for a prosperous Ontario.

The short title of the bill is Supporting Small Businesses Act, but the irony is that there is little in this for Ontario's small businesses.

Our party has put forward over 200 ideas that will help strengthen our economy, create jobs and rein in government spending. However, this Liberal government is continuously seeking to move forward with their destructive, job-killing policies.

The list of burdens for small businesses is a long one, and this bill does little to address the problem. For example, there is the increasing power cost for both on- and off-peak pricing. While consumers can adjust their uses at home, small businesses have little ability to do so, and now, where they may have been able to shift their use, this government is hitting them with an increase in off-peak pricing.

Then there's the costly College of Trades tax hike, which is driving young people away from industry, where this province is experiencing shortages. This government brought in Bill 119, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act. This forces small business owners to pay WSIB premiums for themselves, and now they have floated this idea of introducing an Ontario pension plan, which will further increase the cost for these businesses by doubling their payroll tax.

For each of these, I think of individual people in my own riding who have come to me to complain about some of these examples that I've provided. There's the pizza shop owner who has to use peak power. There's the trades tax and the young people. One of my own staff member's sons has moved out of the province and has reported the opportunities that are there for him, in this case in Alberta, that don't exist in Ontario. A single-employee business complained to me just recently about Bill 119 and how he can't afford to pay the kind of premiums that are being suggested.

At the end of the day, the Liberal rationale for this bill is about as effective as rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. So before you dump Gatorade on yourselves and claim being champions of small business, you should take a look at your record.

Let's look at recent data. The most recent Stats Canada statistics from 2011-12 have illustrated that Ontario has lost over 2,500 small businesses, more than 350 medium-sized businesses and more than 300 large businesses. These amount to significant losses in our workforce and do little to put the over half-million unemployed individuals in this province back to work.

I'd like to present to you an example from a constituent who contacted me with difficulties he was experiencing as a result of the policies this government adopted in the previous Bill 119, which came into effect this year. He has a small construction company and is the only person who works within it. He has a bulldozer and works at an hourly rate. He subcontracts most of his work to other companies, and they can't pay him unless he has WSIB. WSIB bases their rates on his company's gross income and not his personal income. However, if he gets hurt, WSIB only pays him what his personal income is and gives him 85% benefits. This is how this government proclaims to help create jobs and stimulate the economy. He says, "My customers will not pay a 7% increase, and I

can't absorb this cost, as well as the increased fuel costs lately. Please help me and other small companies."

Let me provide you another example of a constituent who has a small business and is being burdened by the College of Trades tax. He says, "This affiliation with this college will cost me \$120 per year or more since I have both a motor vehicle mechanic licence as well as a truck and coach mechanic licence." He goes on to talk about how, if he does not join the college, they will post his name for public viewing and publicly shame him to illustrate that he is suspended due to nonpayment of dues. As a result, he will not be able to legally practise his trade or call himself a journeyman. He says, "I successfully completed the specified college program and successfully achieved a certificate of qualification for my trade. I have achieved my college graduation, and as I understand it, this will be removed from me unless I pay this extortion demand."

How can this Liberal government stand before this Legislature with a bill called the Supporting Small Business Act when they have done just about everything but support small business? Bill 105 is just window dressing and does not address the real issues that small businesses face. I think it is safe to say that under this government, even with Bill 105, the future for small business in this province is bleak. Where our party looks to stimulate our economy and create jobs, this government is more focused on driving them out, because even when they are perceived to help small business, they are not. The people on this side of the House aren't fooled, and neither are small businesses.

1530

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I have one.

Mr. Steve Clark: Boy, that was enthusiastic.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's how much I love small business. I will run to make a comment about it.

First of all, I just wanted to thank the member from York–Simcoe for her comments, and for everybody's comments, actually. We support this bill. We want to see it go forward. I want to point a couple of things out, though, that people at home—if anybody's watching out there—should know.

The best place to have a small business in the country of Canada is in Manitoba, the only NDP province. Why? Because the small business tax there is 0%. Here, you heard the government crowing in one of their stand-ups about a 4.5% small business tax. We actually were seminal in having that happen, by the way, because we pushed for 4% and they came back with 4.5%. But in Manitoba, it's 0%. Why? Because small business provides 85% of new jobs. That's the reality. It's not big business. It's not the EllisDons of the world. It's small business.

My son has a small business, I had a small business, and my daughter had a small business. Trust me, Mr.

Speaker, small business folk, most of them, are hanging on by their fingernails these days, and they're doing that because of conditions that have been set into motion by the last 10 years of government rule here—and probably before that, too.

One of the major asks of small business right now is not only about the small business tax, of course, but it's also about MPAC. MPAC and their ridiculous assessments are killing small business. That's something that has to be reformed, and they're very concerned about that. Of course, gridlock is another. There are a number of concerns of theirs, but again, I just want to emphasize that the best place in Canada to have a small business is the province of Manitoba, with zero—did you hear me right? I feel a little bit like Mel Lastman—per cent interest.

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

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It gives me great pleasure to speak on small business today. I think that the best place to debate this and to improve it, if improvement is needed, is at committee. I think we have more than 10 hours of debate.

And I'll say to the member of the third party that I don't think it's because it's an NDP government in Manitoba; it's because they have a wonderful Premier. The NDP in Nova Scotia—look what happened to them. They just disappeared. They went from 31 seats to seven seats, so look at who is leading in Manitoba.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to provide a couple of minutes of comments to the member from York–Simcoe for her speech.

I first would like to comment about something that the minister of community safety and corrections, and the minister responsible for francophone affairs, just said about collapsing debate and allowing this to go to committee. If this government was confident and had the confidence of the public, they wouldn't be afraid to debate their policies. They wouldn't be afraid to stand by, put a speaker up and defend why this bill is before the Legislature.

I believe that the member for York–Simcoe hit the nail on the head when she talked about how this has got a great, cute title. It tinkers around the edges, but it does nothing to reduce the burden that many small businesses in our ridings right across this province have told us about as members of provincial Parliament.

Now, her riding is certainly not the same demographics as my riding, but I think we share some similar concerns: concerns about electricity, the concerns about WSIB premiums and small businesses. I heard loud and clear from people on the weekend how upset they are with this government for increasing those premiums for those small contractors, who, I might suggest, had a lot better coverage before it was mandatory for them to be covered.

As well, the College of Trades: I agree with the member for York–Simcoe and the member for Simcoe

North when they talk about the job-killing trades tax that the College of Trades is putting forward. I can't believe this government can sit there—and the member said it adequately, that they would dump Gatorade on themselves and high-five themselves, thinking that they're the champions of small business. Well, Speaker, they are all wet. I have to tell you that. They're certainly no champions of small business.

This bill tinkers around the edges.

I can't believe the government opposite is afraid to debate their policies in the Legislative Assembly. It's unbelievable, Speaker.

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

Interruption.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: That baby, I can see, puts a smile on all the Conservatives' faces, so maybe they'll be in a good mood later on this afternoon.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: We're always in a good mood.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: You guys are always in a good mood; okay. Well—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Wait until the baby finds out she's \$20,000 in debt.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Our post-secondary education costs are skyrocketing in Ontario. They're the highest in this country, and we need to do something about that for that generation.

We also need to do something about supporting small business. Supporting small business is vital, as I said earlier, to healthy communities.

I hear that there's a consensus that we're all looking to support this bill in order to pass it through the House. I mentioned this before, and I agree with the member opposite, that full, robust debate needs to be continued if anybody wants to speak. Even though we might have full support on a bill, it shouldn't shut a member down from speaking on the bill. So I hope that all who wish to support this bill, who wish to see it pass to committee, will stand up today and speak to the bill and get the voices from their constituencies heard.

In saying that, Speaker, there's a lot more that we can do with this bill. We did make some suggestions earlier as to how to improve our economy with tax loopholes. Larger corporations will take their profits and shift them around from province to province—subsidiary companies, even foreign companies—and it's not a good thing because we have infrastructure here in Ontario that they also have taken advantage of, in a sense. We've got our hospitals, our roads and our education system, so that corporation is benefiting from those services that we have here. We need to close those corporate tax loopholes too, so that money stays in Ontario, and we can generate revenue so that we can better our economy. Everyone has to do their part.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. I'll return to the member for York–Simcoe for her response.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I appreciate the comments made by the member for Parkdale–High Park, the Minister of

Community Safety and Correctional Services and the members for Leeds–Grenville and London–Fanshawe.

I think that there are a couple of things that emerge from this. One is, the opportunity to debate is something that, quite frankly, makes us unique in the world. There are many places where this would not be allowed to happen. I think it's very important that we are able to exercise our right to debate.

I'm inclined to come to the same conclusion as the member for Leeds–Grenville. Why would the government not want to defend what it's doing? It seems very strange to me that they are willing to give up that opportunity.

The question about the regulatory burden is one that comes up in conversation amongst every person, I dare say, who is elected to this Legislature, because there are so many irritants that people have. I can tell you one story where the Ministry of Labour said, "You'll hang the door this way," and the Ministry of the Environment said, "You will hang the door this way." Ministries can't even agree on what they should be doing.

Another constituent—"You have too much chlorine." "You don't have enough"—Ministry of Health, Ministry of the Environment.

When people are trying to earn a living in an environment which is so burdening and even contradictory, it makes it very difficult for them to feel confidence in the kind of regulatory regime that they live and work in. So we should put this task at the head instead of looking at bills that sound cute, like the Supporting Small Businesses Act. We're a long way from that.

1540

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

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Your time will come, member from Simcoe North.

It's an honour once again to be able to stand up on behalf of the good people of Timiskaming–Cochrane and talk about Bill 105, the Supporting Small Businesses Act, 2013. Before the people from Timiskaming–Cochrane who are watching this afternoon—if they are—get too excited, the Supporting Small Businesses Act, although it does have some stuff for small business, is not quite as big as the title. I think other people have said that, and I think I'd like to reiterate that.

It's particularly, for me—I've been a small businessman for 30 years. I had an honest job for 30 years. The one thing I know—my small business was a dairy farm. Small businesses depend on each other, and that's how they make the economy in small towns and in big cities run.

I bought my tires from a small business. It used to be Ivan's Tire Sales; now it's Kal Tire, Royal Tire and Goodyear. I bought my equipment from Brownlee farm equipment in Earlton. I bought some from Trudel farm equipment in New Liskeard. I bought some, actually, from Green Tractors in Earlton—all small and medium-sized businesses. One business couldn't survive without

the other one, and the economy couldn't survive unless all these businesses work together—a very important one.

A few other ones I'll mention: I had a dairy farm, but I also had cash crops, and when I wanted to sell my crops, I usually dealt with Koch Farms in Earlton and sometimes with the temgrain Co-op, but a lot of times with Koch Farms in Earlton.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Are you a real farmer?

Mr. John Vanthof: Well, now I'm a part-time farmer. I talk for a living half my time now, but I used to farm full time.

Small business faces a lot of challenges, and some of those challenges are with regulatory burdens. We need regulations; you're not going to see a member for the NDP standing here saying that we've got to scrap regulation because, you know what? Regulations keep us safe, and regulations keep our products to high standards. But there are cases where regulations just don't make sense. We all have examples; I've got a couple of nice examples.

I have Creative Meats in Markstay, and I'm very fortunate that I have, in my riding, three abattoirs, which is pretty amazing. I have a big riding, but it's fairly far in northern Ontario, and I have three abattoirs.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Give them time; they'll shut them all down.

Mr. John Vanthof: Well, not if we can help it, not over here. Creative Meats is one of my fine abattoirs, and as a service to their customers, they also smoke fish. This is all legal; this is not under the table. This is legal. They smoke fish as a service to their customers.

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: That's right. I believe, if I remember right, Gilles told me it was about 30 pounds—I'm pretty sure it was 30 pounds a month. Anyway, MNR would like him to pave his yard to control the runoff from his fish-smoking operation. Please. There is an example of bureaucracy gone mad.

If there's one thing that small businesses would hope for when they hear a title like "Supporting Small Businesses Act," they would hope that there was someone out there who could actually streamline regulations.

From a small business background, when I hear people say that we've got to get rid of regulations, as a dairy farmer—oh, oh, oh, because the Milk Act is a regulation, and without the Milk Act, we don't have supply management. So we have to be very careful with regulations. The devil is in the details, and the details are in the regulations.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Or in the red tape.

Mr. John Vanthof: Or in the red tape. Thank you, member from Kitchener–Waterloo.

We do have to streamline, and regulations have to make sense. They have to keep people safe; they have to keep products safe. But they have to make sense, because otherwise they're driving people out of business.

Earlier, I was watching some of the remarks here and I was listening to the Speaker as she made her remarks.

She brought up a case of WSIB. I also have problems with WSIB. I've got Barret from Temagami Electrical, who has got exactly the same problem, where the premiums are charged on his gross. That doesn't make sense.

I don't have a problem that everybody has to pay WSIB; I really don't. I would have a lot easier time defending it, though, if when they needed to claim WSIB because they've already paid into it, they could actually claim what was rightfully theirs when they are hurt. I don't know about the rest of the offices, about the other 106 representatives here, but I know in my office some of the toughest cases and some of the most gut-wrenching cases are the WSIB cases, people who you know aren't trying to rip off the system; they're not trying to do things that are unjust. They're just trying to claim what is rightfully theirs because they paid into a program that was supposed to protect them for when they were hurt at work, a program that is good in principle, a program that should work. But when they're unfortunate enough—because no one wants to get hurt at work—when they're unfortunate enough to get hurt and for some reason they can't get what's due to them, their lives, in some cases, are decimated. Those are the toughest cases we have to come to our office.

Do I believe that everybody should pay into WSIB? Yes, but WSIB should work. But that isn't covered in the Supporting Small Businesses Act. It's a very big part of small business, but it's not covered under this act.

What is covered under this act is there's a bit bigger exemption for the EHT premium, from \$400,000 to \$450,000, if your payroll is from \$400,000 up to \$450,000. That's a fairly big business, but still kind of a small business. For me and for the other members, the difference between a small business and the big, ugly corporation—because, you know, there are lots of regular small corporations, too. A lot of my farmer friends are corporations, right? The difference is that a small business is invested in the community, and if the community does well or does badly, they ride it out. The difference with a big corporation is if the community is not doing so well, they just go to their other branch plant in Mexico. There's the difference. When we suggested taking this exemption out for big companies, they're the people we wanted to catch, the people who have the lawyers and the accountants, and they have no patriotism to their town, no loyalty.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: No skin in the game.

Mr. John Vanthof: No skin in the game; that's a good one. They just look where they can make the biggest profit on their dollar, because they're totally mobile and they really couldn't care less. Those are the people who we're trying to make pay their fair share.

That is something that we really have to keep in mind here, folks. No one likes to pay taxes. No one likes to see their tax dollars wasted—something that people on the other side haven't been that good at. They're really good at wasting but not too good at figuring that out. Everyone should pay their fair share. That's what we were trying to

do when we suggested that outfits like the Royal Bank shouldn't qualify for this exemption.

1550

One of the other things we pushed hard for—and it is kind of included in this bill—is that people can't split up their companies so they have separate little payrolls to get that exemption.

There are some things that are in this bill. It should perhaps have a smaller title.

I support this bill going to committee, but there are a lot of things that we could do to make Ontario an even better place, a much better place, for the people who actually make this economy run, the people who are invested in this province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise to speak about Bill 105. We have spent 10 hours and 30 minutes on this debate, and furthermore, 42 members have spoken on this bill, whether it's 10 minutes or 20 minutes. I just heard the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane say he supports this bill going to committee, unless I heard that wrong. It's time to go to committee and further discuss and fine-tune the bill.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I look forward to my chance to speak on this Bill 105. Hopefully, it will come up this afternoon. I think it's funny that the member opposite would be talking about the rights of people talking to bills. It's our chance to give input. Sometimes we even have good input that they support, but not often, as in this bill.

But the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane stood up and was able to use his time. I guess it disappoints me when I hear him talk about the big, ugly corporations because I think if you look around at these supposedly big, ugly corporations, some of them have done very well by Canada, and we've done very well by them. I think that they could be important job creators.

But unfortunately, we live in a world today where the borders have disappeared. No longer can we demand people to pay more for a product in Canada because it's made in Canada. People want to see quality, and they want to see something that's competitive.

We're seeing more and more of our companies move because they can no longer be competitive and stay in Ontario. They can no longer pay double the price of electricity that they pay in Quebec, Manitoba or Michigan.

But whose fault is that? Is that the fault of the corporations that are seeking to get the best deal they can for their customers, or is it the fault of this government, this Liberal government that has made working in Ontario unaffordable? If they were to go back in 2003 and say they were going to double or triple hydro rates, do you think that would have happened? Do you think they would have had the chance to do that? No.

They talked last week, bragging about closing down the coal plants—clearly five or six years later than they promised and at the expense of the consumers in Ontario.

I look forward to my chance. I just heard that the best speaker is coming up very soon, so we'll hear him talk.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I appreciate the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry's preamble to me speaking in the next couple or 10 minutes. I don't think I'm going to be the best speaker, but I certainly will contribute to the debate—

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: One of the best. I appreciate that.

I do want to commend my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane, who, as a small business owner, knows the challenges and knows what it takes to own and operate and put your heart and soul into a small business in the province of Ontario, not only a small business of general sorts but one in the agriculture industry that adds value: our local food production. I've often said, when it comes to the importance of business, of our economy, we can have manufacturing out the wazoo—I don't know if that's parliamentary—

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: No, you can't say that? I just did.

But, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that the free trade agreement has shown us is that manufacturers will go to the lowest-wage jurisdictions that they possibly can, but our primary food producers, those farmers who feed us, if we lose them, then we are at risk in terms of the sovereignty of our country. If you lose the ability to feed yourself as a province, as a jurisdiction or as a nation, you are at incredible risk of losing your sovereignty, which is all the more reason that we have to find various mechanisms to support our small businesses and our primary producers, who are mainly small businesses. They have been exceedingly washed away by multilateral free trade agreements like the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, GATT, in 1988—they supported, they initiated it, the Conservatives did—the free trade agreement, NAFTA, and now CETA. These are detrimental to our domestic economy. I can't believe that nobody gets it in here except the New Democrats, but we'll stand alone in support of small business in the province of Ontario.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's my pleasure to rise yet again on this one, and perhaps talk about a few small business success stories, such as we've seen in western Mississauga. During the recession, our area became an aerospace hub. One of the firms leading it started out as a small business, and that firm, Cyclone Manufacturing, would actually benefit—even though it's now a large business, a firm such as Cyclone at its stage of development six or seven years ago would have benefited from exactly the measures proposed by this bill.

We need to have those measures enacted. We need to have small businesses collecting the benefits and we need to have small businesses putting that money to work in

our communities. The best way to do that is to get this debate finished, get this bill to committee and keep it moving.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. We go back to the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane for his response.

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, it's an honour to be able to stand up. I would like to thank the member from Scarborough–Agincourt, the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, the member from Essex and the member from Mississauga–Streetsville.

First of all, to the member from Scarborough–Agincourt, I think—

Interjection: You may not have been the best speaker, but you're close.

Mr. John Vanthof: No.

I resent the fact that there's some kind of insinuation that we shouldn't be able to put the feelings of our constituents on the record in this House. That's what we were elected to do, and if we choose to have something that is important that we believe should be put on the record about regulation or about WSIB, and if this is the only chance we can do it, I fully believe it's our job, our responsibility, to make that happen.

To the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, I would like to make it clear that I was differentiating between small business and big business. There are many big businesses in my riding, and my riding depends on big multinational corporations. What I'm trying to get at is that the big, multinational corporations need to pay their fair share. We fully support—I have big mining conglomerates in my riding and big forestry conglomerates in my riding, and we work together with them all the time. They play with a different rule book than small business, and that's what I was trying to say.

Member from Essex, I agree that farmers and agribusinesses are very important to this great province.

The member from Mississauga–Streetsville took some time to talk about how he felt this bill would help. That was his time to do that, and I appreciate that. We will want this bill to go forward and be made stronger in committee, but everyone should have the right to speak to it.

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

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm happy to speak today to Bill 105, An Act to amend the Employer Health Tax Act. It's a bit rich with this government bringing out a small business type of tax—I've just been jotting down things throughout the afternoon, a kind of list of things they've done to make it really tough for small businesses. This original bill in 1996, going to \$400,000, was a Mike Harris piece of legislation, and although it's taken them 10 years in government, they are increasing it. So let's at least say at this point that the government gets it a little bit.

However, I have to look at the kind of complaints I get today. I haven't seen the kind of complaints I'm getting

today—no offence to the New Democratic Party, but the last time we got the kind of complaints from small business people that I'm getting today was in 1995, when Mike Harris made changes to a lot of the—

Mr. John Vanthof: Were you there with Mike Harris? Were you there?

1600

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I wasn't here, but I was a small business man at the time. I can tell you at the time I was managing a small business, and every week we would have to send a fax to Mike Harris's office and say, "Please keep up the work you're doing," because most of us were almost out of business following the five years of Bob Rae.

However, we made those changes. We were criticized for things the Harris government had done. Of course, the main criticism came from the current government.

So what have they really done to help small businesses? Well, I guess the first thing you could look at is the hydro rates in the province of Ontario and where we're going with this ridiculous hydro system that seems to be completely out of control. Each and every week, we hear a new idea, a new announcement. We've had so many Ministers of Energy that I can't even count how many have been there anymore. But you know what? What I do know is that hydro rates are going up all the time, continually, all the time.

Probably the biggest disaster to small business that we have seen as a result of hydro is the global adjustment. I can tell you one case, although it's not a small business but it runs on a business procedure, is a hospital. Our local hospital—and I'm not going to mention the name of it because someone will probably be critical of them—it's over \$500,000 a year of health care money that is going to pay the global adjustment fund. Add all that up across Ontario and see what that means. But all these little manufacturers that are using hydro as their main source of energy are paying the global adjustment fee, too, what are they getting out of it? Nothing. Increased costs, making it more difficult for them to compete with the American states.

I can't say for a second that a Conservative government, particularly myself, would not support this bill in the end. I do support it going to committee, and I support everybody having a chance to speak on it. I support the fact that, when we get it to committee, we'll listen to recommendations and amendments. That's what we do in committee, and I hope it can happen.

But if you're talking about a government—I heard some of the comments earlier. Let's talk about the WSIB for a second. Bill 119, does anybody remember that? Bill 119 added about \$11,000 onto the costs of the average contracting business. That's \$11,000. They brag about increasing it here a little bit, but you know what? That was an actual cost. People who had their own insurance 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, they had their private insurance, and now they're paying two ways because the WSIB doesn't cover those people after their workday is done. That alone is reason for cause. At the time, we

pointed it out. I forget how many businesses were impacted by that, but to the tune of literally thousands of businesses in the province of Ontario.

That takes us into one of my favourite topics in my critic's portfolio: the College of Trades. As recently as last week, the government has not proclaimed section 7 of the College of Trades Act. So I brought a private member's bill to say, "Well, if you're not going to proclaim it, why would you let this hang over someone's head, this section 7?" That just means the College of Trades can, in fact, impose this. I want it removed from the piece of legislation originally so that no government and no College of Trades board of directors can actually tax the employers. There's no reason in the world they should be taxed. It should never have even been in the act. But the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities says, "Well, you know what? We're not proclaiming it. What's wrong with you? Blah, blah, blah, blah." So what's wrong with me? I want it removed. I don't want it looming over the heads of our small businesses across this province of Ontario. And I hear it continually from our contractors etc.

Also look at what this College of Trades has done. You've imposed a fee to hire trades cops. The trades cops are going out there, two at a time, by the way, and they're running into hairdressing salons. Give me a break. If a woman or a man doesn't like the haircut they're getting, they go to another hairstylist. They don't need two big thugs walking through the door in a fancy car and fancy uniforms—almost like the hair police or something—and saying, "Where's your licence?" Where have we gone in this province that we've become so pathetic that we need a trades cop to walk into a hairdressing salon? How bad has it got here? Is it really that bad? This isn't Ecuador. This isn't Venezuela. This is Ontario. Give people a chance. Let these hairdressers and barbers have a chance to do their job. Who cares if they don't have a bloody licence? If they don't have a licence, who even cares? What's the downside of it? Next thing, we'll be going after ratios for barbers, making sure that you have 3 to 1, making sure you never have an apprentice barber in there or apprentice hair salon. Can you imagine how pathetic that is? And they haven't even started on the non-compulsory trades. That's our little College of Trades. I think we should remove section 7 and support the bill that I've got.

God, have I only got three minutes left? Oh, this is getting bad. I should have been here for the 20-minute round.

Hey, I don't know how many of you people are hearing about abattoirs and meat inspectors. There's hardly anybody left to inspect. Yet they come in now, and I've got them in—I understand that as many as four different inspectors can go into a meat shop now. The member from—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Timiskaming–Cochrane.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: —Timiskaming–Cochrane mentioned the smoked salmon. I have the same situation. They come from the MNR. They come from Peter-

borough to my area to check out one company that has got an unbelievable reputation for good service, probably one of the top places you can buy food north of Toronto. This MNR group is nagging this guy continually over the fact that he smokes salmon, he smokes meat, and he's just not quite doing it perfectly. But it gives the guys from Peterborough a good reason to drive all the way over to Orillia to nag this guy for the day. That's the kind of support you want to give small business, so half their time is spent talking to the inspectors.

I can go on and on and on here. I've also got to tell you—and it's sort of a topic that I hear a lot about from our general contractors and people with gravel pits etc. Those people are basically telling me, "We're going to give up." There's so much red tape. There's so much influence by the government and the government ministries, the silos they're all working in that they're saying to me, "The next step, we're done. We're just shutting the doors and getting out of it." I heard that as recently as Friday night with one businessman. He said, "We just put up with so much all the time." Everything is oversight: the College of Trades, the Ministry of Labour, all the different municipal bylaws.

The fact of the matter is, it's not fun being in business, and when it's not fun being in business they don't spend money. They're not entrepreneurial anymore. That becomes a real problem, Mr. Speaker, when you lose entrepreneurship. That's what's happening in Ontario right now. There's not a lot of small businesses that are expanding. There was a recent study done and I think it said that—they asked small business people, "How many of you would actually expand?" Something like 70% of people said there was not a hope of expanding or hiring more people, because I think in a lot of cases the fun has gone out of it. That's wrong in a province like Ontario that has always, since 1867, been the engine that has driven this Canadian economy. They've done phenomenal work, our small businesses, and they've created most of the jobs. When Ford or GM are laying people off sometimes, the reality is that small businesses have been the people who have picked up the slack. It is only the small businesses in the private sector that will create the jobs and get us out of this mess that this government has got us in. That's the only thing we can do. Even then, it's going to be one hard, hard job to do that, because when you're spending at the rate of \$1.9 million an hour more than you're taking in, you've got a problem. Where's that money going to come from? Who are these people who will drive that economy?

I appreciate the opportunity to speak. I'll take someone else's time if I'm allowed to do that, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate that opportunity to speak to Bill 105 today. Thank you very much for this time.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to actually stand up and talk about a piece of legislation which does have the potential to positively impact small and medium-sized businesses in the province. I listened closely to the

previous speaker's comments, and he brings those unique stories to this House, which is his job.

I will say, though, that ultimately the way that we see the world and the way the PC caucus sees the world are very different. We do see this as a matter of fairness. Certainly there's been enough consultation on it. There's no need to strike a panel on this. The people from the province who are directly involved with small and medium-sized businesses have weighed in. I think it's important for us to know that the chambers of commerce and small businesses support this change because of the exemption increase to \$450,000.

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You know what's really key is that what they recognize, and what they see, is that at least in this minority government setting we've come together. We've tried to find some consensus. I mean, we've been very clear that we feel that this piece of legislation can be stronger, and actually it will be stronger because of the minority government setting.

But there are many start-ups in Kitchener–Waterloo who are looking for anything to make the economy stronger and to make their reality as a start-up business potentially stronger. So they see this as a small step, a signal from this Legislature that someone here is listening, and I think what we're saying back to them is that, okay, this is a good first step. We want it to get to committee. We want to be part of a positive solution to grow the economy for small and medium-sized businesses. We'll be supporting Bill 105, and we'll be extracting some concessions in that regard.

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

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise again to speak in support of Bill 105. Mr. Speaker, today we have 50 members from the House, from all three parties, whose support is on record about this bill. Furthermore, we have about 11 hours of debate to date, okay?

I want to clarify that the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane accused, or criticized me—that members don't have a right to speak. I want to be on record: There's ample opportunity to speak either in support or against Bill 105, either through the chamber here or when this bill goes to committee.

As you know, when we go to the standing committee, not only will members go through clause by clause, but it also allows Ontarians to come before the standing committee to improve the bill. It's absolutely important that everyone who wishes to speak can speak.

I also want to remind the member from Simcoe North that we're debating Bill 105. It's not about the Ontario College of Trades. At the end of the day, I also hear from constituents who do support the College of Trades, to make sure that work from small businesses is being protected and seniors are not being taken to the cleaners because of shoddy, unethical construction work.

So, Mr. Speaker, let's have a healthy conversation, but at the end of the day, this bill needs to go to committee so that we could have more robust conversation to improve the bill.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to respond to the member for Simcoe North's comments. I have to tell you, Garfield Dunlop, the member for Simcoe North, is just a wonderful MPP. He's done such a great job in any portfolio that he's had. I know he's a former community safety critic.

I had the pleasure of being at the Ontario Provincial Police Association President's Banquet on Thursday—president Jim Christie. I know that Garfield was great to introduce me around to some folks. The minister was very cordial as well and recognized me.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I offered you a ride.

Mr. Steve Clark: I know you did. She offered me a ride. That's right; she did. She offered me a ride in the company car.

I do want to say that the member speaks with a lot of experience. I know, in my riding, I hear a lot from my constituents. He mentioned hydro rates and the global adjustment. I hear that a lot. I heard it this morning at an event in my riding.

But it's the other issues that he mentioned, specifically the WSIB, Bill 119: I get that all the time. I got it on the weekend at car shows, at festivals and events, from my neighbours. This is a huge obstacle for small business. I read into the record last week comments from some of my constituents.

But it's the issue with the College of Trades: The member for Simcoe North has had over 125 meetings with tradespeople, and he speaks with experience. He's a plumber by trade. He ran a small business, as he said. He was a small business person in 1995, before he was elected in 1999.

Section 7: I think this is a no-brainer. The government should grab his private member's bill, enact it, give it three readings to prove to small business owners that section 7 shouldn't go through.

And as well with the trades cops: I can't believe that trades cops go to barbers and hairdressers. That's totally ridiculous, Mr. Speaker, totally ridiculous.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I want to, actually, add my voice to the member from Simcoe North. He mentioned the importance of entrepreneurship and the fact that there seemed to be a growing trend that entrepreneurs weren't in a position or weren't able to expand, or weren't interested in expanding, not because they didn't want to, actually, but because the conditions were just not there for them to expand.

I think that's a troubling trend, because what we're seeing in our societies is that the societies where the industries or the communities are most successful are the ones that are able to encourage entrepreneurship, particularly knowledge-based entrepreneurship. We look at a country like South Korea, which has very limited natural resources, but they have one of the most powerful economies in the world because of their ability to transfer

the knowledge of their citizens into entrepreneurship, innovation and development. They have some of the most successful companies because of that.

Many economists and experts in the field of how to develop economies have talked about the future being a place where it won't be about as many multinational or large corporations; it will be about many smaller, knowledge-based, entrepreneurial organizations. If we want to keep up with the times, and if that's the direction that we're headed in, we need to make sure we create a climate that supports those small businesses and those entrepreneurs.

The problem with this bill is, though it adds a small benefit, it's not a changing of the climate. It's not an innovative approach to creating a place where small business can thrive and flourish. It's not doing that, and that's what we need to see in this province. We need to see a concerted effort to look at the differences between the smaller businesses and the medium-sized and the large ones, and what we can actually do to implement policies that would encourage their growth and encourage their flourishing. That's what we need to see more of.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Okay, that concludes our questions and comments. I return to the member for Simcoe North for his response.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I appreciate the comments from the members from Kitchener–Waterloo, Scarborough–Agincourt, Leeds–Grenville and Bramalea–Gore–Malton.

I think most people in the House, in their comments, have sort of come up with the same trend: If Bill 105 is an improvement to the employer health tax, we're there to support it.

I think what we're trying to point out, though, overall—and I think the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton summed it up as well, in saying that you've got to change this mentality where you lose this entrepreneurship. I think we've really taken a step backwards that way.

It's not that you're losing it from everybody. There are a lot of small business people who are aggressive no matter what, but I think it's the higher percentage of people, people who just can't stand the red tape anymore. They're tired of trying to collect bills, and government oversight, and what they're saying is, "You know what? I just don't want to hire anybody else." In fact, some people say, "Well, if you want to start a small business in Ontario anymore, you get a big business and you let it grow, and it becomes a small business." I hear that. I'm not kidding. I hear that from people, particularly in construction and that. That's what they're telling me. I mean, I'm not talking to people around the province who have doubled the size of their work crews or anything like that. That would be wonderful news. I think most people feel that there's been a real issue in the fact that they've lost this sense of entrepreneurship and creating jobs and buying new trucks and expanding their shops etc. That's a problem.

I look forward to further debate, and I also look forward to the kind of amendments that might be made to the bill at committee as we move this forward.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 105, the Supporting Small Businesses Act. As I mentioned, I believe, in one of my two-minute hits previously, I'm proud to be the husband of a small business owner. My wife, Jenny, is the fourth generation of a small business in LaSalle, a car dealership, a Chevy dealership, which they have owned and operated as a family business for 83 years. It's a long time.

Applause.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much to my colleagues.

It's a long, long time, so they know how to do it right. They know how to service their clientele, they know how to service their community and they know how to be a part of their community. They are a really integral part of their community in LaSalle.

I'm incredibly proud of that business and the workers there. They deliver great service, and I buy all my vehicles from that dealership. Imagine that.

Interjection: As you should.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: As I should; of course I should. They're General Motors products.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, I come from the riding of Essex. Windsor and Essex county are really at the epicentre of manufacturing in Ontario. We are also, unfortunately, the canary in the coal mine when it comes to the implications of free trade agreements because, as I have often said, I could almost drive a golf ball across the Detroit River onto the other side; we are so close. That's because I can drive a golf ball pretty far, but we are very close to Detroit and the state of Michigan, which has a heavy reliance on the automotive sector as well.

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So when the initial free trade agreement came around, the FTA, myself as a youngster and my parents—my mom was an automotive worker at GM—went and we protested. We actually blockaded the Ambassador Bridge. It was the first and only time that that bridge had ever been blocked by human beings in protest to anything. In fact, it was in protest, and we joined farmers and small businesspeople in protest to the original free trade agreement. Lo and behold, there was an election platform on behalf of Jean Chrétien to not pursue the North American Free Trade Agreement, which involved Mexico, but we saw that that went ahead after the election.

We have seen, since that time, the degradation of our regional economic base in terms of our tier-one manufacturers and, ultimately, the suppliers and those small businesses that rely on having a heavy industrial presence and large manufacturing base. They have all left subsequent to the free trade agreements that we signed. Why have they left? Well, because NAFTA says you can produce goods and services abroad in the cheapest wage jurisdictions on the planet and sell them without tariffs to countries like Canada and the United States. Of course, there are some measures of reciprocity there but not enough to make up for the trade imbalance that we have subsequently when it comes to manufacturing.

My point is that those large manufacturers, those large corporations that originally were encompassed under the employee health tax benefit reduction, really are few and far between these days. They operate in other jurisdictions and simply sell us our goods. I hear often in this House that we're losing so many jobs in manufacturing. Well, that happened well before the first sitting of this session. It certainly happened well before the Liberal government took place. It happened, really, in the early 1990s and late 1980s when these trade agreements were signed.

I've felt it. I see it in my communities every day. I see it with the closing and orphaning of massive manufacturing plants. I look at the Lear plant that my mom used to work at, which is just an empty vacant lot. At one point, it employed 4,000 people. Those are good-paying manufacturing jobs. Where did those jobs go? They went to Mexico—gone. See you later. So to point to the real nucleus of where our manufacturing jobs were left and what existed prior to that was the Auto Pact, which said that if you're going to sell it here, you're going to build it here. Was it a protectionist mechanism? I think it was a fairness mechanism.

All that being said, the makeup of a healthy economy is what I'm pointing to, where large manufacturers had a responsibility. They had a footprint in this country, and they created jobs. That trickled down to our smaller communities. In my riding of Essex, a beautiful, wonderful riding, there are various hamlets, about eight or nine different hamlets: Essex, Belle River, LaSalle, Amherstburg, Kingsville, Ruthven, Pointe aux Roches, Cottam, Comber. These are small towns, and they have small businesses. This is what I see. When I talk about small businesses, I see the small automotive repair shop. I see the small diner, your hairdressers, the Main Street where you've got your shops there, and there are people who live sometimes within the building, on top of the building or behind the building or somewhere in that community. Over the last dozen years, I have seen those storefronts vacated and empty storefronts with cardboard on the doors, out of business without any real hope of returning. It speaks to a fundamental failure in our broader economic strategy here, one in fact in which this province and this country don't have a manufacturing strategy. It's ad hoc; we just make it up as we go. Potentially, this is one of the ad hoc measures that came about, where the employer health tax credit was given to large employers, which we know are not the primary job creators at this very moment. As important as they are, they haven't been pulling their weight. They have been fleeing this jurisdiction for the cheapest wage jurisdictions on the planet.

Again, that's just my opinion, my impression of where we have come from and what the real issues are that haven't been tackled here. Will this be one measure that supports small businesses? I think it will be. Again, I'll consult my wife to see if it has any impact on her small business.

By and large, I think it's a fairness measure, one that makes sense to the broader public out there, that large

employers that far surpass the threshold here, in terms of the \$450,000 employee tax range, should not be exempt from that. They can certainly afford to do that. Companies like EllisDon, which profited somewhere in excess of \$3 billion annually, are the companies that we certainly think can contribute a little bit. It speaks to the broader strategy that we have here when it comes to supporting small business.

I will tell you, and it has been widely reported and widely spoken about, at least from our New Democratic caucus, that the province of Manitoba, under a New Democratic government for the last eight years, I believe—a majority New Democratic government—has successively lowered the provincial small business tax. I believe it started at about 4%, 4.5%, where ours is right now. Currently, guess what the small business tax is there in Manitoba? Anybody know? Raise your hand. Anybody know?

Interjection: Zero.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Our caucus knows, because it's zero; it's nothing. They absolutely support their small businesses in the province because they know that they are economic generators. They support them because they know they're members of their community. They know that they actually create jobs, and they know that they contribute to regional economic development. That's a signal, a strong signal, from a New Democratic government that they can—we can—support small businesses, in our province, in our jurisdictions, not piecemeal approaches, as we've seen not only with this bill but also so many others that have come across the floor of this House, but with one that I think is an important measure that signals the full, unequivocal support of small business and the understanding of the role that they play.

I spoke earlier about consumer confidence. We have one of the highest personal debt ratios in this province right now. People are holding more debt, whether it be credit card debt or household debt or student loans, than any other place in Confederation. Until we address that issue, so people feel consumer confidence to not only tackle their debt and to manage their personal finances but also that their employment is secure—those historic jobs that I talked about that used to be in Essex county, those ones that my mom had, that were able to sustain a family, that had benefits and a pension, until we get back to that era, then all the efforts that are put forward by this government, as I've seen them, are for naught because the larger issues continue to loom, in terms of overreaching, overarching, multilateral trade agreements like the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, CETA, which will play havoc with our domestic economy. It will wreak havoc on our manufacturing and our agricultural base and put us even further behind than we currently are.

I appreciate the time, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Grant Crack: Thanks to everyone who spoke on this bill. There has been a number of members in this House who have spoken at length. We've had 11 hours of debate, and over 50 speakers. It's starting to remind me of what happened over the last year and a half, when a lot of the legislation was stalled.

I urge all members who support this bill to pass it. Let's get the second reading passed. Let's get it into committee. Let's get it there so that we can really do the work that needs to be done, perhaps to strengthen it, make it better.

Without circumventing the democratic process, I think, we can move forward on this rather rapidly.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to comment on the member from Essex. I guess I really wonder about his belief in these trade agreements. Canada is a trade exporter—there's a positive trade balance. If we can't protect our markets where we're able to sell our products, what hope do we have that these countries will allow our products to leave?

1630

We talk about small businesses and their inability to compete. Do we simply want to put up a wall and no longer have access to the products? Everybody in this House has a BlackBerry that was invented and, at one time, was produced in Ontario. Through the regulation, the rules—these are manufactured products that are very high tech, manufactured, but we cannot compete, even in the fields where we specialize and export our technology. They send them outside the country because they can't afford the inputs; the hydro and the regulation behind things. It's one thing not being able to afford the labour and setting the outputs, it's another thing when you're mechanizing these products, and it's still cheaper to do it elsewhere. That's what we've seen from this government.

It's interesting as well that they—the third party—talk about some of the issues, but everybody remembers the Bob Rae days and what happened then. I think the biggest problem this party has is people's memories. They ran this province into the ground. They were crushed by the voters because we could no longer afford to give our people more days off just to help balance the books. You've got to balance the books.

We've seen this latest Liberal government go to even higher ranks. These guys did a great job on our debt; they brought us to a point where we can hardly afford to live in this province. But as good of a job as they did, the Liberals have really polished this off and done a great job: We're heading into a debt of \$30,000 per person in this province.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm pleased to rise here to speak on behalf of my constituents in London West and to respond to some of the comments that were made by the member for Essex.

I think he made a really important point when he talked about the purpose of a tax structure. A tax

structure is supposed to be fair; it's supposed to ensure that tax incentives go to the companies and the individuals who are doing the most to create jobs. The small businesses in our economy that provide employment, that make our communities economically prosperous—our tax system should be geared to ensuring that those small businesses have the support that they need to do what they do so well, which is to create jobs.

Companies that get public dollars in the way of forgone tax revenues have an obligation to use the public dollars that they get, in terms of not having to pay taxes, to keep our economy moving. I think that this is one of the key issues or key features of this legislation, that it eliminates a tax exemption for employers with payrolls of \$5 million or more from paying the employee health tax. There's no reason that those very large corporations should be subsidized through public dollars with an exemption for the employer health tax when they are not the businesses that create jobs.

I really thank the member for Essex for making those comments. This is a very important issue for my constituents in London West. We are pleased to support this legislation and want to see it go to committee so that it can be improved even more.

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

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 105 in response to the comments made by the member from Essex. I was a small business man for most of my 35 years—it grew to be a larger business. All issues have to be considered, and I'm glad to see that the exemption on the health tax has been raised from \$400,000 to \$450,000. I think that's great.

Small businesses are encouraged by our government. We have reduced the tax rates probably about 50% in the last four years. In successive budgets, they've come down; they're still coming down. This is important. We know where the jobs are created in our province, and it's extremely important.

I hope that we can end the debate fairly soon and that it goes to committee and then comes back here and becomes law. For small businesses, it's not a huge change, but it's an important change and it shows that we're still working toward making the burden for small businesses less and less. That has been done, as well, through getting rid of red tape as much as we can. This is part of the government's policy for the last three or four years, and it has been happening.

I hope that everyone supports the bill, that we get it to committee and that we get it back here and make it legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the questions and comments. We return to the member for Essex for his reply.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I want to thank the members for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, London West and Ottawa–Orléans for their comments.

I failed to mention that, living on the border of Detroit and Windsor and having such a large prominence of

accessibility to the US market, the whole discussion and debate around cross-border shopping has been a prevalent one within our area for generations, really. Many times we see people go across the bridge and shop in the States. They fill up their trucks and do that.

I can tell you personally that my parents didn't do that. We made a conscious decision to shop locally. We were actually pretty vocal about the need to support small businesses and to shop locally, and I know my dad lost a couple of friends over it, in terms of him arguing with people about the importance of keeping your dollars in your country and supporting the people who support you.

The member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry makes the case for cross-border shopping when he says that if Blackberry is making their product overseas, at least we're getting a cheaper product. Well, yes, we may very well be getting a cheaper product, but we don't have any jobs attached to that. Why not ensure that we promote ourselves and that we have the resources here to expand domestic production and value-added jobs, and not simply be a resource exporter, but also somebody who develops and has a plan and a strategy around comprehensive strategic economic development, whether it be in large businesses or small businesses? We have this laissez-faire attitude—let it be; let the free market reign; it doesn't matter; let the chips fall where they may. That's your problem here in this House. Nobody seems to want to acknowledge it, but it's staring you in the face, and I can't wait to get the chance to address it as government.

Mr. John O'Toole: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Durham on a point of order.

Mr. John O'Toole: With your indulgence, Speaker, I'd like to introduce a very good friend of mine from Peterborough, Dave Hacke. He's here with one of his friends, Patrick McCarthy, from the Ontario Long Term Care Association. More importantly, he's from Peterborough and he's a great supporter of Scott Stewart, our PC candidate for the riding of Durham.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's not technically a point of order, but we welcome you to the Legislature nonetheless.

Mr. Michael Harris: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member from Kitchener–Conestoga on a point of order.

Mr. Michael Harris: Earlier today, my colleague from Leeds–Grenville rose on a point of order with regard specifically to the Minister of the Environment not responding to order paper questions that were submitted. I would further like to add my name to that growing list of responses to order paper questions that had been submitted about six months ago and which are in fact roughly a month late.

I'll go on to read some of them. For instance, 230: "Would the Minister of the Environment please provide the waste diversion targets and the actual waste diversion rates for the municipal hazardous or special waste program"—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I rule on this point of order, and find that the member for Kitchener–Conestoga does have a valid point of order, although he doesn't have to read the questions again.

I would remind the government that they are required, under standing order 39(i), to file a response within 24 sessional days. The government's responses are now overdue and I would ask that one of the ministers give some indication as to when the response will be forthcoming.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask one of the ministers who are present in the House to inform the House as to when the response is likely to be forthcoming.

I'm pleased to recognize the Minister of Community Safety.

1640

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I'm pleased to answer on behalf of the government. As it is the practice, the minister will reply. Although in the question that was asked, we know that the environment is not the priority for this member, but I'll make sure that he does answer.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry on a point of order.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I, too, reviewing back, am appalled by the record of the order paper questions. I submitted six questions almost six months ago to the Minister of Consumer Services, and I have not received answers—examples like Tarion coverage of installations that are part of the building's structure, with built-in HVAC systems being included.

I think that six months is—there's no excuse for that type of delinquency, and I think it's time that we move on with the question—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Upon checking with the table staff, we find that the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry does, in fact, have a valid point of order.

Again, I need to remind the government ministers who are present in the House that they are required, under standing order 39(i), to file a response to order paper questions within 24 sessional days. Those responses are now overdue, and I need to again ask one of the ministers in the House to give the House some indication as to when the response will be forthcoming.

I again recognize the Minister of Community Safety.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: As I said not very long ago, Mr. Speaker, it's not that they do care about the environment, but we'll make sure that we answer as soon as possible.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Community and Social Services on a point of order.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, in 2000, when I was elected, I had a number of questions, and I put a couple of those questions, as part of the order paper, in 2001, and I'm still waiting for answers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the table staff to see if they have any records of standing order paper questions from 2001.

I don't find that the member has a valid point of order.

Further debate? The member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Applause.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you, thank you. I appreciate that from my colleagues.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's because you're wearing blue.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Perhaps it's because of the colour of my turban, which is no indication of the colour of my politics.

I'm pleased to rise and speak on Bill 105, Supporting Small Businesses Act. My colleague from Kitchener-Waterloo actually raised a great point, and in my comments, I want to address this.

Time and time again—and it's not just me—my colleagues, both in the NDP and in the Conservative Party, have said that this bill doesn't do very much, and it seems to be a bit of a trend. It's not just this bill but many of the bills that are brought before this House by the Liberal government. The response from both the Conservatives and the NDP—we're saying the same thing. One of the points that we're saying is that you're not really bringing forward any ideas that are significant in their impact on Ontario. Your goals and your ambitions are set—your aim is so low, and I want to question why it is that your bills are so unambitious.

It's a question that the member from Kitchener-Waterloo kind of prompted me to ask and to look at, because if you look at what this bill is doing—and it has been mentioned—really, there's an exemption on the employment health tax. In fairness, it makes sense; it's something that we asked for. We said that you needed to bring forward a bill that addressed the fact that companies making less than \$5 million in payroll, or that have less than \$5 million in payroll, are obviously in a significantly different position than companies that make over \$5 million—their payroll is over \$5 million. The exemption shouldn't exist for companies that have a payroll over \$5 million—fair. We've asked for you to do this, and you're finally bringing it forward.

But if you're calling the bill the Supporting Small Businesses Act, that's a pretty bold name for your bill. The content of the bill is not really bold at all, right? I mean, the bill should be called Getting Rid of the Exemption on the Employer Health Tax. That would be an appropriate bill. And you know what? We wouldn't get up here and say that this bill isn't doing very much. If the bill was called what it is, which is the “getting rid of the exemption” bill, then we would get up and say, “You know what? Your bill is doing exactly what you're

saying you're doing.” But it's when you come up with these bold names like Supporting Small Businesses that it causes us to question where the actual support for small business is.

I think about the small businesses in my riding. I think about all the restaurants, the retail, the professional services, the small manufacturers, the services that are provided and the service-industry-related small businesses. I think they're calling out for some real assistance. They could benefit from a shift in the way we treat them. If we really wanted to support small businesses, we'd do something more significant, something more innovative, something more impactful.

My colleague from Essex brought up a great point. If you look at Manitoba—this is an NDP idea from an NDP government in Manitoba. It's innovative. It's a bold and a strong message being sent in Manitoba, where they have a 0% small business tax credit for companies—or a 0% corporate tax rate provincially for small businesses that net less than \$500,000. That's a progressive idea that supports small businesses in a meaningful way.

When I think about what we can do to support small business, there was a group of students that came to my office, and they had a very innovative idea. What they wanted to do was, they thought that the downtown core of Brampton was kind of failing; it was kind of falling behind. There wasn't a lot of growth in downtown Brampton. So they thought to invigorate and instill some growth and to create some entrepreneurial spirit in the hub of downtown Brampton. Their idea was to take a building and to create something that's very commonly done in Toronto, and it's a great idea. There's the 401 building on Spadina and Adelaide which has done this. What they do is they take a building and they share the day-to-day costs. They share the cost of the wireless Internet. They share the cost of the printing. They set up small offices that are affordable, that have a shared-cost mechanism, and they have the ability for the different businesses that are set up there to work with each other. They have a theme. They are small businesses. They're entrepreneurial. They have innovative ideas, and they're from various sectors. So they can combine graphics design with magazines, with innovative ways of looking at brand marketing and strategies for developing brands. They have synergies that can be built.

These students came with that idea and said, “We want to build something very similar to that, that we see many examples of in Toronto. We want to bring something like that into Brampton because we don't have that in Brampton.” There isn't a place where small businesses and youthful entrepreneurs, or entrepreneurs of any age, can get together and have a community of other small businesses that want to launch their start-up company. They want a space where they can share the costs so it's more affordable to actually start the business, but they also want to build off one another. There are shared business opportunities. One company that may be coming up with an idea about brand strategy and marketing can help out a magazine that's developing a niche market that

could also work with a graphic design company to come up with the way that the design will be laid out for that magazine.

The synergies that could be built—it was a great idea. But they said, “Well, what can we do to get this started? Are there any opportunities for us? What can we do to bring this idea to fruition?” If Bill 105 was truly a bill that was supporting small businesses, then it would provide some way that I could go back to those students and say, “Hey, we have a bill here that has been brought forward. It would actually help you out. It would provide you with a way to get this done.” But it’s really not doing that.

Another concern or area of disappointment is when you look at what’s going on in our province when it comes to the principle of the concept of addressing the budget or the fiscal realities in a fair manner. We’re talking about fairness here, with the NDP. We’re talking about looking at the fiscal realities and addressing them in a way that is fair. The reason why I’m bringing that up is because there are significant areas of investment where we need to invest in our infrastructure. We know that there are significant areas where infrastructure is in disrepair; it needs to be invested in.

1650

We also know that transit is a large concern, a growing concern and a serious concern in terms of the economic loss that we’re facing in the GTA and across Ontario, that the lack of ability to move around this province is significantly impacting—is seriously and dramatically impacting—people’s ability to find jobs, to move around the city. While they’re going to and from their jobs, while they are in transit, they are neither able to contribute by working, nor are they able to contribute to the economy by consuming or purchasing. If we invested in transit, we would be able to invest in our economy. It would be an investment in our economy as well.

But what we’re seeing this government, the Liberal government, do is that they want to put the pressure or the obligation or the cost of this investment in infrastructure—they want to put all the cost on the backs of working people. They want to look at ways—they call them “revenue mechanisms,” which are ways of raising funds off the backs of people.

Now, everyone wants to contribute in a fair manner, and everyone understands the responsibilities that we all have to make our society better. But if we look at the trend here, instead of supporting small businesses or supporting working people, we see a concerted effort on the part of this government to disproportionately favour corporations and disproportionately place more burden and pressure on working people and small businesses.

Instead of looking at the scenario and saying, “Listen, we need to help and make sure that the people who are the most vulnerable in our society are protected, we need to ensure that everyday families are protected and that their livelihood is ensured, and we need to make sure that our corporate citizens, who are integral members of our

society”—big businesses provide the employment and employment opportunities, but they need to be paying their fair share. We need to look at the differences.

What we’re looking at is, over the next number of years, the Liberal government is planning to—with a series of corporate tax loopholes and giveaways, over the next couple of years, it will cost, from now to 2031, \$35 billion in lost revenue to Ontario’s treasury.

Over that same period, the Liberals are talking about the need to raise \$34 billion in transit infrastructure. Well, that’s pretty troubling. If we’re giving away, through corporate tax giveaways, \$35 billion by 2031, and we need to raise \$34 billion in transit, there’s clearly a disconnect here. That’s a problem with this government.

We need to make sure that things are done fairly and measured and protect our people, instead of favouring corporations.

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

Hon. John Milloy: I listened with interest to the honourable member’s speech. I’ve listened with great interest to a lot of honourable members’ speeches on this particular topic, including the two-minute interjections. In fact, someone did the math, and if you include the two-minute interjections, over 50 members have spoken to this bill.

It is an important bill. I have heard some on the other side who wish it had gone farther, it was enhanced in a certain way. But I think, overall, everyone supports the idea of lowering taxes for small businesses.

Mr. Speaker, I would call on all members of this House to wrap up this debate and allow the bill to proceed to the next stage.

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

Mr. John O’Toole: Well, it’s encouraging to know that at least the NDP is taking some of the time that is committed to the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton. Probably it didn’t have the same theme as I do. Theirs would be to tax more; ours would be to tax less. So you can differentiate here.

But I’d say this: Some of what he said was actually wrong and discouraging. He was saying that the big companies are fine. I worked for a company for 30 years: General Motors. It’s not fine. These larger companies are struggling under the price of energy and the corporate tax that’s imposed.

I think there’s an alliance between the Liberals and NDP, so let’s be clear about that. They supported the budget. They’re the ones that closed down the horse racing industry. So let’s not listen to the people who are going to make it worse.

I think the best way to do it is to look at the media and what they’re saying. This is an article for the viewer, primarily. It talks about the “stolen decade.” This outlines a list of failed policies by the current government.

Bill 105 is a bill that deals with small business—or so they say. Well, in Ontario today, the advice I could give

viewers is this: In Ontario, how are you to create a small business? You start with a large one and tax it to death until it's finally a small one. That's what they probably did to BlackBerry, in my opinion. But that's just my opinion.

Having the right, proper balance in tax and policy to grow a business, to create investment and to encourage investment from abroad is the right strategy. If you want to know part two of this, look at the 14 papers—Paths to Prosperity—by our leader, Tim Hudak. This is the right plan for the right time for Ontario, not just for our youth, but for people who are out of work because of the failed policies over the last decade. What's going on in Ontario is a shame.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm pleased to rise, on behalf of my constituents in London West, to respond to some of the comments that were made by the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton. I think he really does represent, in many ways, the new economy, the new knowledge workers that Ontario will be relying on to move our economy forward and ensure a prosperous future for all of us.

But he talked about a couple of things that have particular relevance for me, as someone who represents the community of London West. He talked about this whole concept of social innovation shared space, with young people coming together, young entrepreneurs coming together in a context where they are able to feed off of each other, where synergies are created and ideas are allowed to flourish—green shoots of innovation allowed to really take root and blossom. It's those kinds of initiatives that we really need in this province if we're going to really support entrepreneurs and small businesses.

We know from research that the social economy is where young people are looking for employment. These are the kinds of opportunities that young people really want to take advantage of. If we're serious about getting jobs for our young people, then we should be doing more to enable that kind of social innovation to take place.

The other comment the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton made was about the importance of transit. We know that public transit is absolutely fundamental to a local economy, to enabling people who work in small businesses to get to their place of employment, and this is what we need to see happen in this province.

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on the Supporting Small Businesses Act. Speaker, I can tell you, from the perspective of my community of Ottawa Centre, that I have hundreds, if not thousands, of small businesses in my community, represented by seven very strong business improvement areas. When I'm out in my community of Ottawa Centre, they want this tax break to come into place. They want this law to pass, so that they can have a broader exemption from the employer health tax.

They are dismayed by the fact that we have now debated this particular bill for about 11 hours and 30 minutes and it's not moving on to the next stage—i.e. committee—and then coming back for third reading. I urge all the members to please let this bill pass at second reading. Let's send it to committee so that businesses like those in my community of Ottawa Centre can take advantage of this tax break, prosper further and create the great jobs they create in my community of Ottawa Centre.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. I now return to the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton for his response.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I would like to thank all the speakers, including the government House leader, the members for Durham and London West, and the Minister of Labour.

Beginning with the member from Durham, the member from Durham would like you to believe that the same idea that has failed time and time again would work if we just did more of it. If you have an idea that doesn't work, just do more of that idea that doesn't work and eventually it will start to work.

1700

That, to me, is one of the worst ways of creating policy. We've seen what has happened when we just blanket cut corporate tax rates. They don't benefit the people of the province. Even the economist that you love to speak about so much, Mr. Drummond, talks about all the dead money that corporations have, money that they're not investing in communities, not investing in creating new jobs or building infrastructure. It's because if you give someone, especially a corporation—it's not wrong; their job is to make money. They're looking at making profits.

If we continue to give money to someone with no incentive, no strings or no accountability, then they're just going to keep that money. But if you implement a system much like the NDP has proposed, connecting corporate tax rates or cuts to job creation, then you have an incentive. Then there are some strings attached. That's the way forward, creating a new approach, looking at the problem, looking at the issue with a new solution as opposed to doing the same thing again and hoping that you'll get a different result.

I think we need to look at our entire approach to small businesses with a new lens. New ideas with a new lens will create an impactful change for the better.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Thornhill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: In reviewing the order paper questions, I note the item numbered 265, which was a question I put to the Minister of Finance back when I spoke to the Minister of Finance, I guess, a long time ago, on April 29, 2013. It was a complex question that had to do with the total cost to the Ministry of Finance for the use of third-party outside consultants, which firms

were used, what was the total number of billable hours and what was the total cost to the ministry.

I recognize that would take some time to put together, but I believe that ministers have 30 minutes—30 days; 30 minutes would be nice—to respond to these kinds of questions. April 29 is a little bit more than 30 days, Speaker

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I find that the member for Thornhill does in fact have a valid point of order. It's my duty to remind the government that they are required, under standing order 99(d), to file a response within 24 sessional days to a member's order paper question or written question. The government's response is now overdue, and I would like to ask one of the government ministers to give us some indication as to when the written response will be forthcoming.

I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On the same point of order: We've obviously taken note of the concern expressed by the member. I can speak on behalf of the minister in question and say that we will have the answer as soon as possible to the member and the Legislature.

Mr. Todd Smith: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise, actually, on a similar point of order as my friend from Thornhill. I asked a question back in late April. I believe it was April 29 that I submitted the question to the Clerk of the Legislature for the Ministry of the Environment.

It just seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that when the government is talking about being open and transparent and saying that's what they're attempting to be, and then not answering questions that are of serious concern to residents in our ridings, they should be held to account for that.

On April 29 this year, I asked if the Minister of the Environment could explain why his ministry isn't following the recommendation of the Environmental Commissioner and is, instead, placing wind turbines in an area that the commissioner recognized as environmentally unfit for such a project. Mr. Speaker, I have residents of Prince Edward county waiting to find out why the Minister of the Environment would take this kind of action, and they shouldn't have to wait six months to receive a response from members of this government.

I find it appalling and reprehensible, actually, that this government continually stands up every day and says they're open and transparent, but we find it takes six months to get an answer back. That's unacceptable, and it's certainly not acceptable to the official opposition. I would hope we could get a response for the residents of Prince Edward county as soon as possible, because this government simply isn't living up to its obligations. It's not living up to expectations.

I know that the people of Prince Edward county who are waiting to receive this kind of information from the

Ministry of the Environment find this unacceptable, reprehensible and appalling. They shouldn't have to wait six months to get an answer to a question that was asked—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I need to interrupt the member and ask for clarification. What question number is he referring to? We're just checking here.

Mr. Todd Smith: Number 83, Speaker

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I find that the member in fact has a valid point of order. Again, I need to remind the government that they are required, under standing order 99(d), to file a response to a member's written order paper question within 24 sessional days, and again remind the government that their response is now overdue. I would ask one of the ministers present in the House to give some indication as to when the response to the member for Prince Edward–Hastings will be forthcoming.

I recognize the government House leader again.

Hon. John Milloy: I've taken a note of the point of order that was raised by the member and the inquiry of the ministry. I can speak on behalf of my colleague the Minister of the Environment to say that that question will be provided as soon as possible, Mr. Speaker.

I would also like, on a very similar point of order, to point out, having gone through the order paper and noting from 83 down to 304 on the order paper, that there is a list of questions which are outstanding. In anticipation that that point might be raised, I wish to give an answer that I will raise it with all my colleagues who are pointed out here and that those answers will be forthcoming as soon as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I appreciate the government House leader's indication that all of those outstanding order paper questions will be responded to as soon as possible. I'm not able to entertain more points of order on this particular subject of order paper questions that are outstanding in the numbers that the government House leader specified.

Further debate.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Just a point of order, not to be left out by the House leader: I did have a similar point of order on order paper question number 77. I don't know if he intentionally left me out. I put that in on April 25. I think that the House leader did say from 83 on down, so I just wanted to make the point that number 77 was my question. I submitted it April 25. I don't want a committee. I just want an answer to the question that was asked of the Minister of Consumer Services about the gas and propane stations in rural communities remaining viable. I'd like an answer, if that would be possible. Since we're in a transparent and accountable government, I'd appreciate number 77 being answered.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock does in fact have a valid point of order. Again, I'm compelled to remind the government that they are required, under standing order 99(d), to file a response within 24 sessional days to

order paper questions. The government's response is now overdue, and I would ask that one of the ministers present in the House give some indication as to when the response will be forthcoming.

I look to the government House leader and recognize him.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I've taken note of number 77 raised by the member. I can speak on behalf of the Minister of Consumer Services to say that that answer will be forthcoming as soon as possible.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Haldimand-Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Yes, very briefly: With respect to order paper number 199, which again was submitted April 29 of this year with respect to the Toxics Reduction Act—now, that's an act that was passed a number of years ago—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to say to the member for Haldimand-Norfolk that the government House leader has already indicated a willingness to get him a response as soon as possible in the list of questions that he indicated he would reply to as soon as possible. Thank you very much.

Further debate.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm pleased to speak on Bill 105 today. It's giving us an opportunity to discuss economic policy, or the lack thereof, on a broader scale. This government has given the people of Ontario some great platitudes regarding job creation and economic growth, so it behooves us to take the opportunity to examine Bill 105 today.

With 600,000 people out of work, it's important this government take the issue of job creation seriously. We have a glut of labour, and yet businesses face a number of challenges that impede their ability and desire to hire and expand. These challenges include cost pressures, high levels of bureaucracy and high energy rates. Certainly, on this side of the House, we put together numerous discussion papers chock full of ideas to stimulate our economy and get business hiring. We understand how serious an issue this is. For people who wake up without a job and struggle to find a means to cover their mortgage and feed their children, it's difficult to remain hopeful. They look to their government to take the necessary steps to get our economy moving.

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For its part, the government needs to ensure that our businesses operate in an environment that is more conducive to their success, because we all know the success of the private sector is what drives hiring. When businesses are hiring there are more opportunities for unemployed citizens to find gainful employment, and when people can find gainful employment and are able to provide for their families, we can all work together to build an Ontario that we can be proud of and pass on to our children.

The PC Party recognizes the importance of job creation, and that's why we recently offered to clear the

decks with the Liberal Party so that we could focus the collective efforts in this House on our economy. We came out and said that there's legislation before this House that we all agree needs to be passed. Everything from tanning beds to professional standards for our province's dentists, we said it's time to get these things pushed through. I'm proud to say that we worked with the government to accomplish that.

Now let's return to really get to the meat and potatoes of fixing our economy and creating jobs. Our ideas are well known. Anyone here can check out our party's website to see for themselves some of the practical, achievable ideas to get our economy back on track. Our leader has said that the government should feel free and welcome to steal any of these ideas. After all, they're not partisan ideas; they're simply ideas to put the people of Ontario first.

I was excited after the programming motion passed because I knew that the next job or finance or economic development bill that this government introduced would give us some good indication of how this government wanted to proceed on the important issues of economic growth and job creation. That brings me to Bill 105.

I have to say that when I first read over Bill 105, I was kind of bewildered. My bewilderment isn't the product of any opposition to the bill because I don't oppose this bill. The real source of bewilderment is that the Minister of Finance, the de facto director of this province's economic policy, would bring forth a bill that is so limited and would have such a minor impact.

Following the programming motion, I thought we and the Liberals were finally on the same page. I thought they understood the scale and scope of the issues facing our economy, and yet they brought forward this bill which is a positive bill but fails to go far enough to address the critical issues facing businesses. This exemplifies this government's approach: They pick something small and therefore, almost by extension, uncontroversial. They slap an impressive title on it, like supporting small business, that makes you think they're taking bold steps to reinvigorate our economy. Then, when you get into the fine print, you're disappointed in how little they've done.

The focus on small businesses is appropriate. After all, small and medium-sized businesses, like the pharmacy that's in my family, employ about 85% of Ontario's workforce. Inducing any kind of economic momentum has to begin with this sector.

I would like to take this time to review some of the calculations my colleague from Thornhill made regarding this bill. I think he made some very revealing calculations that are being lost in this whole debate. Like the member from Thornhill's business, it has a payroll of under \$5 million and the employer health tax exemption is a welcome one. Currently, my pharmacy is exempt on the first \$400,000 of payroll, which, under this bill, would be increased to \$450,000. I welcome any and all savings of money to any type of business, and I'm sure any business employer would. My colleague from Thornhill's mathematics, his calculations, have found out that

this additional \$50,000 will amount to a savings of \$975 per year per business. Let me repeat that: \$975. I can say for a fact that most businesses would appreciate \$975; however, it's not going to induce anyone to hire additional people to keep the hours of their businesses open any longer.

Let's take a look at how the private sector sees its future right now. In September, the CFIB released their regular Business Barometer. The Business Barometer is an index that CFIB puts together based on surveys they distribute to their members. It's based on a scale of 0 to 100. A score of 50 or higher indicates that business owners are expecting the performance of the business to be stronger in the next year than owners who are expecting the performance of the business to be weaker. CFIB has a lot of experience with this barometer, and it tends to be an economic indicator that investors and businesses look to. In their extensive experience with this number, the CFIB has noted that a score between 65 and 70 indicates that a provincial economy is roughly growing at its potential. In other words, supply and demand of labour is fairly balanced and unemployment is lower. So what do the numbers released in September tell us? Well, the economies in Alberta, Newfoundland and Saskatchewan exhibit a score of above 70, while British Columbia exhibits a score of 67. Ontario is lagging its peers with a score of 63.6.

I remember a time when Ontario led this country in economic growth and business confidence, but after 10 years of detrimental Liberal economic policy, the confidence of our business owners is fragile, and rightfully so. While it's nice that the government today is putting forward a measure to reduce taxation costs to small businesses, I don't think there's a business owner who has been operating in Ontario in the last 10 years who can forget all the times this Liberal government unexpectedly raised taxes to pay for their spending sprees. I'm sure no one will ever forget the former Premier famously pledging to not raise taxes in 2003, only to turn around almost the day after being elected and grab \$2.3 billion from taxpayers.

When you're running a business, uncertainty is generally your biggest challenge. You can therefore understand business owners who are somewhat skeptical of this current tax break. It might be difficult for some to make the decision to hire an additional staff member with this, when they know this government could overspend and come back next year and ask taxpayers and businesses to cover any shortfalls.

Certainly, taxes are a big consideration to businesses. However, if we return to the CFIB survey, it's interesting to note that the biggest cost pressure identified by Ontario business owners, while taxes do rank high, is energy and its rates. Energy rates in Ontario continue to skyrocket as this government continues to push its failed and misguided green energy agenda. Right now, industrial hydro rates are the second-highest in North America and are on trend to take the top spot in the next few years. When the Liberals took office, the total energy rate

was 4.4 cents per kilowatt hour. Now, just the global adjustment itself is 8.72 cents per kilowatt hour.

Our energy rates are quite simply out of control, and it's a cost borne by all business and, in some cases, can be quite significant. For instance, I have a business in my riding that was recently re-evaluated by our local utility company, which deemed that their energy usage necessitated their rates to increase. This caused their monthly hydro bill to jump 25%—over \$200 extra per month spent on hydro. Perhaps the government could put themselves in the shoes of this small business owner. On the one hand, when he files his taxes, he'll get an exemption that puts \$975 back into his business. However, on the other hand, thanks to the government's mismanagement of the energy file, his hydro costs will eat up that exemption within four months. No one would compel this owner to hire and expand. This bill simply does not address the real issues hindering our economic growth.

As I said, I will be supporting this bill. A little bit of savings on the business tax bill is better than nothing. However, this bill, as the first finance and economics bill introduced after we agreed to clear the decks of pieces of legislation in order to focus on job creation, is an embarrassing, puny effort to stimulate our economy.

Mr. Speaker, I've got a lot more to say. I'm running out of time here. I'd like to seek unanimous consent for an additional 10 minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Elgin–Middlesex–London is seeking unanimous consent of the House so that he can speak for an additional 10 minutes. Agreed?

I heard several noes.

I return to the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I think we continue to see the true character of this Liberal government, and it reinforces my belief that they're out of ideas and that we need a new team leading Ontario.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It's a pleasure to rise to respond to the comments made by my colleague the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London. Not only do we share the same geographical area in southwestern Ontario—our ridings border each other—but we also have similar backgrounds, coming from small business.

When you think about it, when 98% of all businesses in this province are small businesses, it makes sense that almost everybody sitting in this House should have a small business background. All of us who have worked in small business understand some of the challenges that face small business. They are real challenges; small businesses face real challenges with regulations.

We talked earlier today about some of the regulatory burdens that are placed on small businesses, and they could use some help with trying to streamline those regulatory challenges. Instead, as the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London noted, what they have in this bill that's called the Supporting Small Businesses Act is simply the elimination of a tax exemption that shouldn't

have been there in the first place. It's not a measure that is going to induce small businesses to hire more people. It's not a measure that's going to really do anything significant to create jobs in this province.

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It will address something that the NDP had pointed out was a concern a long time ago, which is good, and for that reason it deserves to be supported and moved forward to committee. But as the member pointed out, we need a lot more from this government if we're really going to get this economy and this province back on track.

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

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: It is my pleasure to enter into the debate on Bill 105. This bill has already been debated for 12 hours. I strongly urge all members of this House to pass this bill so that it can go to committee, so that we can hear from our stakeholders and have clause-by-clause, and so that businesses in my riding and businesses in their ridings, as well as in Ontario, can benefit from this bill.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Elgin–Middlesex–London—I think it's despicable, the fact that the House wouldn't allow the member to have a little bit more time to explain the first-hand experience he had running two or three small pharmacies in Ontario. He added a lot to the conversation because of the point being made of having experience in small business.

I think, really, the bill itself, its intent is correct, but when you look at some of the conditions they put on it, this is where I become suspicious, perhaps even cynical: when they cap this entitlement at a certain level of income. Why isn't it all business getting encouragement to invest? What are they going to do with that \$963 that they would get? That's the amount when you calculate the employer health tax that is being avoided by raising the threshold by this micro amount.

That \$963 wouldn't allow them to do anything more than place another ad in the local paper. That's about what it would be entitled to. This isn't enough, but what you should do is put it in a program motion with others, reducing regulations with respect to, perhaps, relicensing.

The one that bothers me most now is the billing that they are potentially going to send to small businesses that employ tradespeople, where they're going to have to pay this College of Trades tax. I've heard this mentioned in the House: one more example of a government that has run out of ideas.

But the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London and the experience he brought to it—I hope that he will be given more time. In fairness, I would try that approach again, of asking for unanimous consent, just to see if they're willing to listen.

I've heard two Liberal members stand up this afternoon, and they both spoke about how much time has been spent on this. Are they saying that democracy doesn't work? "It's my way or the highway"? Is that

what I hear them saying, that they don't want to hear from anyone, especially small business people who are a part of our caucus?

Read the Paths to Prosperity. There are 14 papers with ideas on how to get Ontario moving.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'm pleased to follow my colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London in regard to his comments that he brought to the debate. The member from Durham just highlighted something: I wish that, at times, the Liberal government would put as much effort into the meat and potatoes of their bills—specifically when it comes to small business—as the amount of time they take counting how much debate has happened on this discussion up to now. It's unfortunate; I enjoy hearing what my colleagues have to say, especially from their backgrounds. I really do enjoy hearing where you're coming from as far as your bill and how it affects individuals in your communities.

From a northern Ontario perspective, I can certainly bring you a perspective that we have. The member brought up a good point: the energy costs that come with small businesses. You referred individuals to go to your website to grab a look at it. I have to say that our member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, one of the points that he brought up earlier is that if you continue using those same old ideas, it doesn't mean that they're going to continue to work again. Actually, a lot of what I've seen proposed by the Conservative government is that they want to continue with the streamlining of privatization. If there's something that we've learned from history, back from the 1990s when they were there, it's that the privatization of our energy has not helped. It has actually expedited the costs on individual households.

We really, really, really need to look at this from a different lens and bring a different perspective of how we can help small businesses with the decisions that they make, because they do want to hire individuals and they do want to create more jobs, but the bottom line is the biggest factor at the end of the month is the energy costs. If we can't solve that one, it's going to be a really big uphill climb for them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments, so we return to the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London for his reply.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I want to thank members from London West, Algoma–Manitoulin, Durham and Mississauga–Brampton South for their comments. I could offer to do 20 more minutes if 10 wasn't enough, if you want me to continue on with another 20.

Small businesses are in trouble in this province. I think this government needs to do more than offering them \$975 a year, which isn't going to increase anybody's employment numbers in their businesses. It's not going to increase them to expand their business, expand product coming in. As was mentioned by the member from Durham, \$975 buys you a nice-sized ad in the local newspaper. They're helping with advertising for a week.

There are other measures that this government should have taken with small businesses over the last few years, in particular with the College of Trades, where they are planning to implement a tax on the employers of this province—the trades tax, which is section 7—which they refused to pull back out of their bill and which I imagine will be enacted soon in the new year, much like Bill 119, which was enacted on our local contractors and which added \$11,000 per year on their bottom line. Now, that's a tax. This \$975 that they're offering back to them is only a little smidgen of the \$11,000 that they're taking from these independent contractors in all our communities throughout this province.

This government falls short on supporting small businesses throughout our province, it falls short on maintaining a good economic policy and it's falling short on all Ontarians in this province.

Hon. John Milloy: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I believe you'll find we have unanimous consent to revert to motions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to revert to motions. Agreed? Agreed.

I recognize the government House leader.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. John Milloy: I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice with respect to private members' public business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to move a motion with respect to private members' business. Agreed? Agreed.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I move that notwithstanding standing order 98(g), the requirement for notice for ballot item number 54 on the order of precedence for private members' public business be waived.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Agreed? Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESSES ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 VISANT À SOUTENIR LES PETITES ENTREPRISES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the member for—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you, Speaker. I think that shows the need for members to be able to speak up in the Legislature, as we were all sent to do, and have the opportunity to speak to each and every bill should we

want, because the one-hundred-and-some-thousand folks that I represent don't get that opportunity to have their voice. Their voice speaks through this table and this desk, and I'm going to take that opportunity to speak to each and every bill. Bill 105 is one I have not spoken to yet, and I'm looking forward to speaking on behalf of the community that I represent, Kitchener–Conestoga.

1730

I'll refer to the bill as Bill 105, because the government tends to like to throw in these fancy titles to the bills, the Supporting Small Businesses Act; of course, that's what they call it. We have heard the other bills time and time again, so I'll just refer to it as Bill 105.

They are proposing to increase the exemption amount from \$400,000 to \$450,000 for the 2014 to 2018 calendar years; of course, not including inflation. I think that this legislation exemplifies exactly what is wrong with this government and their approach to governing. They're unwilling to go far enough to take the decisive action that is needed to provide real tax relief to Ontario businesses. I know my colleague John O'Toole from Durham, who just left, talked about the fact that, over the last 10 years, this government has made large businesses small, but what I see and hear is that they're making a lot of small businesses tiny, if at all. Too many of those small businesses are continually taxed and burdened over the last 10 years of this government.

More kicking around the edges by this government will not do enough to deal with the jobs crisis this province is facing. In fact, several hundred thousand Ontarians woke up this morning without a good-paying job to go to, or a job at all. We need to get those folks back to work. Unfortunately, this legislation comes at a time when we're struggling with skyrocketing hydro rates, increases to WSIB premiums and the College of Trades tax. I'll tell you, ever since I've been a member—two years now—the amount of emails and correspondence and phone calls I get on just those three issues alone would keep one of my staff members in the riding pretty much busy just dealing with that, especially from a lot of the small contractors who were initially hit, recently. I'll speak to that later on.

I know we have talked a lot about the fact that we on this side of the House actually have a real jobs plan. We have outlined that plan in white papers, which have been consulted on widely across the province and put forward by colleagues and critics, including our leader, Tim Hudak. I encourage all Ontarians to go to ontariopc.com and have a look at the hard work that a lot of our critics have done to propose a solid jobs plan moving forward so that those Ontarians who woke up this morning will, in fact, have a job to go to.

As I said, this is a cleverly phrased bill by the government, Supporting Small Businesses Act. You know what? We have really saddled those businesses over the years, and I'll go through the list: dramatic increases in red tape and regulation, heightened taxes and soaring energy rates. Every time I go out into my community—and my community is still a manufacturing heart of

Ontario in the region of Waterloo. Unfortunately, though, we have lost a lot of good manufacturing employees.

I look at and drive by Budd automotive every day, almost, when I'm home on the weekend. I see the cranes and the Hy-Hoes in there, ripping that plant down. At one time, it employed 3,000 people making frames for automobiles all over the world. The people—my neighbours, friends and family—who went to work at Budd automotive every day now have to drive by that plant and see Hy-Hoes tearing it down because they have been driven out of Ontario.

Uniroyal-Goodrich, the BF Goodrich tire manufacturing plant; Ledco; MTD, manufacturing lawnmower equipment and so forth—Schneiders just recently is an example of another large manufacturing base that will have left our region. All have a lot to do with the fact that we do have soaring energy rates. The implementation of the College of Trades: I know our critic Garfield Dunlop, the member from Simcoe, constantly raises issues with regard to the College of Trades. WSIB premiums, the flawed Drive Clean program, outdated apprenticeship programs, 300,000 fewer manufacturing jobs: We need to address, really, the true challenges that are faced by small businesses in Ontario.

I know our finance critic, Vic Fedeli, when he did his hour leadoff, summed it up quite well. He said that Bill 105 should be called the “supporting small business while we stick it to them 100 other ways act,” with which I would tend to agree.

Day in and day out, the government dreams up, of course, new revenue tools. This is a tax-and-spend government or, more precisely, a “spend first, tax later” government. In fact, this government, over the last 10 years, has doubled our debt. If they were a business, they would be out of business if they were spending like they do. It took 20 Premiers and 136 years to reach a debt of \$139 billion. Today, in just 10 years, our debt is \$273 billion. That's more than double.

We had a young person in the gallery this afternoon wanting to perhaps say his first few words. If only he could hear and know that in fact, before he did speak, he was already in the hole about \$21,000, thanks in large part to the government of today.

I know our son Murphy, who hopefully is watching at home, will be upset knowing that although he'd love to get all those new movies that he enjoys, he too will be straddled with such a large debt and deficit. It's unfortunate to think that his children and grandchildren will be further and further straddled with the decisions that have been made over the last 10 years.

I'll turn back to some of those reasons that I think small businesses are impacted today. We talk about energy rates, especially as we head into the wintertime. It's a time when those small businesses will have to incur more costs to heat and operate their facilities. We all know that the fortunate blessing of living in Canada is that we get four seasons, and the coldest one is upon us shortly. Ten years ago, we paid 4.4 cents a kilowatt hour. Speaker, if you could guess what it is today—we now pay double, at roughly 8.72 cents a kilowatt hour.

I'll tell you, power sector investment planning is inefficient, expensive and unsustainable. The government is actually using the electricity sector to support a range of shifting policy objectives, without critical examination of whether burdening the electricity ratepayer with the cost of such initiatives is economically efficient. We all know the mess that we've been witnessing over the last few months and year, with the cynical commitment by the government to move a power plant with really no diligence or respect for what it's costing the taxpayer, straddling the ratepayer and taxpayer with over \$1 billion worth of costs. Small businesses will end up paying for that, and that's good jobs.

Another issue I talked about is the College of Trades. The government's priority should be encouraging job creation and stimulating economic growth, not creating new fees and more barriers for our workforce. Instead, they've created yet another organization, with additional fees for small businesses, called the College of Trades. This trades tax has driven up the cost of doing business for professionals working in more than 155 skilled trades. Many of the small businesses in my riding still find no value in being part of this organization and are forced to pay \$120 in membership fees for each journey person. This is ridiculous. We heard an example just recently, with the member from Simcoe—Grey, or Simcoe, talking about barbers and hairdressers. It's just insane.

WSIB premiums, of course, for independent operators, sole proprietors, are now mandatory. Referencing an old bill, Bill 119 captured more small business people to pay mandatory premiums who would be unlikely to ever claim for an injury. Office workers in construction companies who never go out on a job site are now having to incur these costs. A lot of them complain, saying that they've already calculated this risk into the costs of their business and have their own insurance to cover them, should ever an accident even happen. So this is again just redundant.

Of course, as the environment critic, I've had the experience to see first-hand the further costs onto small businesses, like a tire tax, straddling farmers, who are in essence a small business, with taxes, for instance, on a John Deere combine from \$91 to \$823.

I notice my time is running out, and I'd love to ask for more. I don't think I'll get it, so I'll come back for my two-minute follow-up and conclude from there, Speaker.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's interesting that this debate is still going on. We've run out of speakers, but we do feel it's important to respond and to show some respect for the opinions that are shared in this House—

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: What's that?

1740

Ms. Catherine Fife: What's respect? I'm going to show some respect now.

The member from Kitchener—Conestoga comes from a primarily rural community, and there are some small and medium-size businesses, agribusinesses, that, quite honestly, are hurting.

When the chamber came forward and said, under Bill 105, “There is some good in this. Try to make it stronger. Try to demonstrate, as a party and as individual MPPs, that this is a step in the right direction and that some confidence has to be built into the issue of supporting small businesses”—it is true. I share some of the frustration, though, as the member from Kitchener–Conestoga, because I just don’t understand why, when the Liberal government brings forward a new piece of legislation, that you just don’t make it right the first time. There are a lot of things that we know can be supporting small businesses, everything from reducing red tape to incentivizing capital expenditures and capital investments. These are tangible ideas. We’ve certainly tried to bring some of those ideas to the fore through the job creator tax credit and certainly through our work in the last budget session to address youth unemployment. So we’ve just adopted a different perspective in this. We want to make this stronger, and we can when it gets to committee.

I understand the PCs’ frustration. We share some of the frustration, but instead of just being frustrated, we actually want to get something done.

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

Hon. Liz Sandals: I’m very pleased to respond to the debate on Bill 105. I think if anyone were actually watching this debate at home they would be very hard pressed to figure out what it is we’re debating. What this bill actually does is reduce the cost of health taxes for small businesses. It reduces the tax burden on small businesses.

There have been over 50 people from all three parties who have spoken to this, and as far as we can determine, every single speaker, all 50, have actually been in favour of doing what the bill does, which is reducing the tax burden on small business. So what is a total mystery to me is why, after 12 hours, we are still debating what all 50 speakers have said they agree on.

I would respectfully ask all members to allow this to go to a second reading vote, to go on to committee, where it could be fine-tuned if that’s necessary. What we don’t want to do is miss the opportunity to reduce taxes because we’re all too busy talking.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I’m pleased to provide a few moments of comments to my colleague and friend the member for Kitchener–Conestoga. He’s a tremendous representative for the area. I had the pleasure of attending the University of Waterloo, and I know from some of my friends who reside in the KW area how well-thought-of Mr. Harris is as a member of provincial Parliament.

He mentioned decisive action. I agree with him that there are members of our communities who run small businesses who do want some decisive action by this government rather than a small measure like this bill.

I also want to say that I appreciate the fact that the member mentioned the wording of this bill, because I do believe that it’s some very clever wording for this very modest improvement for our small businesses.

I do want to give him credit, though: He tabled a bill, Bill 73, the Fair and Open Tendering Act, that would have really helped municipalities and school boards—

Mr. Michael Harris: And small businesses.

Mr. Steve Clark: And small businesses. I believe that we owe him a big thank you for being able to table that bill. I’m so sorry that the other parties didn’t buy into it, because it would have been a tremendous measure, not a small measure. It would have been a pretty big measure for those municipalities, school boards and small businesses that want fairness and equity in the tendering process.

I also want, just in my few seconds left, to acknowledge some of the points he made regarding energy rates, the College of Trades and WSIB. But I want to take two points that he has, in his capacity as critic for the environment for the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party, brought to this floor: the tremendous inequity with the Drive Clean program, the fact that it has got nothing to do with emissions now, but is just a tax grab in our communities, and also the tire tax. I was at an OFA meeting last year just after he uncovered this secret tire tax that the government put forward. It was a revelation at that meeting.

I just want to thank Michael Harris for all of his work, thank him for speaking to the bill and look forward to him being a champion for small business in Ontario.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that engaging in debate today, simply taking one’s opportunity to express their concerns and express the concerns of their riding, is not in any way delaying this bill in a way that’s an affront to democracy. It is, in fact, in support of democracy that everyone takes the time that they feel is necessary to add their voice, to add their concerns and, really, to do the job of representing their communities.

I take issue with the fact that members of the Liberal government continually have been getting up and saying, “Let’s just wrap up the debate and get on with it,” and that there’s some way that this is delaying the process. This is a part of the process. Allowing debate is part of the process.

At some point in time, there will be a moment where members have completed their time to speak and they’ve felt that they’ve expressed the concerns of their riding, expressed the concerns of their constituents, and then this bill will take its course. But to discourage debate, in the manner that the Liberal government has been expressing their frustrations with members in both the NDP and Conservative Party, to me is troubling, and I think that’s something that we oppose. That’s why we will respond to the concerns that are raised by the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

With respect to his particular riding, I think the idea that we were speaking of—and the member from London West also joined me on the idea of supporting social innovation and innovation where there is collaborative work, where we have synergy between different busi-

nesses and particularly start-up companies, particularly where we have a centre of learning, like the University of Waterloo. This is an important area where we need to grow our abilities to allow young people to connect with others, to share their ideas, to build off of one another's start-up companies or energy and to create a knowledge-based economy based on small businesses. This is the way of the future, and we need to be leaders in that area.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We're going to return now to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga for his reply.

Mr. Michael Harris: I appreciate the comments that were made by my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo—we don't always agree, but we do get along well, and I'd like to thank her for her comments on that; as well, the member from Guelph; my great, good-looking colleague from Leeds–Grenville in eastern Ontario; and, of course, the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton. I think they raised some good points here.

I often hear the government talk about, "Oh, you're dragging on debate," and blah, blah, blah. But this was the first opportunity I had to speak to Bill 105. They believe that they should craft a bill, table it, speak a few minutes to it and then everyone sit down, and then it would just go away or get passed. I don't know where they get this notion. I know they've been around for 10 years, and we're hoping that will soon come to an end, but the notion of members being able to stand up and speak to a bill on behalf of their community—I shouldn't feel guilty by doing so. This government wants to always lambaste members for actually having the opportunity to speak to the legislation, and I just find that ridiculous.

I want to speak to some of the comments that my colleague from Leeds–Grenville picked up on. He talked about Bill 73, a bill that I introduced that was, unfortunately, defeated—for cynical reasons, clearly—a few months ago. That would have addressed a lot of the concerns that small businesses had in my community and in my region. In fact, I know the House leader himself has a brother who owns a fairly decent small business, and my bill would have helped companies like that out that will eventually be impacted for no other reason than their members don't hold a union card or are members of a different union. I know he's sitting beside the member from Hamilton, and the member from Hamilton can tell him of those concerns, because small businesses in his riding are forbidden from bidding on work in Hamilton.

I'll leave it there. I'd love to have more time, and I look forward to another opportunity.

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

1750

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I'm proud to rise and discuss this bill. This bill proposes to merely tinker at the edges of what is the result of a decade of failed Liberal policies.

Small businesses in Ontario are feeling the pressure of increased energy bills, increased taxation and rising WSIB premiums. Over the past 10 years, the current government has condemned our most driven and innovative entrepreneurs to a slow death by a thousand cuts.

As with many bills before us in this Legislature, the government gives them catchy names that do not reflect the substance of the legislation, if there were any substance to it whatsoever. Supporting small business involves a consistent attitude that encourages success, drive, innovation and calculated risk. All the current government has done is to inflate the power of bureaucrats and implement redistributive schemes to pick winners and losers.

Being faced with the prospect of further rises in energy costs, prohibitive premiums, mountains of red tape such as the ones generated by the TSSA and uncertainty in the fiscal future of this province has forced many small business people to take their skills elsewhere. Moreover, the Liberals' policies have been driving certain industries to extinction, such as the skilled trades.

In order to appease their own stakeholders, the Liberals are imposing an unsustainable 3-to-1 apprenticeship ratio on small trades contractors. In my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, many tradesmen are unable to take on an apprentice simply because of this. When they retire, no one will be there to replace them. Entire family traditions are being wiped out and, with them, the province's and the municipalities' tax base. Any adviser would tell the government that in any population, a 1-to-1 ratio is barely suitable for replacement; 3 to 1 makes a shortage of skilled trades inevitable.

The current government's approach to small business, and its ways of milking them of their much-needed money are rooted in a deeply held yet wrong belief. The Liberals believe that despite the economic mismanagement, there will always be those willing to bail them out and those with no other choice but to pay.

But times have changed, and we have news for this government: It ain't so anymore. It's a competitive world out there, with open borders and businesses that can simply move, taking their jobs and their tax dollars with them.

Ontario's small businesses are not captive, and there are no barriers keeping them in the province. A small business is the best guarantee to good-quality local jobs that keep our communities thriving. Driving through our region, I see villages being held together by a common fabric resting on local employment. Encouraging and preserving a small-business-friendly environment goes beyond mere economics; it keeps our collective heritage alive.

Small businesses in Ontario must be free to set up, operate, expand, succeed, make a profit, hire, train, and sell their products and services throughout the province. Instead, we see a government focused on the interests of the bureaucrat, striving to control every aspect of economic activity and seize every dollar in the pockets other than their own.

Small businesses don't need just an extra \$50,000 exemption. They need this whole government's failed and discredited approach to administering this province to end.

In the case of this government, they also confuse political bailouts with economic ones. For all their

pandering to the public-sector-bankrolled Working Families Coalition, no amount of special-interest spending will bail out an economy being run at full steam into a debt hole that will place a \$30,000 debt burden on every man, woman and child in Ontario.

Never mind an extra \$50,000 exemption; ask yourself what you would do with an extra \$30,000. With \$30,000, you can hire local contractors to make your home more efficient and perform energy retrofits. And \$30,000 is a good down payment on a downtown Toronto condo or, even better, one on a much larger property in rural Ontario. And \$30,000 is also a decent sum of start-up capital for a small business. Moreover, \$30,000, in many cases, is a full-time wage.

Think about this: Just by tackling the debt, you would give every Ontarian a year's worth of wages. That would be a wholesale injection of true capital into the economy, and then small businesses would be the first to stand in line to reap the benefits.

Ontario needs real solutions to the challenges that our small businesses face and a paradigm shift in the government attitude to success and entrepreneurial spirit. If the government really wants to support small business, its best course of action would be to get out of the way. Let them succeed and expand without the pressure of climbing energy rates; allow them to hire without the apprehension of increasing premiums.

Small businesses are the trailblazers of our progress and economic recovery. They are demanding a true jobs plan. In a gesture of leadership, we've offered to the Liberals to clear the decks of legislation that had all-party support in order for this government to present a true long-term plan to create jobs and generate growth.

We only have 23 sessional days left before the House rises for winter break, and the time for tinkering around the edges is over. The absence of a true jobs plan from this government today is evidence that they are uninterested in truly helping small business and innovators to succeed in Ontario. As an example, we saw the latest bill they put on the table—although it has some merits—on the publishing of calories in chain restaurants, but really, is that a jobs plan? I don't think so.

On the other hand, the Ontario PC caucus had delivered a series of proposals and brought them out for the Ontario public to scrutinize, such as the proposal to fix the WSIB, reform the skilled trades to attract new blood and retain our experienced tradespeople, stop the artificial inflation of our energy rates and focus on our younger generation's skills to make them competitive in the 21st century. These are bold policy initiatives that Ontario businesses need to succeed in a modern, global, competitive marketplace.

A \$50,000 increase in the employer health tax exemption falls desperately short of the expectations of Ontario small businesses and those of the half a million Ontarians who still have no job to go to and no paycheque to help them sustain their families and to look

forward to a prosperous future. The government can claim whatever they wish regarding this bill; however, it cannot even qualify as a stopgap solution. Small businesses are being bled dry and this bill does nothing to stop the hemorrhaging. Any improvement in a business's balance sheet that may come from this increased exemption will be nullified in just a few months' time. The Auditor General highlighted that the energy rates would grow almost 50% between 2011 and 2015, and we're seeing these increases coming almost monthly. That increase alone is enough to undo all of the half-measures this government can hope to adopt to pretend to be on small business's side.

It's interesting: Today I was at a luncheon and Mike Harris was there. Businesses were very quick to point out how he took a situation much like today's from a government that really abused the situation and ran Ontario into the hole. In a very efficient and quick manner he turned this province around. He made it the biggest job creator on this continent. All it did was give this government the ability to bleed it dry until we're now back to even worse shape than we were back then. We've got a debt that's doubled since they took over. So really, they spent this amount of money and what do we have to show for it? We now have a situation where we have a public sector that is out of control as far as trying to be competitive. We talk about being competitive. You look at our neighbours to the south. These are people that have the same standard of living that we have. Their public sector is more competitive. How can you generate enough tax dollars to pay this group of people, pay their pensions? Their pensions are not funded. It's something that this government does not even want to entertain. I think that people deserve to know where their balances are in their pension plans and know if there's a problem.

By kicking that can down the road, as our leader often talks about, you're just making the problem much worse. We look at the city of Detroit, where people are now getting 10 cents on the dollar from their pensions. I think that's criminal. If we know that we're on the way to this, I think it's time to stand up, have a—I hate to talk about another committee, because this government has been very good at creating committees. But in this instance we have to get in and not only identify the problem—I know they don't want to identify this problem—but I think we owe it to the people of Ontario, through the public service, to let them know what they need to do to make these pension plans soluble.

I think there are many things they can do, and we need to see some of these functions carried through by this government.

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 1800.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
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Damerla, Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	
Del Duca, Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
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Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	Deputy House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	

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Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Holyday, Douglas C. (PC)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment / Ministre du Développement économique, du Commerce et de l'Emploi
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
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Jackson, Rod (PC)	Barrie	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	Chair of Cabinet / Présidente du Conseil des ministres Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
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Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
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MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
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Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
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McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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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
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
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Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
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Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Piruzza, Hon. / L'hon. Teresa (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
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
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
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Vacant	Niagara Falls	

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Mike Colle, Joe Dickson
Rob Leone, Amrit Mangat
Taras Natyshak, Jerry J. Ouellette
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Sarah Campbell, Donna H. Cansfield
Grant Crack, Dipika Damerla
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Bob Delaney, Frank Klees
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Rob E. Milligan, Shafiq Qaadri
Jonah Schein
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Bas Balkissoon, Grant Crack
Vic Dhillon, Garfield Dunlop
Cindy Forster, Lisa MacLeod
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Todd Smith
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des comptes publics**

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Toby Barrett, Lorenzo Berardinetti
France Gélinas, Helena Jaczek
Bill Mauro, Phil McNeely
Norm Miller, John O'Toole
Jagmeet Singh
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

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permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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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
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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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sur les services aux personnes ayant une déficience
intellectuelle**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Elliott
Laura Albanese, Bas Balkissoon
Cheri DiNovo, Christine Elliott
Mitzie Hunter, Rod Jackson
Sylvia Jones, Monique Taylor
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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