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Tuesday 18 March 2014

Mardi 18 mars 2014

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 18 March 2014

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 18 mars 2014

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS
AMENDMENT ACT
(LEAVES TO HELP FAMILIES), 2014
LOI DE 2014 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI
(CONGÉS POUR AIDER LES FAMILLES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 3, 2013, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 21, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver, critically ill child care and crime-related child death or disappearance leaves of absence / Projet de loi 21, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé familial pour les aidants naturels, le congé pour soins à un enfant gravement malade et le congé en cas de décès ou de disparition d'un enfant dans des circonstances criminelles.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to stand up and talk about the family caregiver leave act, employment standards amendment. This act actually has had a lot of discussion in this House. It has been a long-standing issue that we know of in the province of Ontario. The bill obviously provides an unpaid, job-protected leave of absence to provide care or support to certain family members who have serious medical conditions.

Let's be clear, the bill is very small; however, it is a positive step forward. But there would be relatively low take-up if the federal government does not change EI so that caregivers taking advantage of the leave have some form of income support. The government must push the federal government hard to change EI so that there is some form of income support for those who are taking leave.

Most employees don't understand their rights under the Employment Standards Act. Most of us in this House would have had people come into our offices in our constituencies, and you can tell that they are not familiar with what rights they have as employees under the current Employment Standards Act. The government must ensure that Ontario workers know about the leave and that there are no employer reprisals for employees wishing to take the leave.

Anyone who has ever gotten ill on the job—my sister just recently went through this. She's in a unionized environment. She had to have emergency surgery about three weeks ago. Originally, the employer, of course, is very understanding because they care about the employee—hopefully—and they want to make sure that that employee gets healthy fast. But it didn't take long in the recovery process for that employer to say, "Well, can you do this? Can you do that?" She's off work. She's recovering from major surgery. There has to be some protection for those employees, and they need to know their rights.

In today's life of work, employers have high expectations. First of all, when you look at the unemployment rate in the province of Ontario, you do feel fortunate to have a job. We're going through the hiring process with the Financial Accountability Officer right now. It's interesting to be on the other side of that employment table because, while it has taken some time, almost nine and a half months—we wanted to hire an FAO, not to give birth to a Financial Accountability Officer. But it's interesting to be on the other side of that table asking questions of people who potentially would take a very serious responsibility in the province of Ontario, and we of course take it very seriously. That's why we brought it to the budget process in the first place.

Let's just take a little step back around the background of Bill 30. All employees who are covered by the ESA, whether full-time permanent or short-term contract, would be eligible for leave. This is important, because what we're seeing in the province of Ontario today is that there is more part-time precarious work—more so than we have ever seen. When the government stands up and talks about their jobs numbers, they're including that forced part-time, that precarious work, and sometimes they're even including those interns, those unpaid internship numbers, in their stats. It's a big number, but it's the quality of the work and the quality of the employment that we are most concerned about on this side of the House.

From the background perspective though, there would be no requirement that an employee be employed for a particular length of time or that the employer employ a specified number of employees in order for the employee to qualify. A qualified employee would be able to take up to eight weeks per calendar year per family member, and a physician would determine whether the condition of the family member is indeed serious in the meaning of the act. In other words, the physical recommendation triggers eligibility for the leave.

Other leaves under the Ontario ESA currently include pregnancy leave, parental leave, family medical leave,

organ donor leave—I was actually very pleased to see this included in there. Organ donation, of course, is a huge issue in the province of Ontario, and we do have, I think, a shared responsibility to ensure that we make it easy for people to donate organs. I personally just went through my form on my driver's licence, and I'm going to be an official organ donor. It could be a more streamlined process. That, perhaps, is a conversation for another day, but I'm pleased to see that it's included under leaves under the current ESA. Three other ones are personal emergency leave, declared emergency leave and reservist leave.

This new leave should not be confused, though, with the family medical leave, which provides up to eight weeks' leave to provide care to a family member who has a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death occurring within 26 weeks. Since 2004, there has been EI support for this leave, conditioned with a significant risk of death occurring within 26 weeks. These are heartbreaking, heartbreaking stories when family members are called upon to help in a palliative care or in a hospice care situation.

Of course, we are seeing this happen more and more, because the hospice sector—those who are advocating for dying with dignity, if you will—is completely underfunded. In fact, it's a miracle that the hospice sector actually gets as much done and helps as many people as they do. They rely, of course, heavily on philanthropy and fundraising, and certainly there is room for improvement on that funding file.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I know home care.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And home care—that's a very good point. Home care, actually, would be of huge assistance with family caregiver provisions. Certainly, when you do see people coming home, the transition from hospital to the home has not been very successful. That's another reason why we negotiated for some secure home care funding in the last budget, the five-day home care guarantee, and we were successful in that.

I was very pleased, actually: I attended a LHIN meeting in Kitchener–Waterloo not that long ago and heard first-hand how that budgetary measure that we negotiated, that concession that we sought, to support the last budget actually is making a difference in the lives of people in Kitchener–Waterloo and indeed across the entire province. In Waterloo region, it's actually \$7 million to the local CCAC, and it is making a tangible difference in the quality of home care in Kitchener–Waterloo.

0910

Just to complete the backgrounder on this file, though, it should also be noted that caregivers covered by a collective agreement or in a managerial position can sometimes get permission to use their own sick days to care for family members who are seriously ill. That's still a very difficult negotiation to have with your employer, quite honestly, because as I mentioned, the pressure that employees receive in this modern age of work is that you work all the time, and those expectations are quite high. This is a hard thing to sometimes negotiate, Madam Speaker.

So for many working in a protected environment, if you will, there is not much value added in the bill. This reinforces the fact that enforcement of all ESA provisions needs to be strengthened, as those who work in the peripheral parts of the labour market will be reluctant to use these and other provisions of the ESA unless they are sure of no employer reprisal.

I will admit, this is actually very difficult to control because there is obviously a power imbalance and a power dynamic between an employer and an employee. All of us in the course of our lives have experienced it, I'm sure, and it's something that we have to be mindful of and cautious of.

Under the employment standards, another short-term priority for action, I think, is to not cut the \$6 million from the employment standards enforcement branch. This is a key component of it, and this is a key idea that's come from us. I think this goes back to the effectiveness of the overall bill. As I said, this is a minor change but essentially a positive change, and it's a step to provide a measure of job protection to those taking time off from work to care for family members who are seriously ill, but if you don't have the enforcement piece in place and you don't have the protection piece in place for the employer, it actually does very little, because it's really just words on a page.

Obviously, it would be more effective if there was some sort of EI or other income support for that, but that doesn't appear likely, given the current nature of the relationship between the provincial government and the current federal government. To say that that is a marriage that is not going well would really be an understatement, but it actually is the responsibility of the provincial government to reach out to the federal government. It would be helpful, I think, quite honestly, if the federal government was more receptive to having a conversation about supporting those family members who take the time away from work to care for their family members. It's a basic act of compassion, but there is definitely an economic imperative for that, because many people cannot afford to take the time away from their workplace to stay home with a child, with an elderly parent, and we are definitely seeing an increase in eldercare sort of down-loaded, if you will, for basically a lack of options, to family members. With an aging demographic, we are seeing the extended family come back into the original family homestead. We're experiencing this personally, my own family, in Peterborough, and there are very few options. This is a key piece.

If you have an elderly parent who would love to stay at home and home care options are not exactly the answer, but they're looking for a long-term-care facility, the wait-lists are incredible. It's very similar, actually—when you think of the spectrum of our lives here, it reminds me of the same battles that I went through to get quality child care 15 years ago with my teenager. You get on a wait-list; you research the institutions. You want to make sure that it's a not-for-profit institution because you want to make sure all of that money that you are paying

actually goes into the quality of the services and the quality of the care, and those spaces for child care mirror the same challenge that you have with finding quality eldercare, and we're living that. Actually, all of us are going to live through that experience, but G30 looks to open a little window of opportunity, if you will, for family members to take time away from their workplace to care for a family member. If you can't afford to do it, then it's just not going to happen, and then you're left looking for the other community resources that, quite honestly, are stretched. I think it's quite fair to say that those community resources are stretched.

Some stakeholders in the community across the province have said that they have no real problems with the act, but just like a lot of the legislation that the Liberal government has brought forward, there are huge gaps in it. I just go back to this common theme of legislation coming to the floor of this Legislature which is just really surface stuff. Sometimes you scratch the surface and you just get a little more surface.

I'm relatively new here. I just don't understand why you wouldn't build some of the other community supports which actually would create a more successful outcome. That successful outcome would mean that people can leave their workplace; they would have some financial security in doing so; they would have some employment security in doing so; and quite honestly they themselves would be supportive. That's a major piece of this legislation that is missing.

Not every family member is qualified to care for a sick person. There are some skills that are involved. Supporting those family members as they navigate through some of those health issues is quite something.

I know that on the health file in my office, we've hired a full-time master's of social work graduate whose full-time job is to help people navigate through a complex health care system which, quite honestly, sets up barrier after barrier to access quality care. There are a lot of press conferences and a lot of ribbon-cutting and a lot of media releases that say, "No, it's streamlined." I can tell you from personal experience that if you are trying to navigate through the health care system in the province of Ontario, you will run into an administrative, bureaucratic nightmare. The full-time master's of social work student that I've hired in my office, she helps, on average, 15 to 20 people each week just to access the system. And when you're looking at mental health, for instance, when you consider the mental health issues that are prevalent in the province of Ontario, there's a whole other set of barriers and walls that are set up there.

We, of course, want to see some supports for employees who have to take leave from their workplace to care for family members. It does happen anyway. Out of pure desperation, and actually out of compassion and out of love, many mothers will leave their job to care for a sick child. Many husbands will take an unpaid leave from their workplace to care for an ailing spouse. They're doing so, currently, without any protection right now.

We do want to see those protections put in place. We do want to see better supports put in place, though, for

those family members. We have some outstanding and legitimate enforcement concerns with G30. Enforcement is always an issue with any employment standards—with the current ESA provisions.

Probably the biggest real obstacle to employees taking advantage of this leave—and I don't even think it's taking advantage. I mean, they're really just stepping in where the system is failing. But when they do take a leave, the fear is the employer will take some sort of reprisal. In this current employment environment, the pressure is on to increase productivity, to go that extra step, to hold on to that job. Clearly, the state of unemployment in the province of Ontario, which is the highest across this country, especially with youth—youth has actually doubled; it's almost 15% for youth in this province. The options of taking a leave from that job without fear of reprisal—on the ground, in reality, it's quite real.

We are seeing some issues that come into our office around quality health care, as I've mentioned. We have seen an increase in long-term-care facilities and the waitlists for those, but we are committed to ensuring that at the next stage, this act actually is strengthened, and it's only strengthened when the people that we serve come in and participate in the democratic process and ensure that their voices are heard in the legislation.

0920

We've been consistent since this minority government has been established, and quite honestly, the people like it. I think the people of this province actually really are happy that this is a minority government because for the first time ever they're seeing an exchange of ideas, and we're forced to listen to each other.

The people of this province want their politicians and their public servants to actually work harder, and I think that they're seeing that in real, tangible results that the NDP was able to accomplish in both budget processes, in the first in 2012, with the fairness tax and with increased supports for child care—child care is a long-standing issue in the province of Ontario—and in the last budget session, we were able to ensure that a Financial Accountability Officer will be part of this Legislature to double-check and to put that second sober thought, if you will, on policy decisions like moving gas plants around.

We've also been able to secure that home care and the youth employment strategy. We're proud of those results, and people see that we are working hard to ensure that their priorities are brought to this Legislature.

We obviously will be supporting G30. We will be looking to strengthen it and to ensure that when family members are in that very untenable and stressful situation where they have to leave their place of work to care for a family member, they are supported, they are protected, and their family member is well cared for.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Mike Colle: The NDP member from Kitchener-Waterloo has to explain why she keeps on talking to this bill. It's already gone through first- and second-reading

debate and committee. People are waiting to get the simple protection: that if they have a child or loved one that's sick at home and they take care of that child, they don't lose their job. It's a simple bill that's been through this House and debated for days and days.

You talk about all these great plans that are grandiose; here's a simple thing that helps people who need help to keep their job so they don't lose their job if their loved ones are sick.

You sit here stalling, talking. Why don't you just stand up and say that this bill needs to be passed and put it to a vote? Instead, you're standing up talking and talking and talking. Let's put your money where your mouth is.

People are waiting here because they've been fighting for this type of protection in Ontario for years. People don't want to lose their job if they have to go home and stay with their sick child. We can't then say, "Well, it's the federal government's fault," if we don't basically pass this simple protection about job protection.

The NDP can stand up and talk about how you're going to make this utopia, but all we're saying is put your money where your mouth is and help simple, hard-working families who have a loved one that's sick. I don't know if you understand that. When someone has cancer, when someone has heart disease, and they're saying, "I have to stay at home," and they ask their employer, "Please, I want to make sure I don't lose my job," the employer right now can say, "Forget it. You lose your job."

So stand up and say that you want this thing to come to a vote so we can get on with the work of helping families, and then we can get more help from the federal government and do all these grandiose, utopian things you call for. But you won't basically do the right thing and just say, "We've talked enough, we've debated enough. It's gone to committee, we've had amendments, we've listened to all the delegates from across the province," and you won't do the right thing and just say, "Let's vote and help families who have sick people at home. Let's vote on it."

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: I don't know what happened there. I'm supposed to be responding to the member from Kitchener-Waterloo.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: I think he must have celebrated St. Patrick's Day yesterday. He's still celebrating.

My point, really, is this, though: This is another example of a government that will not use the legislative tools that they have to pass this bill. They have complete control—they have what they call a minor majority; they call it a major majority.

Interjection: It's a minority.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, it's a minor—it's by one or two votes. They're being propped up by the NDP, to be fair now.

Bill 21, though, in itself is a bill that I have some compassion and reason to support. What is wrong here,

though? A good friend of mine, the member from Eglinton-Lawrence—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Speaker, I want the people here to listen to me for a change.

The member from Eglinton-Lawrence went on a bit of a rant. I had a lot of time for him. He's a former minister. If he hadn't given out \$1 million to a soccer club he'd probably still be a minister.

Interjection: Cricket.

Mr. John O'Toole: Cricket, it was.

But here's the deal: He knows very well, having been a cabinet minister, that he could use the tools to make this debate go away. And I'm challenging you to use them. But at the same time do not deny the member from Kitchener-Waterloo or any other member of this House the opportunity to voice the views of their constituents. It's their democratic right.

Again I have great respect for the member from Eglinton-Lawrence. I do, and I've said that twice now, so you can use it in your next election brochure. But here's the deal: I have a family of five children and 10 grandchildren—caregiver leave. Now, in the committee, you did do the right thing—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Excuse me. Your time has expired.

The member for Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to thank the member from Kitchener-Waterloo. I think she did a great job debating the shortcomings of this bill. The member from Eglinton-Lawrence, although he's entitled to his opinion, spent the last 20 minutes reading the newspaper and then complaining about us debating the bill over here.

The member from Kitchener-Waterloo talked about enforcement. This government had the opportunity, when they were making amendments to the ESA, to make a lot of better amendments. Enforcement is a huge issue in this province around the ESA. If I use the recent example that was in the newspaper this week for Terri-Lynn Garrie, who was paid \$1.25 an hour when the minimum wage was \$6, \$8 and \$10 an hour because there was no enforcement at Janus Joan Inc. in St. Catharines. Ten intellectually disabled workers worked there for 10 years. They were wrongfully dismissed and had to go to the human rights commission. If the government had been doing their job, they would have had enforcement, and they would have enforcement out in manufacturing companies, in small businesses and large businesses across this province, but, instead, they allowed the disabled to be discriminated against by being paid \$1.25 an hour. This woman, after 10 years, was awarded \$142,000 in lost wages, \$20,000 in lost income and \$25,000 in damages because the province wasn't doing its job having enforcement.

In a case where you can't even get your wages, do you actually think that the government is going to put in enough ministry enforcement officers to make sure that people who may be entitled to sick leave—it will be a very small number because it only applies to full-time

people—are actually going to get sick leave or caregiver leave off to look after their loved ones? I—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you.

The minister has the floor.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Good morning, Speaker. I have to tell you, when I came in this morning, I was surprised and saddened to learn that we're still going around the horn on this bill. Here we are at third reading. I've been told we've had 13 hours of debate getting to second reading, and we've had five hours of debate at the third-reading stage here.

The reality is, it's not just us who want to see this go to a vote now; it is our stakeholders on this. I know the Heart and Stroke Foundation, for example, has met with I think every member of the Legislature, indeed every member of the opposition. They came away with the impression that the opposition was ready to go on this bill too. So I'm really perplexed and puzzled why we're still here debating this. I think everyone has had their voice on this, sometimes multiple times.

0930

This is an important bill. It's part of a broader strategy to help families in Ontario, and it's a great opportunity for those to take a leave. They don't have to take the whole leave, as proposed in the bill. They can take a portion of the leave, so they can be with their loved ones in a time of need.

As I said, I'm very confused. Why are we here? Why are we still debating this? I think the member for Eglinton–Lawrence showed his passion for the importance of the bill. He's trying to persuade our colleagues here to get on with it, to listen to what the stakeholders have said. They have also said, "Let's get on with this."

Every day that we keep going around the horn here on this, we are not getting closer to making this a reality for families. We need to stop stalling, and we need to start voting on this, in my view. I'm asking people to stop putting up speakers, so that we can have a vote. I think there are some good suggestions that we can take forward. So let's move forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'd like to thank the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, the member from Durham, the Minister of Consumer Services and my colleague here from Welland.

It's interesting that there's such bluster from that side of the House because, prior to Christmas, they worked with the PC caucus and, through a programming motion, tried to fast-track a number of pieces of legislation. When they tried to get something done for one company, EllisDon, they were able to fast-track and accelerate their own personal interests. Yet when I stand up in this House and point out the weaknesses of this piece of legislation, they cry foul. It is hypocritical and it is tiresome, and it's the kind of cynical politics that people in the province are tired of.

When we stand up and we point out what the weaknesses are in this piece of legislation, and then we give

you options to try to fix it—for instance, there are no maximum monetary limits on claims to be dealt with. There's a two-year limitation period to file a complaint. There are two-year entitlements to claim unpaid wages and vacation. You could have addressed this. You could have done this.

Once again, though, the Liberal government brings a weak piece of legislation to this Legislature. Just with the optics, all that that side of the House is concerned about doing is looking like they are getting something done. I'm telling you something: The people of this province see right through it, and it's our job to make sure they see it. They see you for who you are.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. Further debate?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'm pleased to have been asked to speak to Bill 21 here today. It's an important bill and one that our party supports.

Bill 21, Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families), 2014, proposes several amendments to the current Employment Standards Act to correlate with some similar changes that the federal government has made to the Canada Labour Code.

Our caucus is glad to see that changes our party presented when this bill was originally introduced as Bill 30, the Family Caregiver Leave Act—we're pleased to see our changes incorporated.

The government, in their usual manner, did not properly consult on the original bill with stakeholders, or with the small business community in particular. This is a common theme with this government, as I have outlined in this House on several occasions. I am going to give you some examples now.

Just as with Bill 21, the government didn't properly consult on the Ontario Northland issue, one of the issues that affect so many people throughout northern Ontario. One day, almost exactly two years ago this month, we heard that Ontario Northland was going to be put on the chopping block—a fire sale—with absolutely no consultation, much like Bill 21. We found that they had no consultation, in their typical style. It was quite a shocking revelation throughout all of the north, and here we are, two years later, and it's still not resolved—

Ms. Soo Wong: A point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): A point of order.

Ms. Soo Wong: The member from Nipissing is supposed to talk about Bill 21. I don't know how the Northlander has anything to do with Bill 21. I just want some clarity about that, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Oh, I'll explain.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member needs to be reminded that his remarks have to be relevant to the bill being debated.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. The point I'm making is that there was absolutely no consultation on the original bill with stakeholders—on Bill 21—on with the small business community. I realize that the

Liberals do not like to talk about the punishment that they inflicted on northern Ontario through the devastating fire sale of Ontario Northland. I can understand why they don't want me to speak about that. I am making a comparison, Speaker.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): A point of order.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Madam Speaker, we're not talking about the bill under debate, which is what we're supposed to be doing.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'm mindful of that and I ask the member to continue.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. Again, what I'm trying to do here is to illustrate that the government did not properly consult with the original stakeholders or the small business community, exactly the same thing that they did to Ontario Northland and to members of the north. So that point being made, let me move on to the second comparison.

Just as with Bill 21, the government didn't properly consult with the stakeholders on the Lake Nipissing walleye limit reductions in northern Ontario either.

Just as with Bill 21, the government didn't properly consult on the Far North Act when they devastated the mining and logging communities by taking half of northern Ontario off of the participation list in logging and forestry, which has crippled the mining industry and devastated the logging industry. There are 60 mills that are now closed throughout the north; 80% of all of the mills are closed because they had lack of consultation. We have mining companies now that have left northern Ontario for other mining jurisdictions.

Just as with Bill 21, where they did not properly consult, they obviously did not consult the general public when they proceeded to cancel the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants, which we have now learned cost us \$1.1 billion.

Speaker, I think you're starting to get the picture of this government's inaction in terms of consulting with people in advance. They didn't do it with the horse racing industry. The list could go on and on to make a comparison back to Bill 21.

Previously, my colleague from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex highlighted the lack of consultation with the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters association, in particular; however, we can see now they have followed through on making significant changes and improvements to this bill. They did come back with a better bill. That's what consultation gets you. That's what talking to your partners can get you.

Bill 21 will help in eliminating the inconsistencies that exist between our federal labour code and the provincial labour laws. As of June last year, the federal government started paying out benefits for what is the federal equivalent of the proposed critically ill child care leave. Additionally, as of January 2013, they have also begun implementing grants for 35 weeks for the equivalent of the proposed crime-related child death or disappearance leave.

Bill 21 would not incur any additional costs provincially. It would just protect the job from being terminated. Of course, we're interested in putting families first. I think we all know of families or we've had family members who have faced personal health issues and can certainly understand why this bill is important and why it's important to debate.

In Ontario, there are currently only two forms of leave available to workers that are protected under the Employment Standards Act: the family medical leave and the personal emergency leave. Under the current federal Employment Insurance Act, six weeks of employment insurance benefits may be paid to eligible employees under this leave. The family medical leave is an unpaid job-protected leave up to eight weeks within a 26-week period.

In order to be eligible, a qualified health practitioner must issue a certificate stating that an individual to be cared for has a serious medical condition and has a significant risk of death occurring within a period of 26 weeks. The personal emergency leave gives some employees the right to take up to 10 days of unpaid, job-protected leave each year due to injuries, illnesses and certain other emergencies or urgent matters. This type of leave would only be eligible for individuals who work for a company that regularly employs more than 50 employees.

0940

Bill 21 includes the introduction of new types of leaves, and that's why it's so important to be talking about this, and that's why it was so important to have brought this in advance and consulted in advance. The family caregiver leave offers up to eight weeks unpaid per year; the critically ill child care leave for up to 37 weeks for parents caring for a critically ill child; and a crime-related death or disappearance leave of up to 104 weeks for employees whose child dies as a result of a crime, or up to 52 weeks for employees whose child disappears as a result of a crime. The family caregiver leave mirrors the family medical leave in many ways; however, it does not include the provision of significant risk of death within a 26-week period.

It's important that this bill brings Ontario legislation in line with the federal legislation that was passed some time ago. We would like to see some important flexibility put into this program because it is fairly restrictive in the time frames, and I believe some of this was addressed at committee. One aspect of this bill is to keep seniors in their homes and allow that to happen. Of course, giving people the opportunity to take a leave from their job to care for a loved one—as I said, we've all had family members or friends of our families who have had to face health issues and challenges on that front.

The Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters association raised some issues with this, particularly around the days off. It could impact production in any manufacturing facility. I'm hoping the government will take that into account and work with them on this issue. Again, that's all to do with consulting with your partners, your stake-

holders, the members of the public, the business community who are going to be involved in these decisions. We can't afford for Bill 21 to have a negative impact on the manufacturing sector, especially now when we have 600,000 men and women who woke up this morning without a job.

Since 2003, it has been said many, many times: Ontario has lost over 300,000 manufacturing jobs, at the same time adding over 300,000 government workers to the payroll. Of course, taxpayers simply cannot afford to pay that cost and the burden of those extra workers.

The current government has erected a number of barriers to new jobs, including layers of unnecessary red tape and one of the highest costs of government in North America. We must ensure that Bill 21 doesn't throw up any more barriers to business and business expansion. We cannot put new barriers in front of businesses and in front of job creators. I urge the government just to be careful with these bills that they are bringing forward. We are at a critical time in Ontario's history. We've seen the impact—many of us, from all parties, travelled in the pre-budget consultations this year. We had eight communities that we visited collectively, and we all heard the same things: skyrocketing energy rates, high taxes and red tape. These are part of the impediments to business creation, and we're very concerned that Bill 21 not be added as part of the new burdens to business.

We hear and we talk of Kellogg's, Heinz and Caterpillar all leaving Ontario. They're still making cereal. They're still making ketchup. They're still making earthmoving equipment vehicles. They're just not making them in Ontario anymore. As I said, when all three parties toured Ontario, we saw skyrocketing energy rates, high taxes and red tape as three of the greatest burdens to starting businesses and maintaining businesses here in the province of Ontario, which is why we see Kellogg's, Heinz, Caterpillar—and I could use my last seven minutes just talking about the companies that have left Ontario.

In the United States, we are seeing major corporations bring home production from abroad because they need highly skilled workers and because they want to produce closer to their customers. Even Chinese companies are starting to make their products here in North America. In Ontario, we need to bring companies back to the province of Ontario, but we have to first get the fundamentals right. This is a great opportunity for Ontario, Bill 21, but we are competing directly with other provinces and with US states, where lower taxes, lower power rates, streamlined—

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The Minister of Consumer Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I think just mentioning the bill and injecting that where there are other completely unrelated topics to the bill—I don't really think that's the spirit and intent of the standing order, Speaker. I think that our obligations are to speak to the bill or to vote on the bill, and I'd ask your consideration.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I would remind the member of the point of order and to make sure that he puts it in the context of the bill.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I realize that the cabinet minister does not like hearing the truth about the state of Ontario that her government has created, Speaker. But I can tell you that—

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Point of order, Speaker: Again, I'm suggesting that the standing orders be followed and that my motives are not questioned in this House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member, continue.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I realize that the Liberal government has created a skyrocketing-hydro-rates, high-taxes and red-tape regime, and Bill 21, if they were carefully listening to what I was saying—we want to make sure that Bill 21 doesn't add to the burden that this government has already created, that has caused 600,000 men and women to wake up this morning without a job, which caused 300,000 manufacturing jobs to be lost in Ontario.

Ontario's manufacturers require a champion who will ensure that power rates are competitive, that our provincial transportation system works well, that our schools and colleges educate people for the workplace of the 21st century, and that regulations that government imposes encourage competition and not deter it. Right now, we don't have those conditions here in Ontario. That's why I bring this up with respect to Bill 21: that we don't want to see it causing undue burden. We've heard from this government that hydro rates are going up another 42% in the next five years, and that surely is going to kill more jobs in the province and make life more unaffordable for seniors and for families impacted by Bill 21 who have loved ones at home who are sick.

I think that the bill speaks to the compassion that members of this Legislature have for the people we all represent. Whatever party we're with, we really feel for those families struggling and for those loved ones who are ill. Honestly, most would agree with the kind of initiative. Who wouldn't agree with the plan, as long as it's well thought out and it's not going to be harmful on the job creation side? When a person has an ill child or family member, we all think of them. We can sympathize with the stress that they are under. We hope every child is going to live a happy and healthy life, but that's not always the case. In these circumstances, it is important for all of us to show that type of compassion and understanding.

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It's good to see that we're showing more compassion to family members who unselfishly give up their time to care for a family member and that we are working to provide a level support for them to do so. A streamlined piece of legislation is something we can support, one that eliminates inconsistencies and duplications.

For an aging or critically ill person, it makes a lot of sense to have family members around to care for them, particularly because the reality is that there's a lack of

long-term-care beds in this province. It's a real concern here in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, I think it's a shame when front-line services are cut and what replaces front-line services is more government bureaucracy. I look at the LHINs sucking hundreds of millions of dollars out of front-line health care services right across the province just for the sake of a new bureaucracy.

Again, when dealing with the loss or disappearance of a child, it's time that it finally gets recognized as it does now in Bill 21. During this heartbreaking period for any parent who might end up in this situation, providing them time is not only compassionate, but it's absolutely the right thing to do. That's why our party has been very supportive of this government's piece of legislation.

This bill, as I said, which we are supporting, is important to many people in the province of Ontario, but there are major challenges that we have to address with this sitting of the Legislature. We've said that we need to clear the decks. Our leader, Tim Hudak, has been clear on that, that we need to get focused on what really matters in Ontario right now, especially after the losses at Heinz and Kellogg's. I would encourage this government to start looking at the deficit and the jobs crisis that they have created here in Ontario today.

I'm sure the Liberal members have to agree with me that everywhere you go—we all saw it on the pre-budget consultations—people are concerned about their jobs so they can care for their loved ones. Bill 21, the Employment Standards Amendment Act, proposes several amendments to the current employment standards to correlate with some similar changes made with the federal government.

Again, I say we're supporting this bill. I think that we need to always show a compassionate side for our loved ones and for our families. I wish that we would have had the consultation earlier in this rather than having the bill foisted on us with no consultation, as I said earlier—the same as we saw for Ontario Northland, the walleye fishing in the north, the tourism centres that were closed, the Far North Act. The list can go on and on, including the horse racing sector.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I listened carefully to the member from Nipissing, and he raised some concerns that had something to do with the bill in a roundabout way.

I'd like to use this opportunity to correct my record. Earlier I referred to this bill as Bill 30. It had been at one point, I think. It's Bill 21, and I'd like to correct my record on that.

It is interesting, though, about priorities. I think that the member from Nipissing sort of touched on this. Earlier we heard that the Liberals just want this to be done. But I would encourage them—and there was some outrage about the fact that we're still talking about the bill, debating the bill, pointing out weaknesses in the bill. That has taken quite some time. But earlier, the member from Eglinton–Lawrence—the Liberals need to organize

their legislative agenda, and I would respectfully suggest that. They last called this bill—

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, they're yelling.

They last called this bill for debate on December 3. If this bill was such a priority, why didn't it crack their legislative agenda until March 18? Once again, we are just seeing games from that side of the House.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: If it is such a priority for you, then why did it take so long to get to, March 18?

The member from Nipissing has raised some good concerns, though, around process and around consultation. As I mentioned in my earlier comments, we share the same concern. If you had truly done a thorough consultation on this piece of legislation, you would have heard some legitimate concerns around enforcement, which you have not included in the legislation.

So it is a small step, a small, small positive step, but it's just typical gamesmanship on the part of the Liberal government.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for recognizing me. I want to first off welcome and recognize amazing champions of families and community care in the assembly today. We've got Krista Orendorff, Cristin Napier and Sumi Shanmuganathan from the Heart and Stroke Foundation; Joanne Di Nardo, Kelly Gorman and Florentina Stancu-Soare from the Canadian Cancer Society. We have Delia Sinclair representing the Alzheimer Society, Gene Long representing SEIU, Abidah Lalani representing the MS Society as part of the Ontario Caregiver Coalition, and Natasha Mistry from the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of Canada.

They're all here because they support this bill 100%. They are all here because they want to get this bill passed yesterday, Speaker, so that we can help our families. They have been—Speaker, I want to apologize to them on behalf of my colleagues from the opposition parties for their shameful behaviour of continuing to drag out this important piece of legislation. Hours and hours of debate: 13 hours of debate during second reading, two hours of committee and amendments to the bill that were proposed by the opposition parties at the committee level, and now five hours of third reading debate.

They're being told, these advocates—and I've worked with them again and again—"Oh, we support the bill. We want to pass that bill immediately." However, what we see is the same old filibustering tactics. That is not acceptable. That is not fair to these hard-working people who would rather be in the community right now serving so many of our families across the province, as opposed to sitting in the Legislature.

The time for partisanship is over. Let's vote for this bill now and help our families across the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I listened very carefully to the member from Nipissing, a colleague of mine. He was really trying to put the entire story together, kind of the pieces of a puzzle. I have great respect for the work he has done as our critic on finance, and that role exposes him to both the strengths of Ontario and the weaknesses.

What he was trying to say is that the most troubling part in Ontario is those 600,000 families that don't have a job. That causes stress. Part of what you're doing here in Ontario with some of these bills—and I think you're being disingenuous on this particular bill because it's actually a year; it was March 5, 2013, when it was introduced. If you really wanted to pass this very small bill—now, how poorly it was drafted. If you look at the third reading copy after it has been to committee, it's full of stroked-out sections and additions. So what we've done—

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: I give them full credit. At least the NDP are standing and bringing voice to—in their case, they spoke this morning about the inappropriate amount of enforcement provisions within this. That's something that should be dealt with in regulation, and the government, rather than just getting up and saying, "We've talked too much about it," should get up and actually add value to the discussion and say how you're going to enforce it. What are the fines? What resources are you putting into it? You're downloading this cost to the employers. That's who's paying it. It isn't costing you a nickel. You're giving it to the employers to pay it.

So take this debate seriously. Our finance critic, you've criticized him twice when he was trying to make it so important that Ontario has to have health in the economy so that families can get out from under the stress of looking at their hydro bill or whatever else is causing them grief in their family. Think of the seniors that you're punishing this past winter—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Yes?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to correct my record, Speaker. Earlier in my comments, I mentioned two hours of committee hearings. I meant to say two days of committee hearings.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. Further comments?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I thought it was nice that you raised all the groups that are here, particularly the one around heart and stroke. I can tell you that I've used the Heart and Stroke Foundation when I had my open-heart surgery, and the importance that they are to the community, so maybe you can take it back to say thank you. I'm here today because of the good work that Heart and Stroke did when I needed their time.

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Having said that, during that time of illness I needed a family member to take care of me. When I came home from the hospital, it was hard for me to walk five steps. I needed somebody to make sure I took my pills, to make sure I got to the washroom okay, helped me do the five steps and take me outside—to make sure that I was doing all those things. That meant that one of my family members had to take time off work. I had to rely on an employer who would have to say that they could take the time off work for the five days. She works in a unionized environment—she's a principal, so it was easy, quite frankly, for her to take the time off. They allowed her to take as much time off as she needed. In this particular case, it ended up being a couple of weeks so that I could take care of myself after a couple of weeks.

But the problem you have—and this is why it was so important that the enforcement part was talked about. In a unionized environment, it may be a little easier to get time off because you have a collective agreement. You have a number of things that you can do. In a non-union workplace, how do you get the time off? In that same circumstance, using myself as an example, the employer could say no. The enforcement language that's in place here isn't strong enough to make sure that the employer can't say no. That has been the concern—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The time is up.

The member for Nipissing has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I want to thank the members from Kitchener–Waterloo and Niagara. I want to thank the Minister of Labour.

I particularly want to thank our member from Durham for speaking on the supplementary. The member from Durham talked about getting the fundamentals right, and that's what I wanted to use these last moments to talk about.

We are supporting Bill 21. Let's get that very clear. What we are saying is, they brought this out without consultation, without talking to the stakeholders. That's the point I want to end with, that's so very, very critical. I understand the personal attack. I don't have any difficulty with that.

I know that, yesterday, I disclosed, through the Focus on Finance piece, the new secret documents that we developed. I brought them to this Legislature yesterday; I'll be bringing them back again today. I can understand why they like to shoot the messenger. That's their way. I understand that. I'm used to that from the Liberal government. It happens to be part of my role, first as energy critic and now as finance critic, to be on the receiving end of these secret documents.

I like to talk about those because they tell you what's really in their hearts and minds over there, being told one thing and spreading a complete opposite story as truth. That's the problem we have. We know that's what this government does, being told one thing and saying some-

thing completely opposite to the stakeholders, to the financial community and to the bond-rating agencies.

So I understand why they yell and heckle and can do that. It doesn't hide the very fundamental that they brought a bill without consultation. It's about the 10th time they've done that since I've been here in only two and a half years and, quite frankly, they don't like being exposed for that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Actually, it's truly my pleasure to stand up here today and contribute to this debate on Bill 21. The reason for that is, I want to exercise my democratic right as the representative of London-Fanshawe constituents who asked me to come here and give them a voice to every bill that's presented in this House.

The reason I say that—and there's no disrespect to the organizations that are here today to see that this bill moves forward and gets voted on. I absolutely want this bill to move forward. I also support this bill, as the New Democratic Party members do here in this House.

But there is a process that we must follow. It's a democratic process that we set up here in Canada, in Ontario, and that's what I believe in. So I want to have a voice on this bill. It was introduced, and I know that it's gone for first reading. I also know it went to second reading and then it went back to committee, where a lot of important work was done. But if we continue to push, to rush debate, what is the next bill that we're going to rush through? We have to set a line of standards when we have bills, and the standards have been set in Queen's Park, in the Legislature, of how and when and where to debate bills, and this is the place. So please allow every member in this House to stand up and speak to this bill as they see fit.

The government here—there's a lot of filibustering. They accuse the opposition parties of filibustering; absolutely not. Do not accuse a member of filibustering when they wish to sincerely and passionately speak to an important bill.

You obviously want to push this bill through. We believe that this is a good thing for family members, but we also, again, have concerns. So even though the bill has gone to committee and has gone through those amendments, it doesn't mean it's a perfect bill. It doesn't mean that we agree with the entire concept of this bill.

We agree with the principle of the bill. We all know that family members take ill and that there aren't enough home care supports in place to help our family members when they're ill. Therefore, a lot of that responsibility falls back to adult children, parents, grandparents etc.

This is not the first time—and we have to clear this up. The member from Kitchener-Waterloo brought it up, and I was going to state this as well: This is not the first time this bill has been presented in the House. The member who is the Minister of Municipal Affairs brought it forward—excuse me, the labour minister at the time brought it forward; she is now the municipal affairs min-

ister—but that bill got dropped, taken off the table. The reason—we forget why that was—was because the Liberal government—

Interjection: Prorogued.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes, they prorogued. Why did they prorogue this Legislature, Speaker? Not in the interests of the people of Ontario, not in the interests of my constituents of London-Fanshawe, but in the interests of the Liberal government leadership race. That's the reality.

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's because they were embroiled in a scandal.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The member from Welland has mentioned the embroiled scandals. But I don't want to use that as a theme. What I want to add to the discussion is, I want to add my voice to the debate because I believe it's important to discuss amendments after a bill goes to committee. It's incumbent upon us to discuss those amendments and whether or not they've actually accomplished what this bill is intended for, the purpose of this bill at the time that it went to committee and how it came back—what it looks like now.

It went to committee. We made some changes. Now what does it look like? What are our comments and our debate towards this bill? That's what we're here doing today.

I see the organizations are nodding, and they agree. They agree that, yes, we should be talking about these amendments and do they serve the purpose of this bill. Do they serve the purpose of the people it's intended to affect? That's what I'm going to speak about today.

I also want to talk about maybe, from my perception, how someone stands up in this House and presents their argument, fact, debate.

I see the member from Ottawa—Centre?

Interjection: South.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong:—South nodding his head. For me, if someone stands up and speaks clearly and respectfully and has facts and is thoughtful, I listen. My ears open up and I listen. For a member who's show-casing, flailing their hands, altering their voice up and down, almost like they're shouting at another person, for me, I lose the subject matter of what they're talking about. If we really want to have a fulsome, considerate debate, let's speak in a tone where people are going to open their ears and listen to what we have to say, because the member from Kitchener-Waterloo pointed out very clearly that it feels like cynical politics. It feels like games they're playing when they're yelling and screaming across the way, pointing their finger and accusing us, or accusing members, of filibustering and not respecting the fact that organizations are here and want this bill passed today. Speaker, I just want to point that out.

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When people speak in a way that they actually draw people in, that's when people listen. I don't know how the people who are watching us today, sitting on their couches in their living room, are receiving messages when they hear a respectful tone and information and the

sincerity of a member when they speak, as opposed to someone who's maybe grandstanding—and political posturing—trying to make someone else look like they're not sincere in this debate. I don't know how that comes across, but that's just my thought.

I also want to say that I listened to the member from Niagara Falls and that story. That is the perfect example. Here we have someone who had a very fatal sickness, a heart attack issue, and was at home and needed help. I'm not sure why the home care piece maybe didn't work out, but if that's the case—you often hear those stories. We get a lot of calls in my community office about the lack of getting home care when they need it.

I did present a five-day home care guarantee in this House. It's crucial, when you have someone—as the member from Niagara Falls had a situation—with a heart issue, she or he cannot wait more than five days to have that home care. If he was in rural Ontario, that could have been a grave problem, because they wait for home care an exorbitant amount of time, compared to people in urban areas.

His spouse, his partner, worked for a public education system that allowed them to have that flexibility to take time off. That's great—two weeks that they needed, to get a helping hand, to get back on their feet.

I'm very pleased that we have the member from Niagara Falls here in good health. That probably made the world of difference, that he was able to have that one-to-one care from his family member.

The other thing I want to talk about is what I have personally experienced through someone I know who is going through a very, very difficult, rough patch in their life right now. This woman is fairly young, and her family has been having issue after issue after issue and would require this time off to help with family medical problems, with family traumatic problems.

I noticed that one of the amendments that was brought to committee originally—it's been stroked out here—was that the employee had to take full-week periods. This is why this debate is very important, because we can actually highlight. Organizations probably were part of that committee process and gave their feedback, but the public wasn't. Employees weren't, perhaps. They're working; they can't come and listen every day to committee deputations. They may not have the time to go to the Hansard and find out what those amendments were. That's our job. That's our job, to communicate what those amendments look like after the committee process has happened, and this is what this opportunity is all about.

I encourage the Liberal government members to stand up and talk about those amendments and how they benefit people or maybe if there's a weakness to those amendments—

Interjection.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: That's right.

Please don't filibuster yourselves and accuse other members of holding up debate and pushing this vote through. That's not what it's about today. Today it's

about talking about the amendments that happened in committee and how they affect this bill, and how they affect the general public, and employees specifically, who are working and need that time off to look after family members. Speaker, that was one of the amendments: striking out that employees must take time off a week at a time.

When I looked at the amendments, I went to the table in the Legislature and I said, "Well, okay, I've looked through this. I see that that has been taken out. Where is the replacement piece to that?" Is there another condition somewhere in this bill that says they have to take two weeks off at a time, three days off at a time, eight weeks off at a time? Lo and behold, there wasn't a replacement clause in that time.

Speaker, did you want to stand? I anticipate that you might be—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I was waiting for you to come to at least the end of the sentence.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): It is close to 10:15. This House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise to welcome the Grain Farmers of Ontario, including Chair Henry Van Ankum, who are here today at Queen's Park. I hope that all members will take time to speak with them at their reception this evening in room 228.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to welcome Samantha Machado, a co-op student working at my office, a fourth-year Ryerson social worker.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to welcome, for the third time, Julia Martin, and Elizabeth and Mike Martin from my riding of Ottawa Centre, who are the grandparents of Caroline Falkner and grandparents of our former page Amy Falkner. Welcome to Queen's Park.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Aujourd'hui, je voudrais présenter M. Denis Vaillancourt, le président de l'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, qui est avec nous et qui a reçu hier l'Ordre de la Pléiade, et sa vice-présidente Julie Lutete, qui est vice-présidente de minorités raciales et ethnoculturelles francophones de l'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm delighted today to welcome, in the public gallery, Matt Boudreau from my office. He has family visiting from Davenport, Iowa: Paul Boudreau, Cole Boudreau and Grant Albansoder. Welcome.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'd like to welcome page Jane Oleksiw and her father, Bob Oleksiw, who is in the public gallery in this morning. Welcome.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I also want to welcome Joanne Di Nardo, Kelly Gorman and Florentina Stancu-Soare from

the Canadian Cancer Society, who are here in support of Bill 21.

Mr. John Vanthof: I would like to welcome Karen Laffrenier, proud mom of Callista Laffrenier. She's up in the public gallery. I don't know why she's there today, but welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions? The member from—yes.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to introduce my brother Vince Marchese, who has not been here for a long, long time. He is a retired French teacher—something that, every now and then, I think I might have liked to have done for a lifetime, when we consider pensions or lack of them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member from Trinity–Spadina for his statement. I got thrown off; I apologize to the member for missing his riding.

On behalf of the MPP for Kenora–Rainy River, celebrating our page Mira Donaldson, mother Kelly Spicer and father Guy Donaldson are here visiting their daughter.

Also, on behalf of the Attorney General, Urooj Ali's mother, Naila Ali; father, Syed Muhammad Ali; and brother Ahmed Syed Baktihar are in the gallery visiting the pages.

Welcome, and thank you for being here.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finally, to all members—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's kind of funny when you say something out of context and everyone says, "Uh oh, what's going to happen?"

I'd like the pages to assemble to be introduced. Oh, somebody frogged. You guys realize that one of your colleagues is going to get teased for frogging? Okay.

I would like all members to join me in welcoming this group of legislative pages serving in the second session of the 40th Parliament: Urooj Ali from Kingston and the Islands; Bani Arora from Bramalea–Gore–Malton; Zohaib Aslam from Mississauga–Erindale; Megan Barkey from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock; Anthony Bello from Vaughan; Calvin Devries from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound; Divya Dey from Etobicoke Centre; Mira Donaldson from Kenora–Rainy River; Caroline Falkner from Ottawa Centre; Simon Hopkins from Ajax–Pickering; Nusaybah Khan from Scarborough–Rouge River; Justin Kim from Don Valley West; Nicholas Lacoste from Kitchener–Conestoga; Callista Laffrenier from Timiskaming–Cochrane; Mustfah Madlol from London West; Kathryn Nicol from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke; Isabella O'Brien from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale; Jane Oleksiw from Niagara Falls; Jonah Opler from Eglinton–Lawrence; Eli Park from Parkdale–High Park; Milana Thibodeau Morris from St. Catharines; and Samantha Unger from York Centre. These are our pages.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Get back to work. The Minister of Finance on an introduction.

VISITORS

Hon. Charles Sousa: It gives me great pleasure to introduce members of the Ontario Securities Commission who will be joining us this morning. That includes Howard Weston, the chair of the Ontario Securities Commission, as well as Aly Vitunski and Blair Stransky. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If there are no further introductions, it is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure to ask a question today to the Acting Premier.

Less than a day after your government announced it would be bringing forward accountability and transparency legislation, you announced the appointment of Sandra Papatello, a former leadership candidate for your party and a McGuinty Liberal cabinet minister, to chair the embattled Hydro One. This took place without a public process and without an application process.

She is set to make \$150,000 a year or, based on last year's schedule, \$3,800 an hour. This is at a time when most Ontarians cannot afford to pay their hydro bills and when jobs are leaving this province by the tens of thousands. Ontarians are rightfully cynical over this patronage appointment.

I asked yesterday, given that the Ontario PC government would fire Sandra Papatello, will this government expose what they have said they would pay her in severance?

Interjections.

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

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: We have two agencies in particular that have had chairs who have been in place for upwards of 10 years, Mr. Speaker. In the normal course, we would replace chairs who have been in place that long.

We did look at the abilities of a number of people. I would say, first of all, with respect to Ontario Power Generation, we appointed Bernard Lord, former Premier of New Brunswick, who had tremendous experience and who incidentally has Conservative ties, I believe. We're very proud of that Conservative appointment, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. John Yakabuski: CYA. CYA.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will withdraw.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: We're very proud of that—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No, you're finished.

Supplementary.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: If the Liberals had a Senate, Sandra Pupatello would be the government leader in the Senate.

We're tired, on this side, of Liberal government hacks. The sense of Liberal entitlement has worn very thin. I didn't hear what he is paying not only Sandra Pupatello in her severance, but also Bernard Lord, who this caucus does not think is fit to run the OPG.

Not only are they going to be forced to pay for these exorbitant salaries, as well as severances they are not prepared to disclose, but yesterday the energy minister tied the natural gas increase to hydro rates at the OEB. For a minister that says the OEB chooses rates on its own, it was interesting he would contradict himself when he left question period.

But let's have a refresher on Liberal energy policy: the billion-dollar gas plant scandal, \$20-billion failed green energy plan, exporting energy at a loss of a billion dollars and now Sandra Pupatello's expensive energy policy. I'd call that—

Interjections.

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

Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I quite enjoy the questions I get from my Conservative critic, because there's usually a diatribe that involves six or eight or 10 issues, which you couldn't possibly answer in a question. I have to play "What will I answer today, of all the things she indicated?" I'll get back to her main question.

Sandra Pupatello has served this province and served this government extremely well. She has served in a number of different ministries, including community and social services, economic development and others. She has had the responsibility of managing ministries that have huge budgets. She has been interested, very much so, in service to the public. She has economic experience as Economic Development Commissioner for the city of Windsor. She has also been a senior adviser to KPMG, a business consulting firm. We are proud of that appointment and I really, really think that that's a—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Stop the clock.

From memory: the Minister of Rural Affairs will come to order; the member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry will come to order; and the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke will come to order. I also believe it was the member from Simcoe North.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I did, and I'm hearing the member from Halton now. I'll get you.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: If the minister wants to know why I have so much loaded in my questions, it's because

they have a 10-year record of failure in energy, adding only to the expensive appointment of a Liberal hack, who he wants to repay after she lost the leadership of their party and whom he supported.

We are the only party in this assembly that is committed to reducing hydro bills. We have said we would monetize OPG and Hydro One and make them accountable so it wouldn't be the Senate for Liberal hacks. We have said we would end the expensive FIT program to the tune of \$20 billion a year for 1% of hydro that it's producing and we said we would deal with the oversupply by creating sensible energy plans. I would stack Tim Hudak's plan against their plan any day.

Will they have the guts to go to the polls and put those two energy plans in place and let the voters decide on which path they want to take? Sandra Pupatello and Kathleen Wynne's—

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I give the opposition credit for bringing forward white papers on their energy policy. One of their policies is to privatize Ontario's Power Generation, which they tried to do back around 2002. Here's what the Toronto Sun said about their initiative, which is in their white paper today: "Instead, it led to the exact opposite" of price reduction. "Rates skyrocketed amid rampant Tory patronage, and the Conservatives, faced with rising public fury, abandoned the scheme, leaving a financial disaster in their wake." That's from their paper, the Toronto Sun.

Also, the million-dollar act that they initiated: They will cancel existing contracts and expose the province to \$20 billion in claims.

Their policies were a disaster, are a disaster. They don't deserve to be elected.

SKILLED TRADES

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question today is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, last week, your Minister of Economic Development and Trade rubber-stamped the compulsory certification of carpentry. Basically, he did that without any knowledge of the industry, saying that the decision had already been made. That is in contrast to you and the Ontario College of Trades, who claim that compulsory certification of carpentry is industry-driven.

Minister, is the compulsory certification of carpentry a done deal, and is your government about to rubber-stamp a deal that will cripple the construction industry in Ontario and cost tens of thousands of jobs right here in Ontario?

Interjections.

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

The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Of course not, Mr. Speaker. We set up the College of Trades so that these decisions could be made in an evidence-based, rational environment, unlike the party opposite, whose view is that these decisions should be made in backrooms at the Albany Club. That's the way the decisions were made in the past—not in the future. We respect the skilled trades more than that.

We believe that these decisions ought to be made by people who are involved in the skilled trades, who understand the challenges involved, who understand the impacts on the skilled trades, who understand the impacts on the economy, who understand the impacts on Ontarians. That's why we set up the College of Trades, Mr. Speaker.

So in answer to the member's question, of course not. That's the decision, ultimately. If an application were to come forward, it would go through the proper process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Well, at least they're not making the decision in Pat Dillon's living room.

Minister, the compulsory certification of carpentry is really only supported by one group, and that's the Carpenters' Union.

We all know that the membership in the Ontario College of Trades is nothing more than a new trades tax. You know that; the whole province knows that.

The third party, the NDP, clearly do not support any new "taxes, tolls or fees" on the working class. The Labourers' union, LIUNA, detests the compulsory certification of carpentry. So my question is, are you prepared to cripple the construction industry in Ontario by rubber-stamping the compulsory certification of carpentry, or will you side with the NDP and LIUNA and demand no new taxes and save thousands of jobs right here in our province?

Hon. Brad Duguid: It really is time for the member to start levelling with Ontarians and start talking factually about what the College of Trades is about and stop trying to say things that simply aren't in keeping with the facts. If he's got a good argument, he can make that argument by factually making that argument, rather than making things up.

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the College of Trades is set up to deal with these kinds of issues. These are challenging decisions. They have to be made in a rational environment. They have to be evidence-based. They have to consider impacts on the economy, they have to consider impacts on Ontarians and they have to consider impacts on the skilled trades.

In the past, these decisions were made in government backrooms or not made at all and ignored. We've set up a structure now that allows for an evidence-based consideration of these decisions. That, I think, is the way of the future. That respects the skilled trades. That ensures—

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

Final supplementary.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Someday, Minister, I'd like to give you a briefing on the trades in Ontario. You might learn from it.

Minister, I understand the wedge you are put in here.

The Ontario College of Trades is nothing more than a new trades tax.

Speaker, even today, tens of thousands of hairstylists formed a new association and have joined the Stop the Trades Tax campaign with a new Cut the Salon Tax campaign.

With thousands of apprentices and journeyman candidates about to be put out of work on April 8, and with your compulsory certification of carpentry about to kill tens of thousands of construction jobs here in Ontario, and with a bunch of cop wannabes harassing the tradespeople of Ontario, and now with a new Cut the Salon Tax, don't you think it's about time you actually listened to me and joined with Tim Hudak and the PC caucus and abolished this pathetic College of Trades once and for all?

Interjections.

1050

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

Minister?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I listen to the member every time he gets up. The problem is, what he says isn't in keeping with the facts. So I can listen until the cows come home, but I'm waiting to hear something sensible from the member that's really going to help us drive forward the skilled trades, help us build stronger skilled trades in this province. If we had listened to the member opposite when it comes to ratios between apprentices and journeymen, we would have ended up exactly where we were under them when they were in government, where they had zero reductions in trade ratios. Since we've been in office, since the College of Trades has been in place, they've reduced trade ratios by 14. That's a pretty significant difference in approaches.

We're getting things done. We're doing it in an evidence-based, rational way, allowing tradespeople to have the respect to be able to self-govern their own industry. We have confidence in those decisions. We have confidence they can do the job. It's too bad that you don't.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Acting Premier. Middle-class families are feeling squeezed like never before, and they're worried about jobs. They see Ontario's unemployment rate stubbornly stuck above the national average and paycheques that just don't keep up with the cost of living. Does the Acting Premier think that the status quo is actually acceptable?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: What I can say is that there is no party in this House that has a monopoly on caring for people who are struggling every day to pay their bills. On this side of the House, we have taken action to reduce costs for people who are in that middle class. Some of those examples would be the work we're doing to reduce auto insurance. We've reduced that by 4.66% on average

since August of last year. We've expanded the 30% off tuition grant, so 230,000 students received that grant last year, and we've now expanded access to five-year programs and private career colleges.

One of the most important things we can do is secure a retirement security. We are very committed to doing that, and the party opposite is silent.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Before people can retire, they need a job. People struggling to find work are very tired of hearing Liberals insist that their plan is working. The government insists that the HST and corporate tax giveaways would create jobs, but people keep seeing local plants close. The government insists they can work with employers to bring investments, but businesses like Cliffs Resources and Chrysler are walking away from the table. The Premier insists that she's the change, so why does the government keep sticking to the same old status quo?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We are anything but sticking to the status quo, and I would ask the leader of the third party to actually come clean with the people of Ontario on what exactly their plan is. When it comes to pension security, they have no plans. They remain silent on that issue. When it comes to energy, they voiced opposition to high rates, but they have no plan to bring those rates down. When it comes to transit, which our middle-class families depend on, you have absolutely no plan, or you have a multitude of positions. So I really think it's important that the leader of the third party actually come clean with the people of Ontario and express what their plan is.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think they know our plans very, very well, because they keep implementing them. People want a better future, but we won't get there with the same old approaches. People want to see competitive electricity rates to help attract business. Instead, they see the same bloated system that pays millions to executives and dumps discounted electricity into competing jurisdictions. They want to see tax incentives that reward businesses putting people back to work. Instead, they see tax loopholes that help CEOs write off a night on the town.

The Premier says she wants to do things differently, but all she's offered to do is promise to raise gas taxes and the HST and then frantically scramble in the other direction. Do the Liberals really think this is good enough for the people of Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: You don't have to take it from me. The facts are, the NDP is nowhere on important issues. Let me quote from the Toronto Star, February 16: "Horwath has done everything possible to avoid having policies on tough issues that require political bravery."

On March 15, 2014: "Ontario NDP Losing Its Voice on Minimum Wage."

The Globe and Mail says, "But there's no denying Ms. Horwath has taken the accent off the NDP's traditional focus on anti-poverty...."

"And what about Horwath's response to Wynne's push for a made-in-Ontario pension plan? Silence," from the Toronto Star on February 16.

I think it's time that the NDP said where they stand.

JOB CREATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Acting Premier as well. No-strings-attached giveaways have handed out a lot of money, but there's not much evidence that they've created many jobs. In fact, most of that money has been stockpiled. It's clear that we need a better approach in this province.

Unconquered Sun, a manufacturer in Windsor, told us, "The NDP plan for a new job creation tax credit is a smart, simple idea that will help me grow." Are the Liberals ready to try a new approach that will give a boost to companies that are ready to put people to work?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, let me just share some good examples, and I know the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment will want to speak.

Cisco Systems is adding 1,700 high-tech jobs over six years, with the potential for 5,000 jobs, and we're investing \$190 million over six years to leverage \$4 billion. I call that a success.

Ford Oakville, Speaker: We're partnering with the federal government and Ford of Canada to upgrade the Oakville assembly plant. That's securing 2,800 jobs.

Toyota in Cambridge, 400 new jobs; Original Foods in Dunnville, 150 new jobs; Conestoga Meat Packers in Breslau, 425 existing jobs retained, 100 new jobs; CenterLine in Windsor, 482 jobs; and the list goes—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Sutherland's Furniture is a London, Ontario, success story, and they want to grow. Vivianne Dupuis of Sutherland's Furniture told us that they've been thinking about whether they can afford new hires, and this is exactly the sort of incentive that would help them make that decision in uncertain times. She says a job creator tax credit will "assist small businesses in growing their operation and, in turn, growing the local economy."

What does the government have to say to Vivianne and business people like her?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I know this idea of a job creators tax credit has been around with the NDP for a long, long time. I know they were initially thinking of a 20% credit to the employer, and then it went down to 10%. I have no doubt it may actually end up being 0% in the not-too-distant future.

This is part of the reason I wish they had actually read the report of the Jobs and Prosperity Council, which was chaired, of course, by the esteemed Gord Nixon, the president and CEO of RBC.

Here they are. Here's the Jobs and Prosperity Council report saying that for the proposed tax credit, the NDP tax credit—the JPC indicated that a number of considerations “need to be taken into account in coming to a balanced view of its merits and risks.... Taken together, these considerations suggest that the proposed tax credit entails significant fiscal risks and may not achieve the desired” outcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplement-ary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Here we have the minister once again relying on the same old status quo, on a panel report that doesn't even talk about jobs at all. That's the problem, Speaker. That is exactly the problem. The Liberal status quo has kept Ontario's unemployment rate stubbornly above the national average, and that is not good enough.

Thalamic Labs is a venture-capital-funded start-up in the Communitech Hub in Kitchener–Waterloo. Stephen Lake, Thalamic Labs' CEO, had this to say about a job creator tax credit: “An incentive like the one being proposed would be helpful for companies like us as we continue to build out our teams.”

Now, are the Liberals going to stand by their same old status quo that they continue to flout as I ask these questions, or are they going to listen to businesses like the ones I've quoted today, that are ready to actually start creating jobs in our province?

Interjections.

1100

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

The Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Speaker, frankly, I can't believe that in a single sentence, the leader of the third party has tried to discredit the entire work of the Jobs and Prosperity Council, representing the business leadership right across this province and chaired by Gord Nixon, who was at that time the president and CEO of RBC. I find that, frankly, quite unbelievable.

She references Communitech as well. Communitech is a job creator. It has created probably as many as 10,000 jobs, with government support, over the last number of years, and the examples that she gives—and it's not just the Jobs and Prosperity Council. The evidence shows—

Interjections.

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

FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Finance. In yesterday's Focus on Finance presentation, we had an insider's look into the secret workings of the Liberal Party.

Last year, when your finance officials told you one thing, you immediately went out and told the bond-rating agencies something completely opposite. We also saw that you blacked out many emails, labelling them “commercially sensitive information.”

Let's take a look at what you were covering over: “No funding for incremental compensation increases for new collective agreements; salaries for designated groups frozen until 2017-18.” Minister, you voted against our across-the-board wage freeze when you were secretly planning to do the same thing. What else are you hiding?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the audacity of the members opposite to suggest that we're hiding anything, when that is the party that hid \$5.6 billion in the election before 2003. And now they're referencing information that we delivered to the committee, recognizing that, yes, there are recommendations that are proposed and provided. We take them into consideration. Things change, revenues change; we recalibrate. We control our spending to offset them, and we've been very open and transparent, because we put it in our fall economic statement six months later. The facts are there. They never read it until today. They're pretty slow, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: We've also discovered part of your plan is not to report any real numbers for as long as you can. With today's Fraser Institute report showing Ontario's debt situation is now actually much worse than California's, we now understand why. It also explains why, last October, you failed to disclose the long-range assessment as required by the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act.

When I asked you for this in the Legislature, you said, “We have a fall economic statement coming out shortly,” but guess what, Minister? There were no medium-term outlook numbers included in it. Not even your famous “recalibrated” numbers were in that report. The transparency act also states that third-quarter results must be published by February 15, something you also failed to provide this year.

Minister, again I ask you: What else are you hiding?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, here's a good quote: “[T]he provincial budget has been balanced for the past four years, with a fifth to come.” That was said by Tim Hudak when they showed a deficit.

This is not the case. We have been open and transparent. We will continue to do what's necessary. We have always been outlining—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. As soon as I sit down, I'll get right back up again if someone starts.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: We'll continue to be open and transparent. We brought in laws to do just that. We are the ones who are coming out with our long-range plan. We've already identified that it will be coming forward.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville, the member from Oxford and the member from Prince Edward–Hastings, come to order.

Carry on.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Obviously, they don't want to hear the truth, Mr. Speaker, because this is what they said.

The former Provincial Auditor said this: “[T]he Tories, in their zeal to make the budget balance”—as required by Ontario law—“manipulated figures to ensure revenue appeared to match expenditures.” That was done in 2003.

We will continue to do what’s right.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question to the Acting Premier: Late last week, we learned that Enbridge and Union Gas have applied for increases that in one fell swoop will increase the prices we pay for gas used to power our furnaces and hot water heaters by up to 40%. Now we learn that the Minister of Energy is musing about electricity prices going up more than 42%, indicated in the government’s long-term energy plan, because of high natural gas prices.

Is this government resigned to hard-pressed Ontarians paying electricity price increases that they just can’t afford?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I’ll talk about the gas prices in my response, and then I’ll talk about electricity prices in the supplementary.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated yesterday, there is no flow-through of profit or margin on commodity cost of natural gas. There is a North American problem with escalating prices in natural gas and the gas companies flow that through.

They will go to the Ontario Energy Board. The Ontario Energy Board, which is mandated to protect the interests of consumers, will see what the prices were and what they did with those prices. They will make a decision. The increases that they apply for at the Ontario Energy Board are distribution costs, which they get locally. There’s no profit to the actual gas companies on the increase.

Mr. Speaker, I’ll finish that in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, Ontarians want a government that speaks for them, not for the gas companies. You’ve got to understand that.

People understand that this was a cold winter, but winter is pretty much over and most of the gas used by gas plants is purchased under long-term contracts. Last week, in anticipation of warmer weather and a pickup in drilling, North American gas prices began to decline.

Will the government ensure that any application to increase electricity prices by gas generators is reviewed in a way that’s transparent, or is it resigned to ever-increasing hydro prices for hard-pressed Ontarians?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The issue is before the Ontario Energy Board, and as everyone in this chamber knows, that is an independent association. They look at the evidence. There’s the opportunity for consumer advocates and stakeholders to make representations. They deal with it in an open and transparent manner; that’s the way they deal with business. We cannot tell them what to do.

With respect to electricity prices, as I indicated last week in the House, Hydro-Québec does a comparative study every year of all the provinces and cities across the country. Here’s what they report for 2013: The price for electricity in Ottawa, 12.39 cents per kilowatt hour; Toronto, 12.48 cents; quickly, Edmonton, 13.9; Calgary, 14.8; Halifax, 15.45. We are competitive and we’re going to stay competitive.

HOME CARE

Mr. Steven Del Duca: My question today is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. As we look to the future, I believe most members in this House would prefer that we all have the chance to age with dignity in our own homes and with the supports that we need to keep all of us out of institutional care for as long as possible. I’m sure that every single one of us has an elderly loved one who has needed help in the tasks of daily living that we all tend to take for granted.

That’s why I was alarmed, along with many families and seniors in Vaughan and across York region, to recently hear the opposition Conservative member from Newmarket–Aurora say that high-risk seniors across York region are having their essential assisted living services cut.

Speaker, I’m wondering if the minister could please tell the House what is really happening in York region.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I’d like to thank the member from Vaughan for giving me the opportunity to clear the air on this matter and bring some comfort to the people of York region, who may have been led to believe that they will see a reduction in these vital supports.

As part of our action plan for health care, we are committed to ensuring that seniors get the right care at the right time and in the right place, and very often that is at home. So contrary to what the member from Newmarket–Aurora claims, our new assisted living for high-risk seniors policy will improve assisted living services for seniors who need them most and allow more seniors to get the care they need.

Under the old model, assisted living services were provided only in supportive housing buildings, so many clients did not have access to the 24/7 care that they needed, and unscheduled urgent visits. Now patients will be able to receive in-home personal support, home-making, security checks and care coordination, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, wherever they live.

1110

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

Mr. Steven Del Duca: I thank the minister for her thoughtful response, and I thank her for providing important clarity with respect to what’s really taking place. I’m sure many people living in my riding of Vaughan and across York region will be relieved to know that their assisted living services are not being cut. They’ll be delighted to know that, in fact, they’re being expanded.

However, I am sure that there will still be many seniors in the region who are concerned about the transition

to this new model. Some may be worried that these reforms will disrupt the care that they're already receiving.

Can the minister please inform the House what will happen to patients as this new policy is implemented?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Every patient currently receiving assisted living services will continue to do so under this new model. There will be no reduction in service, and with a \$5 million additional investment from the Central LHIN, there will be 625 additional assisted living spaces in the community. That means more seniors will receive the care they need to maintain their independence at home.

Providers are now working together to ensure continuity of care for all current assisted living seniors with high needs, and they're working with patients who are being transitioned to a new provider. For example, care supervisors from CHATS are meeting with York region's Alternative Community Living Program to best understand how to support each individual. So far, 80% of those one-on-one meetings have been completed, and we will continue to work with the LHINs to make sure people get the care they need in their own home.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Rod Jackson: Speaker, my question is to the minister responsible for the Pan/Parapan Am Games. Oops, you did it again, Minister. Last Friday you told us with conviction that the total transportation costs were between \$75 million and \$90 million, yet yesterday in committee, TO2015 confirmed there's a second transportation plan nobody knew about worth \$32 million.

You've said that you're in charge of the games, but you can't be aware of all the details. Maybe you're unaware of the details because you don't attend your own technical briefings.

Minister, you're clearly not interested in being responsible for the Pan Am Games. Will you step down finally?

Hon. Michael Chan: Speaker, one more day, one more insult to the games. Back a few years ago, when Ontario bid for the games, one of the big requirements was the transportation of the athletes and family members. This is the responsibility of TO2015. The cost was allocated from the beginning. The cost is within the overall budget of \$1.441 billion. Our recent forecast decreased that amount in a saving of \$49 million.

Speaker, as host jurisdiction, Ontario is responsible for the traffic flow in general. We have a comprehensive transportation plan. It is workable. It is achievable. Vancouver did it. London did it—

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

Mr. Rod Jackson: Speaker, the biggest insult to these games is the fact that this government continues to play shell games with the numbers here. To be perfectly clear, the total transportation costs to date are between \$107 million and \$122 million, despite what you say, Minister. This is up from \$55 million—I don't know, who's counting? I am, by the way. It was the organizing com-

mittee's CEO, on the job for only 10 weeks, who shed light on your transportation planning.

What have you been doing all this time, Minister, if you can't be open and transparent? How can you be responsible? You've lost the confidence of the public to lead this portfolio, and you report to someone without a public mandate. Minister, I'm hard pressed to find anyone who knows less about the games than you do.

Will you remedy this finally and step down and let someone do it who can handle the job?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Michael Chan: Speaker, the member opposite is completely out of touch with the games. In November last year, he actually asked when the last Pan Am Games were held. He complained the cost of the games was too high; at the same time, he said we were not spending enough on transportation and security. Most recently, he alleged that the TO2015 mascot was in Sochi and the Caribbean by looking at a picture of a six-inch stuffed animal toy.

Speaker, this is nonsense. The nonsense continues to hurt the games that are coming to Ontario. This nonsense hurts our athletes. This nonsense hurts our coaches. This nonsense hurts the spirit of the games.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The question is to the Minister of Transportation. Over 100 long days ago, I asked the government for crucial information about the most expensive transit projects under way. Earlier today, for the sixth time in a row, the government members in committee blocked this simple request. This Liberal government has an awful record on accountability, and they're doing nothing to fix it. They think it's okay to keep Ontarians in the dark about how public money is spent.

My question to the minister is this: What on earth is he afraid that we're going to find that will hurt him or his ministry?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I am appalled by the third party. This is a party that wants working women in Brampton who cannot get transit to get their kids to Sheridan to have to have an \$11,000 car because they won't support transit. These are people who are happy having people in Scarborough wait 40 minutes for a bus to get to work in the morning. These are people who take working families and marginal workers who work in office buildings downtown and don't provide them with transit.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek will come to order.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: This is not the party of the middle class. This is the party of the indifferent and the elite—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): In case he didn't hear me, or while he was heckling didn't hear me, the

member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek will come to order.

Carry on.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, when does this party care as much about people who ride buses as the insurance rates on people who drive BMWs? This is—

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Speaker, all I have to say is that all that blah blah blah was not very helpful. We know that Ontarians want transit expansion, but they don't want to see more waste and cost overruns. We know that.

The people of Ontario have a right to see the true cost of transit projects, yet the Liberals are blocking the way. They have been stalling these motions for months. They've been refusing to be transparent and accountable to Ontarians.

Speaker, my question to the minister is this: Will he say to his MPP colleagues, "Stop the stonewalling in committee," and tell his ministry to release all the documents that the committee needs to see?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I don't know; I've been suspicious that the people in the third party have gotten so close to the party opposite that they're starting to behave like them: anti-transit.

The other habit they've taken that the Tories have is that they don't read budgets. The business plan for all 15 rapid transit projects and the funding models are all click, click on the website. Anything that he wants, he can find out from Metrolinx, and it's appeared.

I cannot help the third party's transit illiteracy. I understand that they don't understand that some people actually use buses and that, for middle-class families, the cost of transit is actually crushing them. While they love to talk about energy, in fact, transportation is the second-biggest household cost after food. But he doesn't care about that, and he wants to attack transit, not only not fund it, Mr. Speaker. Maybe he can read a report—

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

ONTARIO SECURITIES COMMISSION

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Ontario is home to one of the largest financial sectors in North America, and Toronto has, in recent years, been declared one of the top destinations for foreign direct investment. Regulations for the financial sector are an important part of what has kept Ontario and Canada strong during recent years, in particular with the recession south of the border.

1120

Can the minister please inform the House about the regulation of Ontario's capital markets and the contributions of the Ontario Securities Commission?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you to the member from Scarborough–Guildwood for this very important question. Ontario has a strong and successful financial sector,

and it secures our prosperity and our economy. Recent studies from the Conference Board of Canada and the Toronto Financial Services Alliance note that one in 13 Ontarians are directly employed by this sector and help grow Ontario's economy for many other sectors.

Smart regulations are an essential element of our government's approach to supporting the sector, as evidenced by our continued commitment to a dynamic and innovative business climate. The Ontario Securities Commission plays an essential role in regulating and safeguarding capital markets. They help protect investors from unfair or improper practices. They foster fair and efficient capital markets and confidence in Ontario. The OSC is a success story and an example to the world of how to effectively regulate capital markets to secure prosperity.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Minister, for that important update. My constituents agree that Ontario needs strong, smart regulation for capital markets. We are pleased to see the OSC's efforts to protect investors and combat fraud.

I had the opportunity to attend a fraud prevention event on behalf of the Minister of Consumer Services in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood, and I can tell you this is a real concern for my constituents. They also feel that the OSC must take a grassroots approach to promote financial literacy and combat fraud in our communities. Can the minister please update the House as to the OSC's work in local communities in this regard?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The member is absolutely right: The OSC must work at the local level to combat fraud and offer educational initiatives for all Ontarians. That's why in February 2013, the OSC launched the OSC in the Community initiative with its Protect Your Money fraud prevention seminars. The OSC is touring cities across Ontario, educating investors on fraud prevention and financial literacy and raising the profile and understanding of the OSC as a whole. Thus far, the OSC has visited Thunder Bay, Kingston, London, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, Peterborough, Brampton, Windsor, Ottawa and Barrie, with plans to visit four additional cities this winter. The OSC will be reaching out to all MPPs before they visit your community. These initiatives build relationships with local community groups, law enforcement agencies and small businesses. They help to enhance education and financial literacy, and they combat fraud at all levels.

I thank the OSC for their leadership in this regard and look forward to their new and innovative initiatives. I'd like to thank the chair, Howard Wetston, and his entire team for their tireless efforts in this regard.

AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Yesterday, in refusing to stop the closures of the Kemptville and Alfred

colleges, the Premier repeatedly said that the programs would continue.

Minister, you know that's not true. All the programs aren't moving several hundred kilometres away. Many of them will be disappearing. So the Premier, as Minister of Agriculture, really doesn't understand, or she doesn't care.

North America's leading organic dairy education and research centre in Alfred is disappearing, and so are hundreds of skilled trades positions at Kemptville college. Those positions are needed in the skilled trades.

Minister, can't you see that without a moratorium, you're going to destroy a tradition of post-secondary agricultural education that took almost a century to have?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I recognize the member is an opposition member, and I recognize that it's really easy for opposition members just to ask for anything and take the easy way out. But I really encourage the member to use as an example the work that the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell has done to ensure that the Alfred campus remains working, remains open, that there's continuity there and that those students will be able to continue to take those courses.

He did that, Mr. Speaker, by working really hard to attract local partners. La Cité and Collège Boréal are going to step in. They have signed an agreement with Guelph university. That's good news. It's an example of how the local member can make a real difference.

I encourage the member opposite. We are looking very forward. We will work with him. My colleague will work with him to try to find local solutions to do the same thing at Kemptville.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the minister: Come on, Minister. The only credible plan for these colleges is to have a moratorium. That's the only way forward. Right now, students at both Kemptville and Alfred are receiving letters telling them to reapply to Ridgetown. We're hearing from students in the Kemptville area who won't continue with their studies next year. They're going to drop out. One mom said that her son, who planned to enrol in Kemptville in the fall, is not going to take any other post-secondary position anywhere else. That's what happens when you destroy local agricultural education opportunities.

You're the minister responsible. Can you stand up and assure Ontario that we're going to have the same amount of spaces available for post-secondary agricultural educational programs if you decide to proceed with this plan? Can you tell me that?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Before the minister starts, I want to remind members that when the member was putting the question, I was still hearing heckling from this side, and I heard quiet. I ad-

monished anyone that got in the way of somebody putting the question. I expect the same courtesy when the answer is being given.

Minister.

Hon. Brad Duguid: There is quiet on this side when he's asking that question because it's an important and very valid question. It's something we care deeply about. The member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, I think, has stood out in this particular situation by reaching out to partners in the local community and ensuring that the people that have to be first on our minds on this—our students—are being looked after at that particular campus. We would like to see a similar solution arrived at for Kemptville. We'll work hard with that member opposite. We'll work hard with the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell to see if a local partner can be identified that can continue those courses, but let's be clear. Let's ensure there's no confusion for those students. Those courses are moving to the Ridgetown campus. Those courses are not being cancelled; they're moving to another location. In Alfred, courses will continue, although students will have the option of staying there or moving.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell will come to order. The member from Leeds–Grenville will come to order. The member from Oxford will come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh, I remembered. New question.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. It has been two years since the Liberal government announced the sell-off of the Ontario Northland, jeopardizing 1,000 families directly and many others indirectly, a decision made without consultation or any research and, we later found out, one that was going to cost the government over \$800 million. Northerners united and forced the government to back-track. Finally, the government has allowed management and the employees to put together a plan and present it—a plan that could revitalize the ONTC. My question is very simple: Will you act on that plan?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I very much appreciate the question. I know what an important issue this is for one in northeastern Ontario. Certainly, we are very, very proud of the fact that we were able to work with people in northeastern Ontario, setting up a ministerial advisory committee that has been meeting for the last year as we look at a different approach to the ONTC, a transformational one that really is as much about restructuring alternative service delivery as others. We are very grateful to have had a report submitted by the management and unions together. That was presented to our ministerial advisory committee a couple of weeks ago. We are looking at it very, very seriously. Again, I'm very grate-

ful for the hard work that has gone into that. This is an extremely important decision. We're conscious of the uncertainty that has been there. I made that clear at our last meeting: that indeed I appreciate all the good work that has been done, and we're looking forward to being able to make some decisions soon.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. John Vanthof: The minister made a good point: It is causing uncertainty. It has caused uncertainty in the north for two years, and now we're worried, at this final juncture, that the government might try to sell off part of the ONTC at this late date just to save face. That would scuttle the plan that was put forward by northerners to revitalize the company. We need a commitment that the ministry, the minister and the Premier are truly going to commit to revitalize the ONTC and not try any fast moves to try to save face at this late juncture.

1130

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Again, I appreciate the question. There certainly are no fast moves that are being made. This has been a really important discussion that we've had.

If I can be clear about one thing, the one thing that's been very, very important to us is that any decisions related to the future of the ONTC really, truly are about finding a way to have a sustainable, long-term operation. That goes for all four divisions of the ONTC.

So we've taken a different approach. The member is aware of that. The ministerial advisory committee members, made up of, certainly, municipal leaders, First Nation, Métis nation, business and industry, have been really, really working hard together. The report that came to us, the combined management and union report, is one that we're looking at very, very seriously.

But I can assure you that the bottom line really is that we're going to make decisions that are based on a long-term, sustainable future for the ONTC and, may I say, a bright future for the ONTC.

CO-OP EDUCATION

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Experiential learning is an important component of post-secondary education for many students across the province. The chance to gain valuable on-the-job experience in their field of choice is what many students need to succeed.

Spaces across post-secondary institutions in the province are limited and some co-op students struggle to find placements during their terms. Mr. Speaker, in honour of National Co-operative Education Week, can the minister please explain what the government is doing to support co-operative education in Ontario?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to thank the member for the question and for bringing to the attention of this Legislature the importance of co-op education. It is absolutely a crucial direction that we have to continue to excel in, and our province and our institutions have been among the best in the world at it.

Experiential learning is integral to supporting the skills and knowledge that our students need to succeed in a fiercely competitive global economy. We want to do everything we can to support the 40,000 co-op students at our post-secondary institutions across the province. Through our co-op diploma apprenticeship programs, students get on-the-job apprenticeship training while earning a college degree.

We also support our businesses. To help make it easier for employers to hire co-op students, our government offers up to \$3,000 through the Ontario Co-operative Education Tax Credit.

Mr. Speaker, these are incredibly important programs. There are many more. This is the direction we have to continue to go in. We're good at this, but I think we still need to do more.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: It's good to know we are creating more opportunities for experiential learning by providing support for both students and employers.

Working together, we can make sure that our children have the skills and tools they need to be successful in Ontario's growing workforce, but we must go even further to ensure the success of our students.

As the minister is aware, many co-op programs require students to spend an extra year at their post-secondary institution. This means another year of tuition fees and even more student debt to pay off once they graduate.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, what is our government doing to help relieve the extra cost burden for students who choose to pursue co-op education?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm really pleased to be able to say that our government is doing more to help students pursuing co-op education. Ontario recognizes that many of these students face an extra financial burden, and that shouldn't discourage them from having an opportunity to gain valuable work experience while earning a degree.

I know the member who asked the question was on me on this when we brought in the 30% off tuition program. That's why we've extended the 30% off tuition program grant to students in their final year of a five-year co-op program. Eligible students in their fifth year will now be eligible to save up to \$1,730 on tuition per year. Last year, the 30% off tuition grant helped 230,000 students in low- and middle-income families gain access to education and make their education more affordable. It's a program we're really, really proud of, and we're really pleased to have extended it now to the fifth year for co-op students.

FLOODING

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, last spring, people living in Parry Sound–Muskoka and across central Ontario were hit hard by record spring floods brought on by torrential rains. In my riding, the towns of Huntsville and Bracebridge both declared a state of emergency due to the

conditions. Many people around the lakes and across Parry Sound–Muskoka are still recovering from this 100-year flood event.

My question is, with nearly a full year elapsed since the floods last spring, what review has your ministry conducted into the management of the local water system?

Hon. David Oraziotti: I want to thank the member for the question. As we know, the challenges that were faced by residents in this area, given these unprecedented levels of rainfall, were very, very significant and very challenging.

MNR's responsibility, as the member knows, is to provide flood information, warning updates and information so that local individuals can respond in a timely way and do the best job that they can to prepare for and mitigate any negative effects as a result of this type of natural disaster.

We are continuing to improve, to update and to ensure that the local officials in the areas and in the communities that the member is talking about have the information that they need in a timely way. We're committed to continuing to work with the representatives in his communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Again to the Minister of Natural Resources: Areas of Parry Sound–Muskoka received record snowfalls this winter—over 400 centimetres. Even without a significant rainfall, managing the watershed this spring will be a challenge.

Minister, I think you know how important local knowledge and years of experience are for ministry staff who manage the watershed and understand the system. Minister, I also know that your ministry is going through what you call the MNR transformation plan that involves staff changes.

My question is, Minister, can you assure me that we are not losing key water control specialists in the Bracebridge or Parry Sound MNR offices in your transformation?

Hon. David Oraziotti: The member has got a very important question here with respect to the safety of residents in his community, with respect to the rainfall, the runoff and the unprecedented levels of snowfall this year.

I understand from our ministry folks that in fact we've already issued some warnings, to be on this in a very proactive way, to ensure that those notifications are issued at the earliest possible point.

With respect to our transformation initiative, we'll certainly commit to the member that those individuals who have the responsibility for indicating this information to local community residents will continue to remain in place and will be working very closely with representatives of his communities.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Acting Premier. Three years ago, my constituent Maria Daskalos

lost her mother at a Toronto hospital. The great tragedy was not only Dimitra Daskalos's passing but also the ordeal the family was subjected to prior to her death, and the lack of answers following it. Dimitra was treated as a bed blocker, roomed with someone with an antibiotic-resistant disease, apparently in violation of infection control guidelines, and the family was given a bill for \$19,000.

Our system failed Dimitra Daskalos. Why has the Acting Premier refused to investigate how it could all have gone so wrong?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Of course, I cannot speak to any individual, but I can tell you that people who work in Ontario's health care system are very committed to delivering the highest possible quality care to the patients of this province.

I would be more than happy, if the member opposite wants to share details, to look into this and to make sure that the family has access to the right people to investigate their concerns.

I can tell you that as we move forward with the patient advocate, I am hopeful that all of us will have more comfort in knowing that all of our concerns are dealt with appropriately.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The Acting Premier has in fact been given this information in the past and has not pursued an investigation.

Maria and the whole Daskalos family have long asked for Ombudsman oversight of our hospital sector. Ontario's Ombudsman has noted the nightmare that this family was made to endure, in his plea for oversight of hospitals. Yet this government continues to drag its feet on providing the answers the family needs and preventing other tragedies like this from occurring.

On behalf of Maria, her mother and other families who have been failed by our health care system, I ask the Acting Premier yet again to provide the desperately needed independent third-party oversight that only our Ombudsman can provide.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: In fact, our patient ombudsman will have the ability to investigate issues that are raised and brought to the patient ombudsman. I met with André Marin and spoke to him about the importance of a dedicated patient ombudsman, and he was very helpful in giving advice on exactly what that should look like.

As I say, there are currently reviews and oversight and patient advocates in place within hospitals. We're adding another layer to that, Speaker: a patient ombudsman. I think that's the right thing to do as our system becomes more integrated: to have someone with oversight over the entire health system. Our patient ombudsman will do exactly that.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

Mr. Steve Clark: I forgot to mention it in my question. I just want to wish my neighbour the member

for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry a happy 60th birthday.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think we all like to be reminded of how old we are. It's a great point of order.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Leeds–Grenville has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister—

Mr. John Yakabuski: I can see why.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): —you're heckling the Speaker?—of Training, Colleges and Universities concerning the closure of Kemptville and Alfred agricultural colleges. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1141 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I ask all members of this House to join me in welcoming my great friend and rising star criminal defence lawyer Elham Jamshidi to the House today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak today about an issue that is important to my constituents and, actually, people across the province.

My office has been receiving many calls in recent months from people who are trying to obtain information about the milestone date for commercial operation for renewable energy projects in their communities. This information used to be easily available online, but it has since been removed. People are trying to find this information, and they are running into difficulty. This is true, as I said, not only in my riding but across the province of Ontario.

Raymond Beaudry of Manitoulin Island, for example, has been trying for months to get information regarding the commercial operating dates regarding wind projects in his community. Mr. Beaudry went as far as filing a freedom-of-information-act request for these details. The Ontario Power Authority responded, first, that "It has been determined that the disclosure of the responsive records may affect the interests of a third party." What about the interests of the individuals and the communities impacted by industrial wind turbines? Don't they count?

Secondly, they went on to say—"they" being the OPA—that they are consulting a third party and will

provide a decision by March 25, 2014. We look forward to that response on that date.

But really, they should not have to file a freedom-of-information-act request in order to get the information they deserve. People still have a right to know whether renewable energy projects in their communities are on schedule, and they have the right to know the status of the contracts that are in place. This information is being hidden from people across the province. This isn't fair.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Today I rise to acknowledge the incredible efforts of the small business owners in my community of London–Fanshawe. For those who don't know, my riding, along with much of southwestern Ontario, has been deeply impacted by the loss of good jobs and the lack of investment necessary to help London thrive.

This government stood by and watched our jobs be lost to the US and our small businesses close one after another. Then they created the southwestern economic development fund, which I understand has not helped one single business in my riding of London–Fanshawe.

Yesterday, I was able to spend the day in my riding with the member from Essex, Taras Natyshak. During our time, we met with local small business owners and heard about the hardships they are facing.

One business that we met with was a local store named Sutherland's Furniture. This family-run store first opened their doors to the public in 1998, by Gus Dupuis, and the tradition continues today, with his daughter Vivianne taking the reins. We spoke about the need for incentives for small businesses to grow and hire new staff, but business owners are cautious to take those steps without some assistance.

That's why we came to speak to Mr. Dupuis and Vivianne about our jobs creation tax credit. This is an actual incentive that will help get Ontario back to work. They were so pleased that someone at Queen's Park is finally paying attention to their needs.

POPE JOHN PAUL II DAY

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Yesterday, my private member's bill proclaiming April 2 as Pope John Paul II Day in Ontario passed final reading in the Legislature. I'd like to thank all 107 MPPs who supported that. It was a special day, not only for Catholics in our province but for all Ontarians. Pope John Paul II was a universal figure and spiritual leader whose legacy is marked by his strong commitment to peace, equality, human rights and multi-faith dialogue.

We hope that we will quickly receive royal assent so that we will be able to celebrate Pope John Paul II Day in Ontario this upcoming April 2. It would be extra-special if we could celebrate it this year, as this year marks the 25th anniversary of the fall of communism in central and eastern Europe. Pope John Paul II played an instrumental

role in communism's downfall, most notably in his native Poland, where his pious leadership helped provide Poles with hope, courage and resilience in the struggle against communist oppression.

The passage of this bill yesterday is particularly timely because Blessed Pope John Paul II will be made a saint on April 27. No other pope of this modern era has had a greater spiritual and political impact. He won the hearts of millions, and his lasting message to the world is one of courage and faith. Ontarians will now have April 2 to celebrate and honour the life of this extraordinary man and soon-to-be saint.

CANADIAN WOMEN'S AMATEUR CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to announce to the Legislature that this year the Craigowan Golf and Country Club in the great riding of Oxford will be hosting the Canadian Women's Amateur Championship of golf from July 21 to 24.

The tournament will feature 156 of the best amateur golfers in the country. There will also be international competitors from all over the world, including the US, Mexico, South America, China and parts of Europe. The winner of the tournament will win the coveted Duchess of Connaught golf cup and will also be eligible to compete in the LPGA's 2014 CN Canadian open and the 2014 US amateur championship.

The event will feature over 200 local volunteers from all parts of Oxford. I encourage the people in Oxford to support this tournament by volunteering or simply by attending the event. In addition, the organizers will feature local Oxford food in their menus and receptions. This is a great opportunity to create revenue for Oxford businesses, showcase our great local food, and promote Oxford as the dairy capital of Canada.

Being awarded this tournament is a reflection of the hard work of the Craigowan staff and shows the appeal of the great riding of Oxford. I want to congratulate the Craigowan Golf and Country Club on their hosting this prestigious event. I look forward to a very successful tournament.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to present this statement.

EVENTS IN HAMILTON MOUNTAIN

Miss Monique Taylor: It's always my great pleasure to be able to stand up and to speak about the great time that I have spent back in my riding of Hamilton Mountain last week. I had the opportunity to spend some time with the Hamilton Special Olympic Skating Club for the Special Olympics as they practised with the Disney on Ice skaters. What fantastic athletes these young people are! The dedication that they showed to their sport is outstanding.

I want to commend Clara Hughes as she starts on her 12,000-kilometre cross-country journey to raise aware-

ness of mental health. It was my pleasure, along with many other Hamiltonians, to welcome her to our city at her Big Ride event. Mental health and its devastating impacts need to be brought out into the open so that we can meet the challenges ahead that we're facing.

During a short tour of local businesses with my leader, Andrea Horwath, we heard of concerns, primarily around the increasing costs of hydro.

I also had the absolute pleasure to spend a few hours celebrating Holi at the Hindu Samaj Temple. It was a wonderful time welcoming spring, practising forgiveness and starting anew, with friendship and love for each other. We painted each other with colours to represent a new and brighter future.

I also had the opportunity to visit City Kidz, whose mission is to increase resilience and inspire big dreams for children living in low-income communities.

It was a good week, Speaker, and it reminded me of what a great city I live in and what terrific people I share it with and have the privilege to serve.

KIDNEY HEALTH MONTH

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the month of March as Kidney Health Month in Canada. This year the renal community is celebrating two milestones: the 50th anniversary of the Kidney Foundation of Canada and the 35th anniversary of peritoneal dialysis, a life-saving and sustaining home dialysis treatment which was developed right here in Ontario by Baxter Canada, a global health care company based in my great riding of Mississauga-Brampton South.

In 2009, our government established the Ontario Renal Network to manage the delivery of patient care and set a home dialysis target of 40%, which is benefiting hospitals and clinics and generating savings across Ontario's health care system. Today, approximately 10,000 Ontarians are receiving life-saving dialysis for chronic kidney disease.

1510

I would like to acknowledge the leadership role of Baxter Canada, the Kidney Foundation of Canada and the Ontario Renal Network.

I would also like to encourage all members of this House to raise awareness about the importance of kidney health in their communities.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Last fall, I stood in the House to relay the concerns of the corporation of the city of North Bay and several other communities in my riding whose municipalities also wrote to me regarding the government's Small Rural and Northern Municipal Infrastructure Fund.

Council in North Bay noted that a "per capita formula for sustainable funding" was preferred over the com-

petitive or application process, and passed a resolution asking the Premier to reconsider their approach to the allocation of years 2 and 3 of the fund, in favour of the options supported by the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities.

Now the municipality of Callander has written to me after their application for funding was rejected in December. The letter from the Ministry of Rural Affairs says the project wasn't selected because other applicants had more "challenging economic conditions." Speaker, northern Ontario has double-digit unemployment, and I'm quite certain it does not get more challenging than that.

I said it last fall, and I will say it again—I know in my experience as mayor, as well, whether it's going to AMO or Good Roads, we called it going with the tin cup or with our hat out: The government has set up a system where it picks winners and losers, and we're really hoping for a more equitable position.

PARALYMPIC SLEDGE HOCKEY TEAM

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Speaker, I rise today in the House to speak to the valiant effort put forward by Canada's men's sledge hockey at the 2014 Paralympic Winter Games. Overcoming a disability, any kind of disability, is a moment of triumph and speaks to the perseverance of the individual. Paralympians embody that perseverance, they personify it, and we're so proud of them when they don the maple leaf on our behalf.

On Saturday, the Canadian men defeated Norway in a 3-0 victory, returning to the podium for the first time since 2006. The game featured ferocity, emotion and the unrelenting forecheck we've come to expect from great Canadian hockey. It was a pleasure to behold, and it was likely a misery to play against.

As Ontarians, we should be especially proud of the fact that 12 of the 17 members of the men's sledge hockey team are from our fine province. That includes Greg Westlake, who hails from the great town of Oakville. Our town has now produced four Olympic medalists during the Sochi games alone, a fact that I'm very proud of and will likely brag about until the next Winter Games.

Once again, Speaker, I'd like to congratulate the men's sledge hockey team and the rest of Team Canada for the fantastic effort they put forward on our behalf. They made us all proud at the 2014 Paralympic Games in Sochi.

AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES

Mr. Jim McDonell: On Wednesday, March 13, without any prior notice, except to the Liberal government, the University of Guelph announced the closure of the Alfred and Kemptville agricultural campuses in eastern Ontario. This is a significant loss for the whole region.

Generations of local farmers have studied at Kemptville and Alfred and have helped maintain a tradition of

agricultural innovation and excellence in our area. These campuses helped foster a closely knit farming community stretching from Pembroke to the Quebec border, and provided local education opportunities that are a deciding factor for the many aspiring farmers to enter the industry.

Although according to some sources the Alfred campus may be spared from the cut through the intervention of other Ontario francophone institutions, the opportunity was not afforded to the Kemptville campus. The loss will mean no English agricultural education east of Guelph.

For me, this loss is much more than the loss of a recognized post-secondary institution and the educational opportunities. My five brothers studied at Kemptville, and my family's history, as well as the family history of my neighbours and many aspiring families in the region of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, is tied to the campus.

Kemptville has been an integral part of the fabric of our communities for generations.

If we are to ensure that Ontario leads in agricultural innovation and competes globally, we must preserve local and accessible education in the sector.

It is time for this ministry to step up for agriculture in Ontario and secure a future for both the Kemptville and Alfred agricultural campuses.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here—I normally say that it's signed by a great number of members of my riding, but in fact these are constituents from my neighbouring riding, the riding of Brant. The Speaker will know the riding well. It was presented to me by Roger Chandler.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Health Canada has approved the use of Esbriet for patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF), a rare, progressive and fatal disease characterized by scarring of the lungs; and

"Whereas Esbriet, the first and only approved medication in Canada for the treatment of IPF, has been shown to slow disease progression and to decrease the decline in lung function; and

"Whereas the lack of public funding for Esbriet is especially devastating for seniors with IPF who rely exclusively on the provincial drug program for access to medications;

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

"Immediately provide Esbriet as a choice to patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis and their health care providers in Ontario through public funding."

Thank you very much for allowing me to present this petition.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly called "Support the Fair Minimum Wage Act," and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario government has raised minimum wage by 50% since 2003 and will increase it to \$11, the highest provincial minimum wage in Canada, on June 1;

"Whereas both families and businesses in Ontario deserve a fair and predictable approach to setting the minimum wage;

"Whereas indexing minimum wage to CPI is supported by business, labour and anti-poverty groups from across Ontario as the best way to achieve that;

"Whereas indexing ensures minimum wage keeps pace with the cost of living, providing fairness for workers and their families and predictability for businesses to plan and stay competitive;

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

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass and enact, as soon as possible, Bill 165, Fair Minimum Wage Act, 2014."

I agree with this, Speaker, will sign it and send it down with Caroline.

CHARITABLE GAMING

Mr. Todd Smith: I have a number of petitions here from right across the province.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario, through the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, levies the Ontario provincial fee on the sale of break-open tickets by charitable and non-profit organizations in the province; and

"Whereas local hospital auxiliaries/associations across the province, who are members of the Hospital Auxiliaries Association of Ontario, use break-open tickets to raise funds to support local health care equipment needs in more than 100 communities across the province; and

"Whereas in September 2010, the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario announced a series of changes to the Ontario provincial fee which included a reduction of the fee for certain organizations and the complete elimination of the fee for other organizations, depending on where the break-open tickets are sold; and

"Whereas the September 2010 changes to the Ontario provincial fee unfairly treat certain charitable and non-profit organizations (local hospital auxiliaries) by not providing for the complete elimination of the fee which would otherwise be used by these organizations to increase their support for local health care equipment needs and other community needs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to eliminate the Ontario provincial fee on break-open tickets for all charitable and non-profit organizations in Ontario and allow all organizations using this

fundraising tool to invest more funds in local community projects, including local health care equipment needs, for the benefit of Ontarians."

I agree with this and will send it to the table with Samantha.

RANKED BALLOTING

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas, on June 11, 2013 Toronto city council passed a motion requesting a ranked ballot for municipal elections; and

"Whereas Bill 166 will strengthen local democracy within the city of Toronto;

1520

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

"That members of the Legislative Assembly pass Bill 166, the Toronto Ranked Ballot Elections Act, 2014 which was introduced by Mitzie Hunter, MPP (Scarborough-Guildwood) and passed second reading on March 6, 2014."

I will sign this petition and give it to the page.

AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the University of Guelph's Kemptville and Alfred campuses are two of Ontario's outstanding post-secondary agricultural schools; and

"Whereas these campuses have delivered specialized and high-quality programs to generations of students from agricultural communities across eastern Ontario, and the future success of the region's agri-food industry depends on continuing this strong partnership; and

"Whereas regional campuses like those in Kemptville and Alfred ensure the agri-food industry has access to the knowledge, research and innovation that are critical for Ontario to remain competitive in this rapidly changing sector;

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

"That Premier Wynne in her dual capacity as Minister of Agriculture and Food act immediately to reverse the University of Guelph's short-sighted and unacceptable decision to close its Kemptville and Alfred campuses."

I will be signing this and passing it on to page Jonah.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. Bill Mauro: I have a petition entitled "Support the Fair Minimum Wage Act." It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario government has raised minimum wage by 50% since 2003 and will increase it to \$11, the highest provincial minimum wage in Canada, on June 1;

“Whereas both families and businesses in Ontario deserve a fair and predictable approach to setting the minimum wage;

“Whereas indexing minimum wage to CPI is supported by business, labour and anti-poverty groups from across Ontario as the best way to achieve that;

“Whereas indexing ensures minimum wage keeps pace with the cost of living, providing fairness for workers and their families and predictability for businesses to plan and stay competitive;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass and enact, as soon as possible, Bill 165, Fair Minimum Wage Act, 2014.”

Speaker, I support this and will affix my signature to it and give it to Divya.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Victor Fedeli: “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 agree with this, sign it and pass it to page Simon.

AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES

Mr. Todd Smith: It’s a pleasure to be able to read this petition in the Legislature. It’s addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the University of Guelph’s Kemptville and Alfred campuses are two of Ontario’s outstanding post-secondary agricultural schools; and

“Whereas these campuses have delivered specialized and high-quality programs to generations of students from agricultural communities across eastern Ontario and the future success of the region’s agri-food industry depends on continuing this strong partnership; and

“Whereas regional campuses like those in Kemptville and Alfred ensure the agri-food industry has access to the knowledge, research and innovation that are critical for Ontario to remain competitive in this rapidly changing sector;

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

“That Premier Wynne in her dual capacity as Minister of Agriculture and Food act immediately to reverse the University of Guelph’s short-sighted and unacceptable decision to close its Kemptville and Alfred campuses.”

I agree with this and will send it to the table with page Calvin.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Madam Speaker, I have a petition here signed, as you can see by the pile, by hundreds, if not thousands, of constituents. It’s to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the purpose of Ontario’s Environmental Protection Act (EPA) is to ‘provide for the protection and conservation of the natural environment.’ RSO 1990 ...; and

“Whereas ‘all landfills will eventually release leachate to the surrounding environment and therefore all landfills will have some impact on the water quality of the local ecosystem.’—Threats to Sources of Drinking Water and Aquatic Health in Canada;

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

“That section 27 of the EPA should be reviewed and amended immediately to prohibit the establishment of new or expanded landfills at fractured bedrock sites and other hydrogeologically unsuitable locations within the province of Ontario.”

I affix my signature as I agree with the petition.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further petitions? The member for Durham.

Mr. John O’Toole: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It’s an honour and a privilege to be recognized.

My petition reads as follows:

“Whereas Roseplain Solar Farm Partnership has applied to the Ministry of the Environment for an update in its renewable energy approval application for a solar farm development at 5240 Concession Road 4, RR#1 in the township of Uxbridge;

“Whereas residents adjacent to the proposed project strongly object to a large industrial development on valuable agricultural” class 1 “land and woodlands;

“Whereas possible adverse impacts include reduced property values due to the appearance of the solar development;

“Whereas the province of Ontario has announced cancellation of two proposed nuclear reactors because of surplus generating capacity and furthermore we, as citizens, are concerned that the paying of a large subsidy to a foreign company for many years”—and the feed-in tariff—“will add to the already enormous public debt incurred for building additional generating capacity” which is not needed;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Ontario Legislature not to proceed with this large-scale industrial development, in view of the adverse impacts it will have on our community and our province” and our budget.

I’m pleased to sign and present this to Simon, one of the new pages here at Queen’s Park.

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Laurie Scott: I would like to read a petition this afternoon.

“Whereas Premier Kathleen Wynne and the Minister of Energy Bob Chiarelli have publicly stated that there will be no time extensions for large-scale FIT contracts in Ontario, and the Ontario Power Authority CEO, Colin Andersen, has stated the authority is expecting developers to meet contract commitments; and

“Whereas the Premier, minister and the power authority must recognize that damage to our rural area from being under continuing threat by industrial wind turbine developers for three years is serious and unacceptable; and

“Whereas the FIT contracts for the Sumac Ridge, Snowy Ridge, Settlers Landing and Stoneboat projects—all on or near the Oak Ridges moraine and in the former Manvers township in the city of Kawartha Lakes—have already been extended for one year or longer;

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

“That the government of Ontario, the Minister of Energy the Honourable Bob Chiarelli, and the Ontario Power Authority not issue any further time extensions for FIT contracts and, in particular, for the Sumac Ridge, Snowy Ridge, Settlers Landing and Stoneboat projects—before or after expiry of such contracts. We are advised, and we believe, that the ‘force majeure’ clause in the FIT contracts is completely inapplicable to these projects; accordingly, we respectfully further request the Legislature to instruct the Minister of Energy to adhere to his assurance that extensions will no longer be granted to wind project proponents who have no contractual right to such an extension and who fail to meet their contractual commitments.”

It’s signed by many people in my riding. Thank you to David Frank of Cavan and Heather Stauble for bringing them in.

1530

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

“Whereas the latest policies from the McGuinty-Wynne government only aggravate the looming skilled trades shortage in Ontario;

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

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

I agree with this petition and will be signing it and passing it off to page Callista.

LYME DISEASE

Mr. Rick Nicholls: “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; and

“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 to direct that the Ontario public health system and OHIP include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme diagnosis, to do 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 agree with this petition and I’ll sign my name and give it to page Calvin.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The time for petitions has expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FAIR MINIMUM WAGE ACT, 2014

LOI DE 2014 POUR UN SALAIRE MINIMUM ÉQUITABLE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 3, 2014, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 165, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to the minimum wage / Projet de loi 165, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le salaire minimum.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The Minister for Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: I will be sharing my time with my colleague the member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan on this issue.

It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to this very important bill, Bill 165, Fair Minimum Wage Act. I want to start by congratulating my colleague the Minister of Labour for his hard work in bringing this forward. It's an important step forward for Ontario's minimum wage earners and a crucial part of our government's plan to help people in their everyday lives.

Bill 165 takes the politics out of deciding the minimum wage by tying future increases to the rate of inflation. It's important to note that this was the recommendation in the consensus report put forward by the Minimum Wage Advisory Panel. The panel, as you know, Madam Speaker, included representatives from business, labour, community and anti-poverty groups. They travelled across the province to get advice and feedback. They heard about the importance of the minimum wage and the need to ensure a fair, predictable and transparent approach to setting it. We listened to the panel's advice, and the Minister of Labour brought forward Bill 165.

I believe that this is a fair and balanced approach that provides predictability to businesses. At the same time, we're ensuring that those earning a minimum wage will not see their wages fall behind the cost of living.

Since 2003, our government has increased the minimum wage seven times, which is equivalent to a 60% increase. We're helping families because, for years, the previous government—currently the opposition—froze the minimum wage. As the cost of living increased, hard-working Ontarians fell further and further behind.

Since 2003, we've stood up for hard-working families and raised the minimum wage from \$6.85 to \$10.25. On June 1, we will be raising it again to \$11. This will help Ontario families, like we did in 2008 when we introduced the province's first Poverty Reduction Strategy. Through it, we created the Ontario children's benefit, which this year will increase to \$1,310 per child. The benefit is cur-

rently helping over one million children in 530,000 middle-class and low-income families. We introduced full-day kindergarten to save parents money on child care costs and give almost 184,000 kids a stronger start in life. We implemented a Student Nutrition Program, which ensures that 700,000 children across the province don't go to school hungry. Our first Poverty Reduction Strategy has made a difference. Over 47,000 children and their families have been lifted out of poverty. An additional 61,000 children were prevented from falling into poverty because they had the supports they needed.

We also saw very encouraging signs from the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics. Ontario continues to have one of the lowest low-income rates in the country. Now, what does that mean? The low-income measure measures the number and percent of children living in households earning less than 50% of the median income. After Alberta and Saskatchewan, as a percentage of our total population, Ontario has the fewest number of people living in poverty. We achieved this by making child poverty the focus of our initial strategy and by making reasonable increases to the minimum wage.

But we know there's more work to be done, which is why our next five-year strategy is under development. On its own, raising the minimum wage does not alleviate poverty. Poverty is a complex issue that requires a holistic approach, one that addresses education, job opportunities, health care and affordable housing. Our government has taken that approach, and we have seen the positive impact it has had in Ontario. By investing in people and partnering with industry to create jobs, we give people the opportunity to reach their full potential.

I can see the importance of these investments when I'm back home and I look across the river. Windsor and Detroit have similar-type economies and are geographically alike, and while I see my community benefiting from our government's support, our neighbours across the river continue to struggle. Our government uploaded social services from municipalities, and Windsor has been able to pay down their debt and freeze taxes for the past six years. At the same time, Detroit has had to declare bankruptcy.

Instead of slashing spending, our government invests in education, health care and infrastructure. We're investing in people to develop their skills, keep them strong and help them find meaningful employment. We've seen graduation rates go up, hospital wait times go down and tens of thousands of jobs created thanks to our investments. Our government has fostered an environment that supports business, an environment that encourages prosperity. We have cut corporate taxes, worked collaboratively with unions and made reasonable increases to minimum wage.

Michigan's tax rate is higher than Ontario's, and they're now a right-to-work-for-less state. Their minimum wage is \$7.40 while our current rate is \$10.25. So the question is, does having a lower minimum wage and becoming a right-to-work jurisdiction create more jobs? Clearly, the answer is no. Windsor's unemployment rate

is 7%. Detroit's unemployment rate is 14%. Ontario's unemployment rate is lower than Michigan's. It's quite clear: Tea Party-style policies just don't work. That's what the party opposite advocates for: attacking unions and keeping wages low. That doesn't create more jobs. Their policies would drive away jobs, and that's exactly what they did a couple of weeks ago with Chrysler.

We don't live in an economics textbook or in a theory world; we live in the real world, and in the real world, governments have a responsibility to partner with industry to create jobs. If Ontario doesn't step forward, some other jurisdiction will. We can't pretend that other jurisdictions won't offer grants and tax breaks to steal companies out of Ontario.

1540

The recklessness of the party opposite and their leader is astounding. They pat themselves on the back when they drive away business. While we continue to build a strong economy for today and tomorrow, they would have Ontario move backwards in time. But at least they've laid out their positions. They have reached deep into the Tea Party playbook and said to the people of Ontario, "This is what we stand for."

The NDP's silence, on the other hand, is deafening, and that's dangerous for the future of our province. We reached our position on the minimum wage by taking an evidence-based approach. We took the rate of inflation since we last raised the minimum wage, and raised the rate to \$11. What was the NDP position? Well, at first they didn't have one. It was disappointing that neither of the opposition parties made a submission to the panel, nor did they speak up on the issue in this chamber. When the NDP finally took a position on the minimum wage, after our leadership, it was an obvious attempt to score political points.

We're taking the politics out of minimum wage for that very reason. Our position was developed in consultation with business, labour, anti-poverty advocates and youth. We're taking an evidence-based approach grounded in sound policy because, unlike the NDP, we're not thinking about the sound bites of today; we're thinking about the province we want to see tomorrow. In that province, minimum wage will keep up with the cost of living, and businesses will have a fair and predictable way of determining future wages.

I'd like to thank the advisory panel for all their hard work and bringing forward their recommendations. I'd like to give special thanks to Adam Vasey, the director of Pathway to Potential in Windsor, for his work on the panel and for all his efforts at reducing poverty in Windsor.

Tying the minimum wage to inflation is an important step that ensures workers are protected and businesses have predictability. I urge all members of this House to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Speaker, thank you very much, and thank you to the Minister of Children and Youth Services

for sharing her time. I'll add my thanks, as well, to the Minister of Labour for all of his work in bringing this piece of legislation to the floor of the House.

The previous speaker has spoken well in terms of what exactly Bill 165, the Fair Minimum Wage Act, does: increasing the minimum wage to \$11 per hour as of June 1—should the legislation pass, of course—once again giving Ontario the highest minimum wage in the country. This 75-cent increase accounts for inflation since the last increase, in March 2010, and will bring our increases since being elected in 2003 to somewhere in the order of magnitude of about 60%.

I would, if I can, like to acknowledge, however, that there are still concerns—as is always the case, no matter what the policy or legislation—expressed from some sectors. I've heard from probably a couple of small businesses in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan who have expressed some concern, even with what I consider to be a pretty fair and balanced approach to the minimum wage issue. I've talked to them about this, and I would say it here in the Legislature today and just restate for the record some of the measures that we have put in place when it comes to supporting business generally, and small businesses particularly, in the province of Ontario over the last number of years.

Capital tax: We eliminated capital tax quite a number of years ago. As I understand it, basically it was seen by businesses to be a tax on investment. It really didn't matter if the businesses were showing a profit or not. If they had invested in their particular business, this capital tax would in fact impose a financial penalty on them, and you could say it was actually a disincentive to investment. We eliminated that. I remind my small business friends of that.

We have reduced the small business tax rate once—perhaps twice—I think from 5.5% down to 4.5%. I'm a little fuzzy on the numbers, but certainly there has been about a 20%, at least, reduction in the small business tax rate.

We reduced down to the provincial average the business education tax rate. That goes back to the days when the local school boards still had tax authority. When that was flipped back here and the provincial government in the late 1990s took it over, we had—in fact, the current leader of the Conservatives today was the Minister of Northern Development and Mines at the time, and he left northern Ontario's business education tax rates at the highest level in the entire province.

We received input from the Northwestern Ontario Associated Chambers of Commerce, and we have brought those business education tax rates down to the provincial average, keeping about \$20 million to \$25 million in the pockets of businesses in northern Ontario—a very significant move.

People are familiar with the corporate income tax rates. I hope they're aware as well of the work on the single sales tax, perhaps the single biggest thing that could have been done for businesses and that perhaps has something to do with the fact that Ontario has recouped

about 140% of the jobs lost through the recession in 2008.

I would remind people as well, Speaker, that we reduced the personal income tax rate. I don't think a lot of people remember that we did that some years ago: 1% on the first \$37,000 of income. If you're a two-income family earning \$20,000 to \$25,000 per year each—a low-income family—that 1% is \$400 to \$500. If you're at the maximum of \$37,000, that 1% is \$370 times two, or \$740. It's a significant piece.

As well, I would mention that our tax reforms, since we started undertaking these policy pieces some years ago, have removed at least 90,000 off the tax rolls completely. They no longer pay tax at all.

In terms of all of these tax initiatives, I would like to think they have played some role, as I said, in the number of jobs that we've recouped since the recession in 2008. In fact, I can tell you that in my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan, we have had, for the last four or five years, one of the best, if not the best, unemployment rates, pretty consistently, in the province of Ontario. I think right now it's hovering just over 5%, maybe 5.7%. I forget the number exactly.

For my small business folks, and businesses generally, who have concerns about the minimum wage and what it may do, I think it's important to remind them about some of those initiatives.

As the previous speaker has outlined as well—and I'll add a few points to it—the minimum wage is not the only policy piece that we've undertaken over the years when it comes to anti-poverty measures. The previous speaker talked about full-day kindergarten and also the Ontario Child Benefit, that is now benefiting about one million children in the province of Ontario and will be increased soon to \$1,310 per child—significantly increased, I think, about \$100 more from about \$1,210.

Raises to ODSP and OW, for those on social assistance who are working, increase the threshold up to \$200 on money that they can keep before anything is clawed back, if they're on social assistance. I think it's at about 50%. So we've increased that to \$200. I should have done the math—I think it was at \$100 and we're moving it to \$200—to see exactly what that might mean for somebody who's on social assistance. In terms of a percentage increase, it's a very significant amount.

We don't talk about that a lot, but in terms of an anti-poverty initiative, I think it's important that we remind people of that, and that when we're talking anti-poverty, we don't just focus on the minimum wage.

As I've mentioned already, I've talked about the PIT rate for people, and the Ontario Clean Energy Benefit, 10% off your energy bill. For northerners, there's the northern Ontario electricity tax credit. If you're single, you're eligible for up to a maximum of \$130 per year. If you're a low-income family, you're eligible for up to \$200 per year. They're significant pieces.

As well, one that I wanted to mention and highlight, and that we're all quite proud of, is the Student Nutrition Program, which I think is significant as well, where over

700,000 kids in Ontario are now benefiting from this particular piece.

All of those, Speaker—and I'm sure I haven't captured them all—are parts of an anti-poverty program and are having a significant impact. So when we talk about the \$11 per hour, I hope people are not framing this as the only thing that has occurred when it comes to helping those who are on a lower income level.

I wanted to talk briefly—I'm running out of time. Quickly, there was a \$14-an-hour campaign that was conducted across the province for some time. I thank those people and those organizations for their work. I do think that a 40% increase, which is close to what was being asked, would have been seen and viewed by most people, I think, if truth be known, as having caused significant concerns. I think it's why you could say that there was no political party of the three represented here—not the Conservatives, not the NDP and not the Liberals—that aligned themselves with that particular campaign and that would have agreed to go to \$14 an hour. Certainly, businesses would have had serious concerns with that.

1550

I am very pleased with the measured approach that we've taken, going from \$10.25 to \$11 and indexing it to CPI. I think that is prudent. I think it's progressive. It allows for predictability.

I would also say, as the previous speaker outlined, that we stand in stark contrast on this policy to that of the other two parties. We know when they were in government, the official opposition I think froze it. I don't think it moved even once in the eight or nine years that they were in power, from 1995 to 2003. I don't think they moved it once—I think it was frozen—and there were significant reductions in other social assistance programs. I forget what the rates were slashed by for those who were on social assistance. And the third party, the NDP, did not come out publicly with a position on the minimum wage until after we had staked our dollar value at being \$11.

As I said in the Legislature some time ago, Speaker, when we said \$11, they'd say \$12; if we had said \$12, they would have said \$13. I think people understand that, and I think it probably would have led to some interesting conversations within their caucus, given the fact that they wouldn't take a position on this.

I will say this in defence of the minimum wage as well: I think that people who are making what will soon be, should this legislation pass, the \$11 per hour—what we do know about people who earn lower incomes is that most of their money is spent. People who are making \$11 an hour are not socking money away into RSPs; what they're earning usually goes back into the economy. On that very fact alone, for many reasons that I've talked about previously but this one also, the disposable income aspect of this, I would say back to the small business owners perhaps, stands as good support for this particular policy position. They're not saving this money. If you're making \$11 an hour, most of what you earn is going back

into the economy in one way, shape or form. I think it's another reason to support this particular policy.

I only have a minute left. The other thing I would say as well is, in terms of making a distinction between smaller businesses—who we all have sensitivity to, and their ability to make money, earn a living and all the risk that they take, and I have great respect for small business, having grown up in one myself—and some of these larger corporations out there, without naming any, who pay their staff a minimum wage and oftentimes don't have a benefit package: I'd love to see a public pressure campaign, not just government. If we put one minimum wage on everybody that was too high, it could really hurt some folks. We do know there are outfits out there that make a whole lot of money, that could afford to pay a higher minimum wage than the \$11, and I'd love to see some sort of public pressure campaign honestly being applied. Without having to mention any of these large corporations by name, many who are watching will know a couple of the big ones off the top that I'm talking about, who really could likely afford to pay their folks a higher minimum wage than is currently being contemplated in the Legislature.

Speaker, my time is up, and I thank you for the 10 minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's an honour to get up and respond to the comments made by the party opposite. I noticed in a couple of comments they were talking about Michigan, and they brought up the unemployment rate. But, Michigan, when this government took over, used to be not in first place in the auto industry, and, of course, through their policies, now they're in first place in auto manufacturing. Ontario used to have that role; of course, now, we're number 3, behind Mexico. So we can see their policies are really working. It's great for the state of Michigan, improving the other one-industry state, something that we didn't used to be, but, of course, we're offloading. They have an ambassador down in Washington, I guess, organizing, as our companies leave and go down there to work.

They talk about investments. It's interesting, I heard this week about the investment in two long-standing institutions: Kemptville campus is getting ready to celebrate 100 years, and with no notice, rumours the day before, that they're closing, not accepting first-year students. I guess it's great that they spent some time and supposedly have worked on something in the Alfred campus. We haven't seen that. We don't know if they're keeping their institutions. We do know that the quota system that belonged to both those institutions is going back to Guelph, one of the few incomes they had. I hear them talk about the costs, that these institutions were actually costing money. Well, I guess that is the nature of educational institutions, whether it be primary, secondary or university or college in this country, that they do cost money. They're considered an investment.

After hearing the Premier's speech in St. Albert last week talking about investment in agriculture and trying

to grow the industry, two days later we're shocked to hear what she meant. She didn't mean investing; she means taking money out of the industry. We're looking forward to see if we can do something with that, with her help.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: We're talking about Bill 165, the Fair Minimum Wage Act, today. The minister for, I think it's community and social safety services—

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Children and youth services.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Children and youth services, sorry. She had mentioned that there were panel consultations, going around the province. I remember when we got that email letting us know that the government was forming a panel to travel around the province to get deputations for the minimum wage. What I did is I sent them out to the community. I sent them out to groups that could actually participate in that consultation. I don't know where the idea comes from that the NDP had to present at the consultation. We would have people that are constituents, groups and organizations that should be participating in those consultations.

Political parties—we're going to, of course, come out with our proposal once we have done our own research. That's what we did. We consulted with stakeholders and constituents and listened to the groups that reached out to us, as well as we reached out to them, and then we came up with our policies.

It's very interesting how the Liberal government was much anticipating what the NDP's proposal was going to be for minimum wage. I'm glad that we finally came out with it and satisfied the anticipation of the Liberal government, but we took our time and we made sure that our proposal was a practical one. I'll discuss that later in another two-minute hit.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments? The member for—

Mr. Paul Miller: Brampton West.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Brampton West. Thank you.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to speak on Bill 165, the Fair Minimum Wage Act. Madam Speaker, to begin, I can tell you that in Brampton West, a lot of people will benefit as a result of an increase in the minimum wage as a result of our balanced approach to helping put more money into people's pockets—for example, a reduction. There are a lot of students in Brampton West. We have the student fee tax credit, the child tax benefit, which will help a lot of single parents. As well, we're helping Ontarians with a reduction in auto insurance with our target of 15%, and we've already reached a reduction in auto insurance by 5%.

With this act, we are increasing the minimum wage on June 1 to \$11 a hour provincially, which will be the highest minimum wage paid in Canada. This is on top of the many increases that we've had since 2003. We've increased the minimum wage seven times—60%.

We have taken a very fair and balanced and predictable approach to increasing the minimum wage in the future. We have set it to inflation so that our businesses know, and they can predict, what their costs for the future will be.

The bottom line: This is about fairness. It's about putting more money into people's pockets, and it's about giving business predictability to help grow our economy.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: It's very interesting that the member from Brampton West is saying that this is going to put more money into people's pockets. I don't quite understand how that's possible when you're raising minimum wages and yet hydro rates are doubling and Enbridge is asking for a 40% increase.

I'm concerned at the fiscal management. My mother was an accountant and I used to help her. I remember being a child and having her explain to me with the big ledger books when it would end up that people would be in the red. I couldn't understand how businesses could be operating in the red. It's a sad truth that not only is our government operating in the red, but we have households in the province, many households, where we're promising them some fiscal management and some relief and instead they are seeing hydro rates go up, they are now seeing natural gas costs go up, and they are seeing all kinds of new taxes, hidden taxes. I'm hearing from constituents who can't afford to pay the parking at hospitals, and they're suffering because of that.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: So what's your solution?
1600

Mrs. Gila Martow: Exactly. We need to offer solutions, and the solution isn't to focus on creating minimum wage jobs in this province. The solution is to lower the cost of living, lower the cost of doing business, and create jobs that will support life, support students, and create the opportunities for people in the eastern ridings to be able to study at colleges that focus on learning a trade such as agriculture and farming. That's what we need in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The time for responses has ended. The minister has two minutes to respond.

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: I'd like to thank the members from—hopefully I got these right—Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, London–Fanshawe, Brampton West and Thornhill for your comments with respect to my and my colleague's comments with respect to the Fair Minimum Wage Act.

It's interesting when I hear the comments talking about what we need to do and some of the solutions. If I look back in terms of what this government has done in terms of providing access to education and increasing graduation rates, establishing an education system that is looked upon around the world, and when we look at this jurisdiction still being a popular jurisdiction for investments and, in fact, higher rates of foreign investments coming into Ontario, I think Ontario is a pretty good

place. I think we should all be standing up for Ontario and talking about our strengths, absolutely.

I hear the NDP talking about consultation and whether they were or they weren't part of the discussion through that period of time. The fact remains that through the consultation they didn't say anything, whether at a panel or in a question here. After we announced what our response was to the panel, I think it took about a couple of weeks before they came forward and said, "Yeah, well, here's our plan." I guess they must have heard a little bit of the same that we did, that they went up to \$11, but I'm sure they were hearing from their constituents that in fact they wanted \$14. Well, they didn't go to \$14. I'm sure they heard from business that they need predictability, but they said, "Well, 50 cents will bring it to \$12," again making it a political decision.

We're making this a fair, transparent, predictable system, which is what business has asked us to do. At the same time, we're ensuring that minimum wage will maintain its parity with CPI, with the cost of living, and ensure that that stays even.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm pleased to speak today on the government's plans to raise the minimum wage and tie it to inflation.

Let us begin by saying that reducing poverty in Ontario is a noble goal that's shared by all parties in this Legislature. Our duty as elected representatives is to ensure Ontarians enjoy an increasing standard of living and greater opportunities to achieve prosperity.

The many aspects of good government boil down to keeping order and ensuring law-abiding citizens can succeed in the field that they choose. It is no secret that the present government has failed to carry out their duties to the latter. Before we talk about poverty reduction and minimum wage, let us see how the party opposite got us into the situation we have today.

Over the past 10 years, they have presided over an artificial inflation of utility rates, a ballooning provincial debt, and an exodus of good-paying jobs from Ontario. All these failures contribute to keeping Ontarians in poverty and throwing more of our residents into it. In fact, they have doubled the number of people, or the percentage, on minimum wage. The minimum wage is not the be-all and end-all solution. I will examine each of these separately, beginning with energy.

One of the hallmarks of adulthood and achieved independence is the payment of one's own bills. Whether it's an 18-, 58- or 88-year-old, the utility bills are a significant component of our monthly cash flow and influence many of our decisions. When the bills increase, our disposable income drops, sometimes significantly, leaving us with fewer opportunities to provide for ourselves and keep the local economy going.

The natural variability of energy prices can be ascribed to market dynamics and is an economic factor that we have to live with. For instance, the recent spike in propane costs is attributable to increased demand and the

unusually high heating needs in December and January. However, in Ontario, we have witnessed nothing short of a deliberate inflation of the cost of energy that has already eaten away any benefit Ontarians may derive from any increase in the minimum wage.

As per the Auditor General's 2011 annual report, there was no economic study done by this government prior to committing to unaffordable energy subsidies, which we are all paying for through the global adjustment. This line item can be as large as half of the average family's utility bill.

My seatmate from Cambridge had a bill from a small business in his riding. The global adjustment was more than \$37,000, plus HST—over \$42,000—more than 62% of the overall bill of \$67,000. That's just unbelievable.

This is how you create small business: Take a medium or big business and hit it with taxes, expenses and regulations until it is small.

Although the government professes to care about the plight of the poorest Ontarians, many residents in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry come to my constituency office with their utility bills in hand, at their wits' end, desperate for help. They aren't complaining about the minimum wage or anybody's carbon footprint. They're facing the choice between heating and food, and they can see no reason for such continued energy rate increases that are threatening to make them homeless.

If poor Ontarians are the intended beneficiaries of this bill, the government is in for a disappointment. The party opposite could deliver much more significant financial relief to poor families by abolishing their artificially high energy rates, which are nothing less than a stealthy, regressive tax on the poorest.

The second factor eroding Ontarians' standard of living is the growing public debt. The entire cabinet must have flunked Economics 101. Had they paid attention in class, they would have learned that money does not grow on trees. Government debt is a slow-acting economic poison that affects the poorest most. Every dollar borrowed today will have to be removed from the economy tomorrow or sometime in the future, which, unless the size and costs of governments are reduced, can only be done through taxes, user fees or reduced public services. All three Liberal methods of addressing public debt will nullify any benefit poor Ontarians may derive from a 75-cent increase in the minimum wage.

Socio-economic status is a reasonable predictor of an individual's health and need for public services. It is no secret that Ontarians experiencing the most financial pressures are more likely to be in need of extra health care and extra access to social services such as housing and emergency financial assistance. Unaffordable levels of public debt affect our ability to provide these services, as our creditors impose tougher interest conditions on further borrowing. Increased taxation is not the answer, as mobile businesses and middle classes are not bound to Ontario and can, in the end, leave the province if they so choose, eroding our tax base even further.

Many poor Ontarians are unable to move due to a lack of skills, experience or due to other factors such as the

need to care for dependent children. Just last year, we were presented with plans by this government to raise fees for a range of government services, including a \$5 charge for the use of ServiceOntario. These fees are, again, regressive, because their impact on a poor household is disproportionately larger than on a household earning an average income.

This rings especially true in Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, a riding with a total area of 2,700 square kilometres, where the city of Cornwall, the only entity that receives a pittance of gas tax money for transit, covers less than one sixtieth, or 2%. Many rural residents need to commute to the city, including its business park, with a private vehicle. Any job seeker accepting a minimum wage job in the city will end up earning \$6 more per day, but they will see an extra 35 cents taken away due to the planned increased gas tax on an average 20-kilometre commute in a fairly efficient vehicle. Over the course of one year, combined with increased hydro and user fees, the benefits of a higher minimum wage will vanish altogether.

I will give another example of how these benefits of a higher minimum wage will be eroded. Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry is the host of a bilingual call centre. Whether they pay their employees the minimum wage or a proportion above it, any benefit derived from this bill's provisions will be eroded by the upcoming mandatory trade registration for call centre workers. Between hydro, gas taxes, trade taxes and user fees, Ontarians will no longer be better off than they were before the minimum wage was increased.

1610

I will now address the last factor I mentioned at the beginning of this speech: the gradual disappearance of well-paying jobs in the province under this government's watch. Ontario is blessed with abundant natural resources, advanced energy-generating technologies, a highly educated workforce and continued attractiveness for skilled immigrants. Even in 2010, in the depths of the recession, according to an internal study by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Ontario was the intended destination for almost two thirds of skilled workers admitted to Canada. When skilled workers from across the world believe Ontario to be the land of opportunity, holding the same belief and implementing strategies to make this vision into reality should be a no-brainer for this government. What we have witnessed instead is a gradual erosion of the competitive advantages Ontario once had.

The only way to raise overall wages is through job creation, not raising the minimum. Over the past decade, despite all professed good intentions and policies, the present government has caused the cost and difficulty of doing business in Ontario to increase. These can be direct costs, such as increased WSIB premiums, increased energy costs and taxation, or indirect costs, such as more paperwork, unreliable energy supplies and a shortage of skilled tradespeople.

I recently received several delegations from northern Ontario municipalities, who brought to my attention the

particular challenges faced by enterprises in their area: The power supply is prone to blackouts due to many stations operating either significantly below or at capacity due to regulation, causing imbalances in the grid. Every energy cut can cause several hundred thousand dollars' worth of damage and delays. Municipal representatives raised the concern that northern Ontario plants of some major manufacturers were the least economically viable, putting local jobs at risk. They are not minimum wage jobs, but they are at risk of vanishing.

The minimum wage does not raise people out of poverty. Here are some factors that do: good jobs, good health care, affordable energy, private sector job creation, good mobility, low taxation and low payroll deductions. This government has implemented a misguided approach to jobs, whether at the minimum wage or above, by expanding the public payroll. With some exceptions, government jobs remove wealth from the economy by burning value. Money that can be spent, saved or invested by consumers is instead used to pay pen-pushers.

Moreover, this Liberal government is about to remove even more disposable income from the pockets of Ontarians through its plans for a mandatory pension plan. Whether you make the minimum wage or fall into any other bracket, it's what you receive that actually counts. Whatever increases in the minimum wage are implemented, the planned pension program is bound to take away benefits. While Ontarians will not see the benefits of the increase until they are 65, their well-being beyond that point is always in doubt. We hear of unfunded liabilities in both provincial programs, such as the WSIB, and the federal programs, such as CPP and EI. I have, however, yet to hear of an unfunded liability in an RRSP or a tax-free savings account, mostly because these funds aren't managed by the government.

So what is the purpose of this bill before us? It is designed to help Ontarians who are struggling to pay the bills. It won't. It is designed to increase the disposable income available to Ontarians at the bottom of the wage scale, and it won't. It is designed to address poverty, and it certainly won't. The current government has seen a doubling of the workforce on minimum wage. They may see it as an achievement, increasing the number of provincial Liberal voters who can be attracted by minimum wage policies. We see it as a great pool of talent and skill being underutilized.

As trustees of public policy, we should be focused on strategies that would make the minimum wage a distant memory for all Ontarians. Rather than see the number of minimum wage earners double, the Ontario PC caucus wants to see Ontario on a path that would see all Ontarians employed well above the minimum wage levels. Skilled, high-value-added jobs produce wealth, and the more value that is added, the greater the benefit to the whole province. What we need in Ontario is a comprehensive strategy to reduce the initial costs of production and foster job creation and innovation. Minimum wage policies are not a factor that helps achieve these objectives.

Just a few weeks ago, the current government voted against a much better plan for lifting Ontarians out of poverty and out of minimum wage jobs: the Million Jobs Act. On this side of the House, we realize that the future of Ontario lies in innovation and skilled jobs, rather than more agencies and government-sponsored talking shops.

Tinkering with the minimum wage is dangerous because of the numerous unintended consequences that such policies may have. It's important to highlight these, because, if there is something that we can be certain of, it's that this government hasn't done their homework. Maybe that's the reason that they failed Economics 101, and numerous poor Ontarians in the process.

There's hardly anyone remaining on the government front bench to act as a credible advocate for caution and well-thought-out economic policies. If they express their reservations in cabinet, they are clearly not listened to.

The minimum wage's influence is twofold. It obviously increases the overall cost of labour, which can be either passed on to the consumer through higher prices or amortized by reducing hours or the workforce. Higher consumer prices will eat into the benefits of a higher minimum wage and further erode the disposable income and saving potential of workers who are earning above the minimum wage level.

The more treacherous influence of the minimum wage is seen at the margin. This includes employers' choices such as whether to stay in business or not, or whether to train or not. Let's face it: Many workers require training on their new jobs. It can be as basic as adapting to new routines, co-workers and the environment, or as complex as learning to operate certain machinery or gaining some kind of safety certification. While these processes are ongoing, the worker is for all intents and purposes almost a dead weight, which the employer hopes to transform into a productive employee. Increasing the minimum wage skews the equation against the untrained worker.

The recession released many experienced workers into the job market, and they are naturally the first in line to be rehired once the business begins recruiting, as they require less training and adaptation time than someone who has either been unemployed for a long time or whose skill set does not match the employer's profile perfectly.

Incidentally, a higher minimum wage may cause increased demand for government-run training programs, which are inherently more expensive than employer-driven training. They require government bureaucrats to administer the money, and they require government bureaucrats to deliver the money and service. Ultimately, the government-trained job-seeker will see a fraction of the investment in his or her training, and certainly a smaller portion than a privately trained employee will benefit from.

A recent report in the United States from the Congressional Budget Office, an impartial watchdog, predicted that an across-the-board increase of the minimum wage in the country could result in as many as 500,000 jobs lost. Granted, the minimum wage jump that was

being considered was significant; translated into our situation, it would mean either \$13.10 in dollar-for-dollar terms or \$14.29 in proportional increases, yet we cannot deny that minimum wage is a factor for many employers who rely on minimum wage workers.

Speaker, the lack of ambition—rather than creating better jobs, they focus on the bottom of the scale. Instead of fostering success and growth, they punish it. Instead of focusing on keeping taxpayers' money in taxpayers' pockets, where it belongs, they plot ways to reduce Ontarians' disposable incomes.

Prosperity and financial security are about disposable income, not the minimum wage. If energy was affordable and municipalities received their fair share of the gas tax so they wouldn't have to increase property taxes to fund road maintenance, even Ontarians on today's minimum wage would be better off.

This government must stop taking money that isn't theirs and, when they do take money, focus on delivering the services we pay for rather than cushy jobs and perks for their support base. This bill does not create jobs, nor does it bring relief. It is an excuse to tout Liberal anti-employer credentials with a segment of the population that needs much better and more focused action. This bill may not kill jobs today, but it distracts from the actions that we take for the sake of a better tomorrow.

1620

The Ontario PC caucus has a better plan to lift Ontarians out of minimum wage jobs and out of poverty. While the government may relish the economic decline as it makes Ontarians more vulnerable to their rhetoric, we believe that Ontario can succeed, if only we gave the workforce a chance.

Incidentally, statistics show that a very large portion of minimum wage earners are students. If the aim of this bill was to lift Ontarians out of poverty, it clearly misses the target. It may be a solution for the government's failure to deliver true relief to the least-advantaged students facing the highest in-province tuition in Canada—the students that most needed the 30% discount ending up being ineligible for it. The minimum wage may deliver some relief, but is clearly not the amount to cover the 30% of the educational costs.

The bluntness of minimum wage legislation as a poverty reduction tool has been shown in many economic studies. The minimum wage is a cop-out for the government that is out of money for programs that can truly make a difference and aimed specifically at the poorest. Meanwhile, they can always find \$1.1 billion to save their own seats. Altering the minimum wage is a way for the government to make employers pay for rhetoric rather than bureaucrats paying for government mistakes, and we can do better.

Speaker, I have a study here that talks about the faith that small business has in this government. We see, in Ontario, less than 15% of employers think that—“How confident are you that your provincial government has a vision that supports small business?” We clearly see that there's work ahead. We need to develop an atmosphere

that will foster the old Ontario way of wanting to do better, investing in the future, expecting returns that they can count on based on the prosperity of this province. But we see a cost of doing business that again is being driven up. We brag about having the highest minimum wage in the country—I guess you could translate that probably into “on the continent.” I guess they're bragging about the highest energy rates on the continent and the highest payroll taxes.

This government has wasted an enormous amount of money. If you look at the increase in revenue that they have achieved over the previous government back in 2003, if you add up the differences in the revenues, the offloading of funds, over half a trillion dollars wasted that they could have turned around and bought infrastructure in this province that we're desperately in need of. These are lost opportunities. They are lost forever as now we have to turn around and pay this debt off. I think that it's clear that this government has failed. We have a game-changer here, the minimum wage. But really, we have to start looking at what this province really needs to succeed again, and we're looking at our plan.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'd like to talk on the minimum wage, and on exactly some of the comments that were made earlier.

It was very surprising to me when they talked about the strong economy in Ontario today.

They said that the NDP was silent on the minimum wage. I can tell you that I was here less than a week and I had asked questions on the minimum wage.

They also talked about it being political, the minimum wage, from the NDP. Well, I can tell you, as a candidate in Niagara Falls, during the middle of my election, they made the announcement on the \$11 minimum wage. I don't think there's anything more political than making an announcement as important as the minimum wage in the middle of a by-election. It was extremely surprising to me—the candidates should have been going around the riding talking about jobs, where, in Niagara, I continue to say, we have the highest unemployment in the province of Ontario, where the poverty rate is one of the highest in Ontario, where you have one in six children in the Niagara region living in poverty. That's what we should have been talking about in the election.

When you take a look at the schools in Niagara, almost every school, thanks to the teachers and the principals, has breakfast clubs because the parents cannot afford to pay their rent, pay their high electricity rates and feed their children. It's surprising to me. When I was going around talking about Fort Erie and talking about the importance of the government committing to a long-term future for the Fort Erie Race Track, we couldn't get that commitment during the election. We need that to be done so we can help—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments?

Mr. John Fraser: It's my pleasure to respond to the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

I would first, however, like to address the comments from the member from Niagara. I think I've already welcomed him. The truth of the matter is, you're late to the dance, but you're at the dance and that's great, and I hope you'll be able to support this bill.

I think that raising the minimum wage is the right and fair thing to do for families. It's balanced. It's supported by small business. Our measures to increase it are consistent in terms of yearly review with the consumer price index, an annual increase, depending on what that is.

I would, however, like to address right now—well, also to establish the fact that the member opposite's party has voted against every minimum wage increase and froze it for eight years while they were in government. More importantly, you talk about getting jobs for young people, but you voted against all the investments we made in post-secondary education, which are the determinants of people getting good jobs: \$6 billion into our colleges and universities, more access, 30% off tuition. Those are the things that are going to help people get good jobs.

What I'm really, really surprised at from the member opposite are his comments on CPP. There's a reason we come together as a government, and that's to do things together, to look out for each other, and CPP is a great example of that. It is almost unconscionable that the federal government refuses to address that issue. Now, I understand that the federal Minister of Finance has resigned today. Yes, he has, so maybe there's some hope for CPP.

I appreciate the member's comments, but I want to underline that his comments on the CPP really are out of step with—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Prince Edward-Hastings-Quinte West.

Mr. Todd Smith: Well, Quinte West is close by, that's for sure—Prince Edward-Hastings.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to bring some comments to the 20 minutes that the member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry had when talking about minimum wage here in the province. I thought he made an excellent point when he said that really there's nothing for this government to brag about when they're talking about having the highest minimum wage in the country.

We have the highest energy rates in the country. He was right about that. We have the highest energy rates in North America now, and 10 years ago, we had the lowest. We have the highest payroll taxes in Canada now. That's not something that we should be bragging about. And we have the largest red-tape burden of any jurisdiction in North America. These are all things that are making it very, very difficult for our businesses in this province right now to hang on. Many of them tell me that they're hanging on by their fingernails because of the costs of doing business in this province. So the government comes through, in the middle of the by-election in Niagara Falls and Thornhill, which—the member from Niagara Falls is absolutely right: The government

shouldn't be making major policy announcements during by-election campaigns, or even general election campaigns, for that matter. You'll recall what they did in the general election in 2011: They announced the cancellation of the gas plants in the middle of the election, and it ended up costing us \$1.4 billion. What has that done to increase the highest energy rates in North America? It has put them even higher, which makes it even more difficult for Ontario businesses to survive. These types of announcements shouldn't come during an election.

I would like to point out, though, that during the first week that the member from Niagara Falls was here, he voted to support the Liberals in a confidence motion after he had campaigned for five weeks against this Liberal government, which he called corrupt during that time.

I agree with the comments that were made by the member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry. We need to look further into this.

1630

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I find this exchange very interesting, and I'll tell you why, Speaker. This is good. The member from Ottawa South stands up and he points over here. He meant the Conservatives didn't raise it in eight years, and he also meant that the CPP was their doing, not ours. Thank you for clarifying that.

The member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan: He's saying how wonderful the Liberals are in the last seven or eight years, raising the thing up. Well, I've got news for you, folks. For 15 years before that, the NDP were asking for raises. Some of you were not even around. So it makes me laugh when they take credit.

And they say, "Well, why didn't the NDP come out flying on the raises?" Well, I'll tell you: because the Liberals sat back and wanted to see what we were going to do. Like everything else they do, they take our ideas. They have no research. They have no substance. They have no direction. They wait for the other party to come up with the idea, and then they run with it, and then they announce it as their idea. They are unbelievable. I can't believe they do these things. And I have to sit there and listen to this.

Then they pick on the member from Niagara Falls, who just got here. The poor guy is being pounded already, and he's not in the wrong. He was absolutely right in what he said in his campaign. Todd took a run at him, but that's okay.

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm sorry. But I'm telling you right now, Speaker, it makes me laugh to sit in this House and look at these people riding that horse when they never even got on it in the first place. When they finally do get on the horse, it was their idea, and they go right down Main Street with it, just like on this thing, just like on—everything they do is off our ideas and our research. You're welcome.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: No. Two-minute response.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Okay. Back to the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker—and I guess quite amusing. I hear people around here on a high horse talking about horses. But anyway, it's interesting to hear some of the comments directed back and forth, and I guess we'd have to agree with some of the comments about the government here. Every day, people come up to me, and the word is that Ontario's in a mess. I think that's a good way of putting it: It's in a mess. Anybody who runs a business is fed up. If they can't leave, they're upset, because they can't take their business with them. That's all that's left here: the people that can't take their business away.

You talked about, Ottawa South, the minimum wage. They didn't even follow their own panel. The panel never talked about increasing minimum wage the way it did. It talked about inflation rates. But you took an immediate jump to be, you know—they've got to be first in this country in minimum wage.

You talk about the previous Conservative government, who created 1.2 million jobs in this province. That's something we're proud of, and I guess something we hope the other side would aspire to. Instead of losing 600,000, we should be trying to create some. We aren't seeing that, and we aren't going to see it with the economic climate in this province.

I look at my son, who left. When he finished an engineering degree, he had to go to Alberta to get a job. A lot of people even in my generation did. But when he came back to visit some of his friends here later, they were all, his group of friends, still looking for jobs. Engineering degrees in this province now don't guarantee a job in Ontario.

But some of them did have jobs. They were working at the local restaurant. Not that it's a bad job, but they were trained with a four-year degree—highly technical skills that we're really demanding our students follow. But it no longer generates a job in Ontario. They're all over Alberta and Manitoba, and they could be in northern Ontario if we'd just take steps to finally get the Ring of Fire going, but we haven't been able to do that as a government.

The people of Ontario know what's happening, and they want to see a change of government. They desperately want to see—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, I'm pleased to stand before the House today to speak about Bill 165, the Fair Minimum Wage Act. The members across the road here want to know where we stand. Well, you're going to hear it.

Regardless of the title of this bill, it certainly doesn't go far enough. It goes partway. But to discuss the bill, let's discuss what the government agreed to do before this bill came into effect. The government had agreed to raise the minimum wage to \$11 an hour effective June 1,

2014. At least the government has done something for minimum wage—I'll give them that—but not nearly enough, of course.

Everyone in this House knows it has been the NDP who for years have fought for increases to the minimum wage. The Liberals implemented it—I'll give them that—but it took them a long time to get on that horse.

In fact, we have always asked for a livable wage. Somebody earning minimum wage now and working 40 hours a week will earn about \$410. The increase to \$11 an hour at 40 hours a week will result in \$440 a week. Speaker, that's \$30—oh, I forgot; there's taxes. They're down to \$23 a week, which is just under \$100 a month, \$1,200 a year. They'll be lucky if that pays for their hydro.

Everyone seems to think this is a huge burden on small business; it isn't. We offered in our platform to give small business a percentage break on that, which would counteract the increase to the minimum wage. Everybody would have been happy. But it didn't go there.

With increases in everything from public transit to hydro to groceries, this money is eaten up in hours—hours, this increase.

This increase is all that minimum wage earners will see until the ludicrously low CPI formula found in Bill 165 kicks in. For 17 months, Speaker, minimum wage earners will be stuck while they know that the basic cost of living will increase. They'll be stuck in limbo. All Bill 165 says is that as of October 1, 2015, the annual increase to the minimum wage will be equal to the CPI increase.

Speaker, of the troubling aspects of this bill, two stand out glaringly to me. First, any future increases to the minimum wage will not kick in until October 2015. Second, given the most recent CPI numbers, the Liberal plan would provide almost no relief for our most vulnerable citizens.

Last year, the CPI used for OMERS pensioners was 1.81%. That's not a heck of a lot. Let's apply this to the minimum wage of the day. The minimum wage of the day was \$10.25 at that time. Under Bill 165, that would mean an increase of just 19 cents an hour to the minimum wage. Fast-forward to this year: With an \$11 minimum wage in June, using the same 1.81% increase in CPI, that would result in an increase of 19.9 cents. Isn't that very generous, Speaker? Let's round it off and say 20 cents.

I can't believe that the Liberal government really believes that this is a plan to help the most vulnerable. I think not. It seems they haven't thought this out too well. I would hope that we can fix it, but by fixing it, I mean adopting the NDP position, which, instead of relying on increases on CPI, would increase the minimum wage by 50 cents in each of the following years. Remember, Speaker, that once they go on to the CPI annual increases, they will suffer the same fixed-income increases as many pensioners do now. We will now have both seniors and low-income earners tied to the CPI increases under the Liberal plan. We know that the CPI increases

do not accurately reflect the real increases in the cost of living.

It bothers me tremendously that this proposed increase to the minimum wage isn't really to help bring people out of poverty; it's just another election gambit. These people across the floor know very well they made promise after promise after promise in prior elections, and they know how few of them have been implemented. People know. I think I counted it: It's about 117 promises broken already. We're moving up, too. There will be a couple more before this is over.

It also bothers me that—I find it difficult—people can't get by on what they're making. They're pawns in the chess game of election fever. That's what it is, an election fever chess game.

When we do the math, it's clear that the Liberal plan would do little to help the most vulnerable. The Liberal plan would do little to help the most vulnerable, but we know that even the little increase that would be spent locally would provide a small boost to our local economies.

At the same time, both the Liberals and the Conservatives want to keep lowering the corporate tax rate. We know that large corporations are not spending money locally; they're putting it in the bank, and they're giving it to their shareholders. We know that many of those who enjoy our extraordinarily low tax rate are spending the money offshore—not even in Ontario—and not benefiting our local economies. We live in one of the lowest corporate tax rate jurisdictions in Canada and the United States.

Corporate profits are at an all-time high, but where are the profits? Do they sink it back into their business? Do they sink it into their local community? Do they sink it into their province, state or country? No; they give it to the shareholders.

1640

A recent report found that Canadian corporations are hoarding—I repeat, hoarding—nearly \$500 billion in unused funds, rather than using that money to reinvest in our local economy to help create jobs and provide a higher livable wage for their workers, the people who create their wealth. They're kicking them right in the head.

Many of these same corporations continue to demand that the provincial government keep corporate tax rates low for their own benefit, either to hoard it or to spend it offshore. Even knowing that, the Liberals and PCs both continue to push the idea ahead that if we continue to give tax breaks to our wealthiest corporations and individuals, it will somehow trickle down and benefit everyone else. All of a sudden, these people are going to become Santa Clauses, and they're going to start giving it to all the people who helped them make the money they made. I think not. I think it will go to the shareholders. I don't think it will go into our communities. I think it will go offshore to banks in Switzerland. That's where I think it will go.

Successful Liberal and Conservative governments have followed these depressive policies for years, and

they can't seem to get off that train, down that track, for corporations. Big money for big business, and to heck with the rest of them: "We'll give you a little trickle, if you're lucky, just so you have enough food to eat so that you can get to the job."

In fact, we listened to the PCs on this issue, and boy, are they off the map. They would have us believe that the problems of poverty and inequality are somehow solved by further lowering tax rates, by so-called freedom of choice in the marketplace. I really get a charge when the leader of the official opposition stands up and says he's going to create a million jobs. I don't know what fantasyland he came from. But I'll tell you, we could use probably at least 100,000 jobs where I'm from. It's unbelievable that they just throw out numbers like that. Where's the proof? Where are the jobs? Where are these employment agencies opening up and giving the people in my area jobs? It's not happening. One million—not happening.

And let's not forget the right to work. That's another peach. We'll all be working for six bucks an hour when they get through with us, and then they'll say, "Why can't you pay the hydro bill?" "Because I can't even put a piece of tart on the table. I can't afford anything. I can't pay my bills, let alone your taxes."

What's going to happen, too, if we're all on a lower wage scale? Who's going to pay for all these new highways and LRTs? Who's going to pay for all the things that we need to move ahead and advance as a society? Not the guy making seven bucks an hour. He's lucky if he can feed himself and his family. But let's have a right-to-work state.

If you look at the GDP of those right-to-work states, 20% of their workforce has left those states and gone elsewhere to work for a more livable wage. Oh, it has been a wonderful record.

Mr. Wayne Gates: No pensions.

Mr. Paul Miller: No pensions. Attacking pension plans in the private sector as well as the public sector—that's great.

What they want to do is eliminate the public sector, union, good-paying jobs. They say that the private sector is not making enough; fair enough. But the bottom line is, if you eliminate all those large groups, you're going to eliminate our middle class. There will be nobody left to pay for all this stuff. Wait a minute; maybe those guys making seven bucks an hour will take care of it. I don't think so.

Speaker, freedom and choice don't feed an empty stomach; I'll be honest with you.

From 1995 to 2003, it was the Conservative Party's reign of terror on low-income workers that resulted in a freeze to the minimum wage. They chose not to increase the minimum wage by a single penny.

I must give credit to the government; they at least give something—not enough, the way I'd like it.

Everyone says that the NDP didn't come out with a position. No, we wanted to see how bad these two positions would be and then we would fix it once again.

At the same time, since 2003 the Liberal plan to move forward on minimum wage was only a result of the push by the NDP. They had no plan for increasing the minimum wage back then, in 2003. We brought it forward and pushed it to benefit the most vulnerable. Never mind 2003; I can remember fighting for an increase in the minimum wage in 1976—not when they got into government. I've been doing this for 30 years. This is not new to the NDP. They make it look like we jumped off the train and aren't saying anything. That's a load of manure.

This bill provides an opportunity for counter-arguments and workable NDP proposals. We know that small business is the engine of our local economies, and we also need to help small business create jobs. So what did we do? We said we'll give the small businesses tax relief to counter the increase to the minimum wage, which benefits everyone. They can deal with the minimum wage increase. Their employees make more money, and they spend more money in our community. It's a trickling effect—not just to give it to corporations so they can go offshore and put it in a Swiss bank. We need to let people meet their needs, and then they will spend what excess money they have in our economy. But if you can't meet your basic needs, you're not going to spend the money. But if small business is the engine of our local economy, and we think it is, then it's almost the engine of our provincial economy, isn't it? Because 74% of the employers in this province are small businesses. We help small business, they help the people with the low wages and everybody profits. We have a producing economy again. However, that's not the way it's going.

Ontario New Democrats have a plan to support small businesses as well as the lowest-paid workers in our province by phasing in a series of reductions to the small business tax rate while increasing the minimum wage to \$12 and revisiting it a couple of years from then, not giving further reductions to large corporations but giving the benefit where the benefit is needed. Based on a minimum wage of \$11 an hour as of June 1, 2014, the NDP three-part plan includes—stay tuned, folks; I'm going to drink—

Hon. James J. Bradley: What's in that water?

Mr. Paul Miller: It's good stuff—a 50-cents-an-hour increase to \$11.50 an hour on June 1, 2015, and a further 50-cents-an-hour increase to \$12 on June 1, 2016, to be revisited after that depending on where we're at. Using the previous CPI, in June 2015 our plan would have the minimum wage at \$11.50 an hour, compared to the Liberals' \$11.20. The following year, our plan would see the minimum wage raised to \$12 an hour, compared to the Liberals' \$11.40, following a similar CPI, which we've seen previously. We're already moving the lowest income earners further ahead than the Liberal plan would. The minimum wage sets the wage floor to stop employers from taking unfair advantage of workers with little bargaining power at all. With a number of large US corporations buying out formerly Canadian-owned businesses, we know that the goal will be to keep wages low and profits flowing out of Canada. If these people get

in, everybody is going to be working for nine bucks an hour, if they're lucky—and that's a good job. Scary stuff.

The minimum wage would help bring workers out of poverty. A \$12 minimum wage is closer to the low-income cut-off than an \$11 minimum wage. The \$12 minimum wage on a 40-hour week gives an annual gross income of \$24,960. Finally, for a single person in this province, at \$24,960 they have edged just above the poverty line. Isn't that good? This isn't going to make anyone rich by any means, but it's certainly going to stimulate our dragging economy. It's going to help, because when people have money in their pockets, they'll spend it, after they pay their bills. That's how it works. But they need to put food on the table, too; they need to be able to eat, to get good nutrition so they can go to their job to work and be functional. They'll be able to buy their children warm winter clothing and will be beginning a better life for themselves, maybe even some better medicine and more stimulating, nutritious food. No, it will not result in new cars, expensive trips, big-screen TVs or trips to the Caribbean, but it will make things a little easier. It will also allow students to have some more for their education. Their part-time job will allow them to put that much more money away to take care of their years in post-secondary. It will help to ease the pressures on families and seniors who are worried whether they are going to be able to pay their rent or heating bills this month. In fact, they may not have to make a choice between the two. They may be able to pay both if they get a decent, livable wage. Stats Canada's low-income cut-off after taxes for a single person living in a large city like Toronto is about \$19,800 and for a family of four, it's \$37,000.

Recent research has toppled assumptions that increasing the minimum wage causes job loss. It doesn't cause job loss, and that's what some of the people are trying to float around this Legislature, that if you increase the minimum wage too much, companies are going to leave the province. That's nonsense. That's absolute nonsense. Over the past two decades, academic research has found that minimum wage increases did not lead to job loss, even during periods of high unemployment. In 2012, almost half of the minimum wage workers in Ontario were employed by corporations that have over 500 employees. Companies like Pizza Pizza increased profits by 37% that year. I don't think they're going anywhere. If I can make 37% a year, I'm sticking around. The increase we are recommending to the minimum wage is negligible in that profit range. Many of these large corporations enjoy the lowest corporate tax rate in North America, continue to accumulate and hoard massive profits while their workers struggle to make ends meet while living below the poverty line.

1650

Speaker, the measure of the government's worth is not just in its gross domestic product or how profitable its corporations are; rather, it's measured in what it does for its citizens and the extent to which it improves their lives. The NDP plan will help people—the most vulnerable in

our province—improve their day-to-day lives. The plan is economically responsible and will help lift hard-working Ontarians out of poverty, while allowing small business to keep driving our economy forward.

The increases to the minimum wage will be accompanied by a reduction in the small business corporate tax rate as follows—here it is, folks; you wanted to hear about it: a reduction from 4.5% to 4% on June 1, 2014; a reduction from 4% to 3.5% on June 1, 2015; and a reduction from 3.5% to 3% on June 1, 2016. Cutting the small business tax by 0.5% will provide small businesses with an estimated \$90 million in tax relief annually.

We have taken the time to listen to people earning minimum wage and to small businesses paying minimum wage. The result of that endeavour to find a practical, responsible solution is in the NDP plan. Unlike the Liberal half attempt at a plan, we have a well-thought-out, targeted and balanced approach.

The NDP plan also calls for:

- immediate action on capping public sector CEO salaries and management bonuses. I know that one of their former ministers is now the head of Hydro One. Isn't that interesting? Wow, that should be interesting. I'm going to follow that development very closely. I will be very interested in what Ms. Papatello has to say and do when she's head of Hydro One. I don't want to see any new boats on the harbour;

- a crackdown on corporate tax avoidance, following the Auditor General's 2010 finding that the government had left over \$2.4 billion in corporate taxes uncollected while laying off tax enforcement agents. Well, isn't that special? You lay off the guys who are trying to get the money for the government so we can increase—we lost \$2.4 billion. Wow. What could we do with that? And;

- the closure of the planned new corporate tax loopholes worth \$1.1 billion annually. Well, that's another billion, so there's \$3 billion or \$4 billion sitting right there we could use.

We know what will happen if we follow the NDP plan; however, what we really need to consider is what happens if we don't follow the plan. If we don't follow the NDP plan, families will continue to struggle to put food on the table, provide clothing for their children, and an education; students will be burdened by increasing levels of debt.

Low-wage jobs are not just a problem for young workers or those who hold retail or fast-food or service industry jobs. Between 2004 and 2012, the number of minimum wage workers aged 35 and over has increased by 10%, from 17% to 27%, so I wonder if that increase is part of the 137,000 jobs they talk about. I wonder if any of that is part of that 17%. I would say a good portion of it is.

Jobs across many industries pay wages near the bottom end of the pay scale, jobs such as bank tellers, security guards, child care workers, personal home support workers, teaching assistants and flight attendants. And let's not forget our below minimum wage service industry workers; that's another one.

Low wages not only affect people's pocketbooks but their overall health, mental health and well-being as well—I'm running out of time here. Wages below the poverty line increase rates of chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, migraines and bronchitis compared to those with decent wages. So I guess wages are connected to health and well-being.

The Liberal plan will do little to help Ontario's most vulnerable. The NDP plan will take more significant action, more quickly, to help those living in poverty better the economic standing and quality of life of the people of this province.

Speaker, the reason they didn't hear—because we wanted to see how bad theirs was, and that one would be even worse—and now we know where they stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Grant Crack): Questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Well, with a speech like that, I think the member should be in the front row. Second, he should be getting more questions. He had a question today.

Now, I don't know whether he actually believes what he read on that piece of paper, because I know him very well, and he's been a champion in terms of the minimum wage over the years and the issues related to labour.

I can say he will no longer have the federal finance minister, Jim Flaherty, available to deal with these matters federally, because he has resigned from the cabinet, so this will be an opportunity for federal members from all the political parties to stand up for Ontario instead of playing Captain Canada first, when Ontario gets—I'll have to use the words correctly; there are too many pages here—done in by the federal government in terms of the formula for money coming to the province. We've been looking for all of them to be on our side.

I was very interested recently to watch the leader of the New Democratic Party, who is now the tax fighter—she used to be in favour of tax increases; she's now the tax fighter—pandering to business and refusing to state her position on the minimum wage. I know the member said she was waiting to see what the Liberals were going to do. That hasn't been the case in the past for the NDP, when they were prepared to stand up. I hope that the members of the caucus will remind the leader that she must take those kinds of positions.

I also want to remind the member that the Liberal government cut income taxes for the lowest-income people when it was there and actually put taxes up for the highest-income in our last budget.

I also recommend to my friends in the New Democratic Party a book written by Dr. Janice MacKinnon, who was the finance minister in the province of Saskatchewan in the 1990s when they hit the financial wall. It will give a clear indication of what the NDP does when it has to, when it's in power, compared to what it recommends elsewhere, such as closing 52 rural hospitals in Saskatchewan, not because they wanted to be mean, but because they were up against the wall.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Chatham-Kent-Essex.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's a pleasure to stand here and to discuss Bill 165.

With my discussions that I've had with a lot of businesses, and people involved in those businesses, being employees or even part of the supply chain, we talk about the minimum wage, or we talk about wages, period, and the impact that maybe an increase in the minimum wage could have on businesses.

I think specifically of a particular number of greenhouse growers down in the Leamington area who in fact, back when the minimum wage was \$8.75, and then it was increased by \$1.50 up to \$10.25—I chatted with one of the growers, and he said, "Rick, that almost killed me." I said, "Well, how could that be? It's \$1.50 an hour." Then he started explaining to me more and more as to how it could have, because he employed around 75 people. Not only did he have to now give those at minimum wage \$1.50 extra an hour, but he had to give everyone an extra \$1.50 an hour. So if you do the math, at 75 people, that's approximately—do the math quickly—somewhere in the neighbourhood of a \$110-an-hour increase in wages for that company, with nothing more to show.

My concern is this: We hear the NDP talking about \$9 an hour and whatnot. That's ludicrous, simply because we're talking \$11 right now. They're worried about digressing and what can happen in business, in industry today. Well, that's not going to happen. We're going to be moving forward with this thing. If we can create the right business environment that will encourage businesses to come to Ontario, we'll have good-paying jobs for everyone, and the unions can negotiate whatever they—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for London–Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I believe I have a two-minute comment, right?

Mr. Paul Miller: Yes.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Okay. Just making sure.

Speaker, I wanted to congratulate the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for his 20-minute contribution to the debate today. What I wanted in particular to address was the information he put out there with what the NDP's proposal was for minimum wage.

The practical approach is exactly what this plan is about. We have the increase to the minimum wage, and then we also are considering the real job creators in a lot of ways in our community, which are small to medium businesses, and then we're offering, of course, the 4.5% tax decrease in order to help small to medium businesses continue to grow in our communities, because we find that those are the real job creators that stay in our community.

Yesterday I was at Sutherland's Furniture. Sutherland's Furniture, in that same location—they've changed the names. Sutherland's has been there specifically under that name since 1998, but that particular furniture store location has been there for about 36 years, and Gus Dupuis, who is the owner, has hired many, many people in the neighbourhood. He has created job after job. Gus is

one of the people who has his roots in the community. He's not going anywhere.

1700

We need to make sure that we can support local business, and in doing that, if we're going to increase the minimum wage, there has to be some relief for small business. That's what the NDP proposed. We are promoting new hires as well through our new tax credit, which means if a small business owner hires for a new job, they will get a tax credit for that. That's how we can actually create new jobs and help people stay in London, and Fanshawe in particular, because we do have a high unemployment rate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Hon. David Zimmer: I'm glad to add my two minutes to the debate. As usual, let me just state some facts.

First of all, the minimum wage is going to \$11 on June 1. That will be the highest in Canada. Then it increases yearly thereafter, and here's the important thing: The increases will be equal to the increase in the Ontario consumer price index. Furthermore, if there is deflation—that is, the consumer price index goes down—the minimum wage will not go down, but it will remain at the higher level.

If there are some wrinkles in the program or the program seems not to be working or there are better things we can do, the entire program itself is going to be reviewed every five years to make sure that we've always got it right.

In short, what we are doing is we are being fair, we are being balanced and we are being predictable. We are being those three things because we've got the best advice from the Ontario Minimum Wage Advisory Panel, which consisted, of course, of business, labour, youth—who have a lot to gain by this—anti-poverty groups, and, in particular, representation from the Retail Council of Canada and the tourism industry in Canada, which have an important interest in this issue.

With respect to what minimum wage workers are actually going to be affected, the top three minimum-wage-earning categories are retail, with about 164,000 people; food and services, about 152,000 people; and culture, information and recreation industry, about 35,000 people. All of those groups have been represented in the planning of this approach to the minimum wage; that is, increasing it to \$11 and indexing it to the consumer price index and so on. We've got the best advice—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Paul Miller: Well, Speaker, once again I must stand up and say that I appreciate all the comments from the speakers. With all due respect, though, I know that when someone brings a bill forward, they have to justify what they are doing to the public and to their party and to the business community. One member said that he had spoken to all groups. I don't think he spoke to the groups that wanted \$14 an hour. I don't recall him being at any

of those meetings. That was called a livable wage. I don't believe he took part in that.

I would challenge anyone in this room to try and live on \$11 an hour in their lifestyle, or lifestyle from before they were even here. I know I couldn't get by on \$11 an hour. If you've got two or three kids you've got to put through university, if you've got an unemployed husband or an unemployed spouse, you're not going to make that. You'd be lucky if you make the \$400 or \$500. Social assistance certainly isn't at a level that's even going to reach the \$11 an hour. If you wonder why people get frustrated and they're up against a wall and they give up or lose respect for the politicians or lose respect for the direction they're taking, it's because they can't even make it through life. They can't live on what they are making. So when they trumpet 11 bucks an hour like it's the best thing since corn chips, well, it's not. We've got more room to move.

As the member from Fanshawe said, we can put tax breaks to the small businesses so they're not hit as hard and can increase and go along with the flow, which helps the overall economy, because, trust me, Speaker, I would say the majority of our population is probably making less than \$40,000 a year. The family income might be \$55,000 or \$60,000, if they're both working; if they're not, you can cut that in half.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been more than six and one half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader specifies otherwise.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Be in your seat.

Hon. David Zimmer: I am, right here: David Zimmer. I'm not that dumb.

Madam Speaker, we would like the debate to continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise today to speak about the issue of minimum wage, Bill 165. I was waiting for the government to put speakers up, but I guess that they are not going to even though they just agreed to further the debate. But I'm pleased to stand.

Bill 165, for those who just tuned in at home, which probably won't be many, is An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to the minimum wage. This would adjust the minimum wage annually, starting in October 2015, by indexing it to the Ontario consumer price index, the CPI. Currently, the minimum wage sits at \$10.25 an hour, and it will be increased to \$11 per hour effective June 1 this year.

We've said—and other speakers from the PC Party have said today and when it was debated before—that we're going to be supportive of this bill, but we do not believe it is the solution for getting Ontario's economy back on track. We have made many, many suggestions. The current Liberal government doesn't seem to want to take them.

The latest: In February, our leader, Tim Hudak, put forward the Million Jobs Act, which he introduced as a private member's bill. It was not successful; the government and the NDP chose to vote against it. I don't know why they are against creating more job opportunities to put the people of Ontario back to work, because I believe there are a million people needing work, that are unemployed, in the province of Ontario. We want to see Ontario prosper. This legislation, if it had passed—and again, the Liberal government and the NDP opposition blocked our plan for more job creation, the Million Jobs Act—would have started creating good-paying jobs.

We have to balance the budget quickly in this province. Most people do not realize that what the Liberal government has created, the debt and deficit of our province, is the third-largest budget item in the provincial government. You have health care, you have education and then you have servicing this enormous, unprecedented debt that this Liberal government has put the province of Ontario in. Guess what? When it's the third-largest budget item, you cannot spend on programs that we hold near and dear: health care, education, social services. You can't do it. You are paying this enormous mortgage down.

We need to educate people. There needs to be more fiscal literacy—no question—out there. I save as much as I can. You have to put it in perspective.

We say we need to get more people working; that certainly creates more taxes for the government to pay off some of this debt and deficit. It helps us all be better as a province, and it gives people jobs, which I can't stress enough is the number one thing out there: jobs and the economy.

With the Million Jobs Act, we would have balanced the budget quickly, using tools like an across-the-board government wage freeze—that's a \$2-billion savings right there. We would have reduced taxes on employers so they could start to hire again. We would have changed the apprenticeship ratios.

My colleague from Simcoe North has just been outstanding for a year and a half, travelling the province of Ontario about apprenticeships, about the damage the College of Trades is doing to this province and about changing the ratios so we can get more of our young people into the jobs that they want to get into—good-paying jobs in the skilled trades, which we need and which companies are looking to other countries to bring into the province of Ontario because we live in an outdated apprenticeship ratio system that has to change. We have to enable our young people to get those jobs, not make it more difficult for them.

1710

Those are some of the examples that we have been giving in the Million Jobs Act. What we've said is that we want good-paying, middle-class jobs, the kind that you can depend on to support your families. I know the NDP thinks we're all going to be working for \$6 an hour. That's not true. We want—

Mr. Paul Miller: Only if you get in.

Ms. Laurie Scott: No, we want good-paying, middle-class jobs. This government has lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs. Those were good-paying jobs. Their record over the last 10 or 11 years has not been stellar. They have nothing to shout about.

The rate of Ontario residents working in minimum wage jobs has actually gone up under this government. Do most people know that? I can tell you that I see that in my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock all the time. If they can get a job—I have more people working on minimum wage than there ever were. It's shocking; minimum wage jobs are at 9% right now. It used to be 6.3% in 2007, and I think even lower—I'm just looking at this article, what it was, but it was even lower than that 10 years ago. So they've created high unemployment, the highest in the country. It's 80-some months in a row now that they're going for the highest unemployment. We're going to have the highest minimum wage in the country, but along with that—you know, we want small businesses to create jobs, but they're running them out of business. Right? We've got the highest hydro rates in North America, the highest electricity rates. You've got the highest payroll taxes. So all the costs of doing business—which are the job creators—you guys have piled upon the businesses and they can't do business: WSIB; Bill 119.

Have you not heard about that in all your ridings, how difficult it is to do business? The business people who actually want to have a business, open up shop and create jobs, which we're all talking about, they're like, "Why would I set up business in Ontario? I'm going south of the border." Let me tell you, people south of the border want our businesses to move down there, to create jobs down there. This Liberal government has done a great job of creating jobs in the United States as our businesses leave.

It's nearly impossible, I think we can all agree, to live on a minimum wage job. But let me tell you, when I talked about businesses and their increasing hydro rates, do you think increasing the minimum wage by the amount that it's going to go up, which is this bill—and we're not going to vote against it—is going to solve the problems out there for people? Do you think that's actually going to help them pay their hydro bills? You have to understand that the cost of living for the people is so high—and I tell this story often in the Legislature; it's absolutely true—they cannot pay their hydro bills. We've just seen the heating bills go higher. I don't have a lot of natural gas in my riding, but certainly they plan on going up. Propane has tripled; hydro; oil—it is hard to pay your bills and stay in your house. So they have to make those choices of what food they buy—and let me tell you, I'll say again, my food banks are busier than ever. And I have fuel banks that are running out of fuel pretty much on a daily basis. That's what it's come to.

Is this going to really improve the financial situation of these low-income workers? They want jobs. They want good-paying jobs. Do you know what happens when you set the minimum wage? It is a barrier. It is a

floor that people who weren't making minimum wage—the employers then have to look at increasing the wages they're paying their employees. That's another burden on business. Do you know what? They just don't hire that summer student. You look for reasons why your youth unemployment is so high? I'm giving you lots of them. Businesses can't afford to hire youth. They can't afford to hire the extra employee that they used to. That's why we need to get back to creating good, well-paying jobs so that families don't have to make the kinds of choices I just mentioned.

Youth unemployment, I just want to mention, is an appalling 16.5%; and I would say that it's certainly higher than 20% in the riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. We want to support the future of tomorrow and make sure there are good-paying jobs for our youth in Ontario.

What happened last week? They closed two agricultural colleges in eastern Ontario: Kemptville and Alfred.

Mr. Paul Miller: Guelph university.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Guelph university involved, but the Premier said, "By 2020, we are challenging the agri-food sector to increase by 120,000 jobs—to double their output. We are going to be able to do that because there is so much potential in the agri-food sector." When you close agricultural colleges that are training our young people for the skills they need—we all want them to, and the government, I'm sure, wants them to. I'm just saying, you're not connecting the dots over there. You're closing the colleges when we want more young people trained in this trade and the Premier herself says they want a 120,000 job increase in the agri-food sector by 2020. They're not giving the businesses or the schools the tools to achieve this.

We can do the minimum wage bill that we're discussing today; as I said, we're not going to oppose it. It's just not solving the bigger problem that exists out there.

The member from Leeds–Grenville has done a fantastic job. He has been active, and within 48 hours there were 500 people at a meeting in Leeds–Grenville about the closure of the campuses and the solutions that we can do, ideas, going forward.

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I've explained this before. You're not connecting the dots when you say, "We want to create all these jobs." You're not giving businesses the tools to do the job creation they need to do because you have the highest payroll tax, because you have the highest hydro rates.

You've seen the jobs leave—Heinz, Kellogg's. A Lakefield company just laid off yesterday in the riding of Peterborough. GE in Peterborough lays off. Caterpillar lays off. The list is extensive, and those are just some of the bigger companies. The smaller ones don't get as many headlines, so you don't hear about them as much.

I can tell you, this government is spending, I think, \$45 billion more in revenue since 10 years ago, and my people are poorer than they used to be. They're poorer than they ever were. They're poorer than they were 10 years ago, for sure.

So there's this revenue that's coming in, this government's spending is out of control, and there's nobody better off in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock than they were 10 years ago. So yes, something is quite wrong.

As I said, there are a million people out of work in Ontario—300,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs in the past 10 years.

This bill today, Bill 165, is a band-aid. It's not solving the bigger policy issues that are out there. You have to create an environment for businesses to succeed. You can't government-mandate jobs. The government is pretty good at giving some money, and is pleased to create the jobs, but there's really no accountability with our taxpayer money for giving some companies money and then they don't create the jobs. Does that do any of us in the province of Ontario good? No, it doesn't.

You have to create a climate so that businesses actually want to come to Ontario, want to create jobs, want to partake in the training of our youth. If you listen to even the co-op programs at the high schools, there's such a burden now for businesses to get involved. They're discouraged. They're not taking as many on. That is a big problem. We all agree that that co-op program and Pathways to Success have been good programs. They have been a helping hand to help kids decide what they want to go into. But when you're discouraging businesses constantly—business has to be part of that equation, and I can't say that the Liberals have done a very good job at that; in fact, it has been the opposite. They can deny it all they want. It's just reality out there. I challenge them to go into their ridings and hear those stories that are there.

We say, where is the jobs plan from this Liberal government? It's not out there. It's not creating more jobs. Between the hydro bills and the minimum wage increase, people aren't going to be any better off.

CFIB just did a study and they asked small business, who, by the way, create 98% of the jobs, especially in rural Ontario—they did a survey and they asked, "How confident are you that your provincial government has a vision that supports small business?" Eighty-four percent of the respondents to this small business survey that CFIB did were not confident in this provincial government, that they actually were supportive of or had a vision for small business. That's pretty bad out there.

I go back again: The biggest job creators are the small businesses. Guess what? Rules, regulations, hydro costs—have we sung this song to you before? We have. What have you done? More rules and regulations. You've tripled the rates of hydro, and your Minister of Energy states quite emphatically that hydro rates are going to increase another 42%, so there's nowhere to go but up. That doesn't create an environment where people are confident in setting up a business.

1720

Do I hear every week about someone's grandchild or child who has had to go out west to get a job? You bet I do. I hear of the middle-aged men who go out for two

weeks to Alberta and work and come back here for two weeks, but not to work. They'd like to work in Ontario, but they can't because there are no jobs, so they go out for two weeks. That is what Ontario has become now, and it is awful. We have to change it, and we can change it. We have to turn it around, and you have to have bold steps.

Doing the minimum wage—again, the band-aid solutions that continue without dealing with the real issue.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture did have input into the discussion about the minimum wage. They had some pretty serious concerns—

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Guelph: Were they there?

Ms. Laurie Scott: They had input to the minimum wage. Now I can't find it, but I'm looking for it. There it is. There are a couple of things I wanted to highlight of what they said:

"The intention of a provincial minimum wage is 'to create a wage floor for the labour market and to help ensure a minimum standard of living for employees.'

"However, we respectfully submit that 'minimum standard of living' is a very subjective phrase where standard of living is completely dependent on a host of considerations including wages; health; costs of living factors such as housing, food and taxes; and lifestyle choices. You cannot legislate wealth or even well-being by addressing only one contributing factor"—which we are doing in this bill.

I've mentioned other factors, which they actually agree with. It says, "Boards and committees in other provinces charged with reviewing minimum wage policy have agreed that changes to basic personal income tax exemptions, strengthening of social assistance programs, and support for continuing education can produce far better results for the standard of living of low-income workers than an increase to the minimum wage...."

"Relying on employers to carry this burden through increases to the minimum wage is ineffective, if not counterproductive, and is a disservice to low-income workers. When we have dramatic increases to the minimum wage, jobs and job security are threatened, benefitting no one."

I'm just putting that out as a warning sign. This isn't new. They submitted this. They've said it time and time again. You can go on their website.

Agriculture is a huge component of my riding. It's the largest industry, certainly, in the southern part of my riding. I've been at many agriculture events over the last month and a half. I have to say that hydro, red tape and minimum wage are the top three things I hear about, and that's good. They're giving their input. They've given it to the government.

They're just saying that they're not getting the support from the government that they could to grow their businesses. We say, "You're right; you're not. We're here, trying to help you tell the government that the changes they're bringing in are actually hurting businesses."

They've left you lots of recommendations. So have we—again, back to the million jobs plan over eight years.

You know what? The province of Ontario is a big province. We can do that, but we have to make a lot of changes. As I said, Bill 165 is a little step. We're not going to fight you in that battle. But there are bigger issues that you need to address.

I mentioned that the third-largest budget item was servicing the debt. That's a big thing. People don't understand that huge mortgage payment that they have to pay.

I believe that yesterday we uncovered—the member from Nipissing, our finance critic, did a great job of basically saying, “Guess what? The Ministry of Finance documents”—we did a freedom-of-information. It took us seven months to get the materials. Guess what? The Premier has not been truthful about balancing this budget in 2017-18. So the—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Just a moment, please.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I think the member will want to withdraw saying that the Premier was not truthful.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'll withdraw that the Premier was not truthful.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Just say, “Withdraw.”

Ms. Laurie Scott: What's that?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask you to just say, “Withdraw.”

Ms. Laurie Scott: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member may continue.

Ms. Laurie Scott: We weren't given the accurate information from the Premier about balancing the budget in 2017-18. That's a pretty important fact to kind of not tell the people of Ontario. We had to uncover that. Seven months, freedom-of-information, the member from Nipissing, our finance critic—we got the information. You are not on track, so you'd better come clean. The people of Ontario are not trusting you. You have given them 10 years of reasons not to trust you. When I said that was the third-largest budget item, it is. It's taxpayers' money paying that mortgage payment in the province of Ontario.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Just the interest.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Just the interest. I take it back; it's just the interest. Increasing the minimum wage, okay—as I said, that is like a little step towards the bigger problem that you have—

Hon. James J. Bradley: But you're voting for it.

Ms. Laurie Scott: You're right. The bigger problem that you have is creating a business climate where jobs are actually produced, where we actually have good-paying manufacturing jobs once again, because we want good-paying, middle-class jobs. You have been scaring the people of the province of Ontario. It's time for you to be telling the correct story about the state of the finances. We said we would support Bill 165—small step. It's time

for the Liberal government to really solve the problems of the province of Ontario.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Before we take questions and comments, I would ask the member to withdraw.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Yes.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I listened intently to the member from Kawartha Lakes–Brock. I certainly agree with her: hydro costs are off the map. There's no doubt about it. But I might give a suggestion to her. She says, “How are we going to solve the problem?” She might want to talk to her corporate buddies that have got \$500 billion locked up in bank accounts that they're not using to stimulate our economy or sink back into business or create jobs with the \$500 billion they have locked up in the banks.

Does she really believe that people will be better off without a minimum raise? I think not. Does she think that lower hydro rates are going to solve the poverty issue? I think not. Does the member think that most businesses are going to voluntarily give big raises to their employees? I'll tell you, for about 30 years I used to have to fight to get 35 cents an hour out of the Steel Company of Canada. The biggest raise we got in 30 years was \$1.05, and they thought they'd died and gone to hell when they had to pay out \$1.05 an hour. So don't tell me that the corporations are going to all of a sudden be generous, help people out and bring this economy—if they take the \$500 billion out of the bank and spread it around, we might be better off.

And then, the million jobs—that's a beauty. Listen, why don't you break that down for me? Am I going to get 20,000 iron workers and welders in Hamilton? Am I going to get 15,000 Bell telephone workers? Where are these million jobs? Cripes, I can't even get 35,000 jobs in Hamilton in the last 20 years. That is absolute insanity. It's a number you picked out of the air. It's a load of baloney. It's not going to happen, and if the people of this province believe it, I'm sorry. A million jobs—you'll be lucky if you create 100,000 jobs.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. However, it is really difficult to follow the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and get myself to that crescendo, especially with my voice. Hats off to him.

This bill is about attaching the CPI to minimum wage. So that's giving people the consumer price index every year to increase their minimum wage. In responding to the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, I just want to remind her that her party opposed minimum wage increases since 1995, and it was \$6.35 an hour. Okay? Remember that. I also want to remind her that her leader has a policy of right to work which has morphed

into “not right now.” He wants to put us in a race to the bottom. Also the white paper on education: 10,000 teachers, good-bye.

We are all concerned about debt here, but I also want to remind the member opposite that in 2009, when the world economic crisis—the great recession—came, governments of all stripes invested in stimulus and invested in people, and we kept those things that we built going. That’s why we did it. Governments of different stripes did it. There are ledger sheets that are outside of this building, outside of this government; there’s 13 million of them, and those are people. Those people need those services, and you don’t see those deficits, because they’re in people’s lives. That’s what we have to remind ourselves of every day.

1730

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Durham.

Mr. John O’Toole: I wonder if I could share my two minutes with the member from Nipissing. I’m only kidding. It’s so quick it disappears on me.

The member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock I think kind of linked the discussion about the importance of jobs and the economy to the issue of what’s an appropriate minimum wage. There’s no disagreement that this bill here is, in regulation, going to set, in accordance with certain classes of workers, the minimum wage through a process attached to the consumer price index. That’s probably not a bad idea.

Here’s the real truth of it all: First of all, there’s so many people without jobs in Ontario; that’s troubling, and I think that’s the point the member was trying to make. In this morning’s debate, the member for Nipissing, our critic on finance issues, said that the state of the economy and the outlook in the economy of Ontario is very desperate and dark.

This opportunity here really costs the Wynne-McGuinty government not five cents. This is downloading that to the employers. What is this? This is important. It’s a small business that’s trying to survive; it could be a husband and wife, or it could be the little 7-Eleven store next to my constituency office. The people there—there might be a high school student, but it’s the father and the mother that run the place. Do you understand? What’s it going to do for the people who are working at what I call low-wage or poor-wage jobs? To me, these people themselves are creating their own jobs. They’re buying a franchise. They’ve got debt. And they’ve downloaded more tax to them.

I think, when you look at the economy of Ontario today—I was cleaning out my desk today, and here’s the headlines from the business paper. It says “Kellogg’s ... Plant ... a Casualty of Changing Tastes.” Here’s another one; this is from the *Globe*. It says, “Audit”—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I want to talk about the highest hydro rates in the country in relation to this. There’s a small business in Niagara Falls that had their hydro rates

go from \$900 to \$1,250. That’s a \$350 increase. What transpired there is that they had to let an employee go. Now, instead of them working eight hours and going home and spending time with their family—they actually let an employee go, so now what happens is that they have to work 16 hours a day just because of hydro rates, instead of having somebody work.

You take a look at, you want to give help to a small business—under our plan, the reduction to small businesses, their tax would go from 4.5% down to 4% as of June 1, 2014. It would then go from 4% down to 3.5%, which is 2015. Then it goes from 3.5% down to 3% in 2016. So that’s giving some help to a small business.

But you have to make sure that the hydro rates are taken care of as well; it’s a package in how you do that. When you take a look at the hydro rates in Niagara, what’s happening is, we’re selling hydro to the Americans, and what they’re doing is, they’re then subsidizing it to a manufacturer who then takes the jobs from the Niagara region. It makes absolutely no sense.

I want to talk in the last 30 seconds about the right-to-work-for-less in the southern states that people were talking about. I challenge anybody here, on both sides, everybody here: Who wants their kids or their grandkids to work for less? Who wants their grandkids or their kids to have less opportunity, less health care? Stand up if that’s what you want, because that’s exactly what happened. There is more poverty when you have the right-to-work-for-less in the States. That’s a fact. They have no pension plans, so think about what happens to your seniors when that happens.

We have to take a serious look at exactly where we want to go in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I thank the members for their comments. I’m not sure of some of them—Hamilton East–Stoney Creek—but we have very different philosophies, so I’ll leave it at that, and very different outcomes to the solutions that we propose, the member from Ottawa South. The member for Durham gave a great example of a small business, and then the member for Niagara Falls actually backed up what the member from Durham said by saying that with the increase in the hydro rates, they won’t be able to hire people, and that’s what is possibly happening. If you put the increase on employers, whether it’s hydro rates, whether it’s minimum wage, whether it’s payroll taxes, etc., at some point they can’t hire anybody else; they have to work the longer hours. So there is a reality check to be done there. This is a burden on employers.

I’ve said, you know, we are going to support this bill. I also was hoping that the parties would support Bill 158, the Million Jobs Act.

Interjections.

Ms. Laurie Scott: They are making fun of it over there, but you know what? We want to create that many jobs in the province of Ontario. We want to focus on good-paying jobs here, middle-class jobs—whatever that

really sometimes means—but you can't dispute the fact that the people earning the minimum wage have gone up from 3.5% to 10%.

We have laid out government wage freezes, reducing taxes on employers to get them to start to rehire again, affordable energy, training more of our young people in the skilled trades, changing the ratios, eliminating the College of Trades, which has been a huge burden on our businesses. Even the hairdressers are up in arms—or their hair is up in knots, if you want to say that, about the College of Trades.

So reducing regulatory burden—those are all job creators, and guess what? When the Progressive Conservative government was in power the last time, we created a million jobs in our term by doing these things. So you've lost a million; we created a million.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It's a great pleasure for me to rise in this House today as MPP for London West to speak in support of Bill 165, the Fair Minimum Wage Act. I want to begin by saying that I welcome this debate, and I welcome having it here in this assembly. I welcome the opportunity to exchange ideas and consider options for the appropriate policy responses to the ongoing challenge of minimum wage, which is a challenge that has confronted successive governments for years.

I call it a challenge because whether you look at it as a social policy or an economic policy, government's approach to setting and increasing the minimum wage has far-reaching implications.

As a social policy, minimum wage rates are an important tool in a comprehensive poverty reduction plan and can help lift the lowest-waged workers in Ontario's economy out of poverty, the majority of whom, 60%, are women. We also know that racialized workers and recent immigrants are overrepresented among minimum wage workers. Racialized workers made up 13.2% of minimum wage earners, compared to only 9% of earners who make above minimum wage salaries. About one in five recent immigrants is working at minimum wage, which is more than twice that of all employees.

Increasing the minimum wage could assist in addressing these inequalities. It could help close some of the wage gaps between women and men, between recent immigrants and other Ontarians, between racialized workers and non-racialized workers.

But there are limitations on what minimum wage can do. It's just one of the issues that must be tackled to really reduce poverty in this province, and I will talk more about those other issues later in my remarks.

As an economic strategy, raising the minimum wage can increase consumer spending power and generate a boost to the economy, since any increases in disposable income for low-wage workers tend to be pumped right back into the economy. But the economic benefit of minimum wage increases can be mitigated somewhat by the impact on small businesses, which have much less flexibility than big corporations to deal with increased payroll costs.

My remarks will focus on these two aspects of the Fair Minimum Wage Act; that is, its usefulness as a poverty reduction strategy and how it can be improved as an economic policy tool.

Prior to this bill, there was no mechanism in the province to establish where the minimum wage should be set. There was no independent body of experts making recommendations about what the minimum wage should be. Instead, governments from all three political parties used an ad hoc approach to minimum wage policy, freezing wages, for sometimes years on end, and increasing wages when the political climate was conducive to implementing an increase.

1740

The minimum wage, as we know, went into a deep-freeze during the Harris years and remained locked—frozen—for nine years. In constant dollars, this meant that the minimum wage was only slightly higher in 2003 when the Liberals took office than it had been in 1990 when the NDP was in government. This nine-year freeze created a huge deficit to be overcome in the relative incomes of minimum wage earners, and I acknowledge the actions that were taken by the Liberals to implement a series of one-off increases to the minimum wage that took it to \$10.25 an hour by 2010. However, after four years of inaction, I do not believe that the current Liberal plan goes far enough.

As I mentioned, ad hoc approaches to minimum wage policy allow governments to act when they sense it is politically convenient to do so, which is why in the middle of a by-election, now with the possibility of a spring election in the air, and considerable pressure from labour and civil society groups to take action, we are now seeing a 75-cent increase to the minimum wage after four years at \$10.25. Over those four years, inflation has reduced the real purchasing power of that \$10.25 by 6.5%.

What happened over the last decade with the global financial meltdown and the loss of good manufacturing jobs, particularly in my community in southwestern Ontario, is that the proportion of minimum wage workers increased relative to the overall labour force, doubling from 4.3% in 2003 to 9% in 2011. That's almost one in every 10 employees who is working for a minimum wage job. This is bad news for the economy, since household spending drives 54% of gross domestic product. That's why my party, the New Democratic Party, identified an \$11 minimum wage as part of our platform during the last election, which as everyone recalls was in 2011. It's because we know that if people who have the fewest financial resources spend all the money they have and more—increase their take-home pay, they spend more money; everything extra that comes in goes right back into the economy. Three years after we made this proposal, the Liberals have now stepped forward to echo our recommendation and are moving forward with an \$11 minimum wage.

The problem is that when constant dollars are compared, an \$11 minimum wage in 2011 does not represent

the same purchasing power as an \$11 minimum wage in 2014. New Democrats have proposed to go further and increase the minimum wage to \$12 by 2016 before it is indexed to inflation.

What Bill 165 does is set out a mechanism and a specific time frame for adjustments to the minimum wage. The bill stipulates that each October 1, the minimum wage will increase in accordance with the consumer price index, or CPI. This ensures predictability, with employers given four months' notice in advance of the exact amount of the wage increase. It allows employers to plan, grow and invest with confidence. It ensures transparency because it is based on a process that is open and depoliticized.

New Democrats agree that predictability and transparency are important, and support the provisions of the bill to index the minimum wage to the CPI. What we do not agree with is setting \$11 as the baseline before indexing begins because what that effectively does is institutionalize minimum wage incomes always far below the poverty line. Our plan calls for an increase to \$11 an hour this June, followed by a further 50-cent-per-hour increase to \$11.50 in June 2015 and another 50-cent increase to \$12 in June 2016. Once the minimum wage reaches \$12, that is when the annual cost of living increase will begin.

At the same time, we want to ensure that small businesses are not negatively impacted by the increase to their staffing and payroll costs, and have proposed a reduction in the small business tax rate alongside the increases in minimum wage. This will provide a cushion to help small businesses deal with the increased minimum wage and ensure that the small business sector stays strong and can grow.

Our plan calls for a reduction in the small business tax rate from 4.5% to 4% in June 2014, a reduction to 3.5% in June 2015 and a further reduction to 3% in June 2016. This kind of tax policy is in line with similar reductions being made in other Canadian provinces, for example, Manitoba and British Columbia—to ensure that the small business sector remains strong. For example, Manitoba, under an NDP government, has gone even further and reduced the small business tax rate to zero.

I want to be clear that the plan under the leadership of Andrea Horwath and the NDP caucus acknowledges that increasing the minimum wage and reducing the small business tax rate are both good policies from a social, as well as an economic, perspective. Linking these measures is a practical and responsible approach to begin to lift families out of poverty while also ensuring that small businesses can grow and prosper or, as my colleagues from Niagara Falls pointed out, at least pay their hydro bills without having to lay off staff.

I know that some people would have liked to see a higher increase than \$12 because people are being squeezed like never before. Not only do the bills keep coming in, but they're getting bigger and bigger and bigger. We've all heard about the hydro increases and just the challenges of meeting the costs of daily life.

In closing, as my time runs out, I want to conclude by saying my New Democratic colleagues and I support this bill, we want to see it moved forward to committee, but we believe it falls far short of what needs to be done to raise low-income—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Comments and questions?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm delighted to be able to comment on this. I'm really pleased to hear that both opposition parties are actually going to vote for this piece of legislation. I know they will be anxious to see it get to committee at the earliest opportunity so representations can be made by the public and by all who are interested, and that amendments, if necessary, can be presented at that time.

What we don't want to see is what we've seen with so many other pieces of legislation, where there's an interminable debate in this House just for the purpose of holding up legislation so that the Legislature doesn't appear to be working. Because we all agree on this particular piece of legislation in principle, it should move quickly.

I was interested in the member's interpretation of history on this particular piece of legislation. I want to say that the government, a number of months ago—in fact, even before that—was looking at a mechanism to look at the future of minimum wage in the province. That's why a panel was established to give us advice and that consultation would take place. What was mystifying to me was that the New Democratic Party, which, for years, had championed—I'm sure the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek has always been one of those who had championed—an increase in the minimum wage, took so long. They asked the leader about it, and she was bobbing and weaving. I thought it was a dodge ball game going on as she bobbed and weaved on it. But I knew that many members of the NDP caucus, whom I know personally, were very much in favour of moving forward on this.

There may be some variances in simply how far the bill goes and so on, the mechanism, but I am pleased to see—and it's an odd situation where all three parties are in favour of this legislation. I know I'd love to see it go to committee this week, if it could, but probably more realistically next week, and then passed, and I'll be happy to applaud—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I want to agree with the member from London West, who said that people are being squeezed. As one of the newest members here, I've been learning my way around and listening to everybody's comments. I think that everybody's kind of skirting around, but certainly what the NDP and PC caucus agree on is that raising the minimum wage is just one small part of making quality of life better for the citizens of Ontario, but done in a climate where we have enormous debt—we're making California look fiscally responsible now—done in that climate, it's not very responsible of us. It's

almost like a teenager asking their father for an increase in allowance when the father has just been laid off from his job. It's just one small part of the puzzle. Yes, we do want to get more money in people's pockets, but with soaring energy costs, I don't see how just raising the minimum wage is going to be enough. We all know it's not enough.

1750

Of course, I support raising the minimum wage, as does the rest of the PC caucus, but it falls far, far short, as the member from London West said as well. We've got to turn this ship around. We've got to maybe take some lessons from California. Maybe we have to send some of the Liberal members to a sunny clime—how would you like that?—and learn how California has turned things around.

What I'm concerned with is that we're seeing a roller coaster where we have a tax-and-spend Liberal government in place for a number of terms, and then in the province people get nervous, and I believe they will vote in a PC government. We'll right the ship. We'll make sure the Titanic isn't hitting the iceberg, and the thanks we're going to get once we bring the debt down is we'll see another Liberal—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments.

Mr. Paul Miller: It's been quite a day in the Legislature. When I look back at history and all the fights we used to have in the steel industry to get 35 cents an hour—I believe in 1981 I had to go out for five months for 25 cents. And then in 1990, we got the biggest raise in the history of Stelco, \$1.10 an hour, and that took us three months of being on strike to get that.

I hear what the member is saying about California. You don't have to go to the States. All she has to do is go to Manitoba—an NDP government, by the way—five balanced budgets, the lowest tax rate for small businesses and one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. Five balanced budgets—NDP. I'm just saying, we don't have to leave our country to be fiscally responsible. We don't have to go to the States. Half the States are broke. Detroit can't even operate. Detroit city closed down. They can't even pay their bills. I don't want any lessons from the States. In fact, through the big recession and through the last economic challenges we had, actually, Canada came out of it one of the best in the world. So I think that we could take lessons locally, not going across the border.

It amazes me when the Tory party can sit there and say, "Well, I, too, would like to see hydro rates lowered." But I say to them: You've got corporations, \$500 billion in this country tied up in banks. If they loosened their strings a little bit, spent a little money, invested in employees, invested in our economy and invested in our local economy, there would be a lot more jobs and you wouldn't have to worry about going after them on minimum wage.

The bottom line is: There is hope. You've got to play the cards right, and if you're smart, you'll listen to the NDP.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The Minister of Labour.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for acknowledging me. I've been listening to the debate quite intently. First of all, I want to say that I'm heartened to hear that both opposition parties will be supporting the Fair Minimum Wage Act. I thank them for their support, because this bill is an important bill. This bill is a historic bill. It's historic in the sense that for the very first time in the province of Ontario, we are going to remove politics out of how minimum wage is determined.

I think we've been hearing stories about how minimum wage has been treated in this province for eight years when the Conservatives were in government under Mike Harris and the Leader of the Opposition. The minimum wage was frozen at \$6.85. It was our government that has raised minimum wage from \$6.85 to \$10.25 and now to \$11 an hour. But this is people's livelihood, those who live and work on minimum wage, and fairness requires that we should not allow politics in that whole process—and also predictability, because businesses have told us again and again that they want predictability. They want to know in advance what the minimum wage is going to be. What we have put forward in this bill, the Fair Minimum Wage Act, is a process by which every year, minimum wage will be determined based on Ontario's consumer price index. A six-month notice will be given so that everybody has the benefit of knowing what the minimum wage is.

We have done so by extensive consultation by an advisory panel that was made up of business, labour, youth and poverty reduction groups. They have all agreed—a consensus report—that this is the right direction to take. I'm really proud that this government has put forward a bill putting in place their recommendations by legislation, and I hope we can pass this as soon as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from London West has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank the Minister of the Environment, the member for Thornhill, the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and the Minister of Labour for their comments on my remarks.

I wanted to speak to the issues that were raised by the member for Thornhill and the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek about the fact that so much more needs to be done. Earlier, I had wanted to read into the record an email I received from my constituent. I think that it's really helpful in understanding what the challenges are for people working in low-wage jobs:

"I'm a father of two young boys currently living on my wife's minimum wage job. Our rent is \$830 plus hydro. This week, a plant is opening here in London, Canadian Solar, and I'm one of the few that got the opportunity to get hired. The downfall from all of this is, I can't seem to be able to afford reliable child care for my two kids. The London child care fee subsidy department just told me that they do not have funds for new applicants, and the waiting list for new applicants is estimated

to be two years. A private daycare is charging me \$60 a child per day; that is \$120 a day for both. That's \$600 a week. My starting wage would be \$14 an hour for eight-hour shifts, which equals \$112 a day and \$560 a week before taxes. Do you see how unaffordable daycare is for an average parent? I would be in the negative over \$100 a week if I started to work."

So, clearly, minimum wage is important. The mechanism to offer predictability for employers is important, but so much more needs to be done to address access to child care, to address affordable housing, to have jobs available for all of the people who are unemployed and unable to get that first entry into the labour market.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Leeds–Grenville has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Minister of Agriculture. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or the parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

The member from Leeds–Grenville, you have the floor.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm actually pleased that the parliamentary assistant to the Premier in her capacity as agriculture and food minister is here: Mr. Crack, the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. Unfortunately, the Premier has shown during the past week that she is not as strong a voice for farmers and agriculture as people thought that she was. The decision that has been made to close the Alfred and Kemptville campuses is nothing less, I believe, than an attack on our rural way of life.

People who are watching at home need to understand the severity of this decision. You can't blame it on the University of Guelph, because we all know that, as a government with multiple ministries that are involved with these two colleges, they could have made a different decision. I hope that I get an answer from the parliamentary assistant this afternoon.

One of the things that I think, in government, we have a duty to do, whether you are in opposition or in government, is to ensure that important programs are offered in your ridings. The two that we keep mentioning over and over again in the House are health and education. Those are two that come up in debate many times. That's why this is a decision that has caused me so much grief over the last week. What we're doing is, we're taking two significant colleges in eastern Ontario that are providing post-secondary opportunities for young farmers and the agri-food industry, and we're taking it away.

1800

I've heard the Premier, I've heard the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities and I've heard the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell talk a lot about working with them. Let me tell you: I've come to the table and I've told you that I'm prepared to work. But I've said over and over again that I think the first thing we need is a two-year moratorium on this decision. It's the only credible starting point. As I wrote in my letter to the Premier on Friday, this government has established a pattern. I suggest that the previous Minister of Agriculture and Food did the same two-year moratorium when he dealt with the New Liskeard Agricultural Research Station. That gave the opportunity for the local community to get together, work on a local solution, and I understand that report is being tabled to the government sometime this summer. All I'm asking is that we give the same opportunity to those community members in Alfred and Kemptville. They need the same chance that was given to those folks in New Liskeard.

I'm going to be debating the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, so I want to make a couple of comments about local partners—everybody keeps talking about local partners. We have so many people in eastern Ontario who have come forward—the 400 people who came on Saturday to the meeting. We've had so many resolutions of support. The United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry passed a resolution supporting the two-year moratorium, calling on the Premier to reverse the decision. Last night, the municipality of North Grenville said that they supported my request for Premier Wynne to come to Kemptville, and supported the two-year moratorium. I understand the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville county council are debating it on Thursday. The Pembroke Observer today said that the SD&G recommendation was passed by Renfrew county's admin committee; they supported the two-year moratorium. Again, there's no doubt in my mind that if we give the local communities time, they can accomplish good things.

Now, I did mention I was pleased with the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, and I hope that during his five minutes he'll respond to some of the questions. I want to make sure that I quote from the Ottawa Citizen story on Monday, where the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell supported my call for a two-year moratorium. Here's what MPP Crack said that was quoted in that story: "It's our government that set the precedent here," Crack said. "I'm sure it (a moratorium) will be something the minister will look at. I'm certainly in favour of that as an option." I guess I'm asking: Do you still stand by those comments? Do you still support what you said in the media?

My second question specifically is on Alfred college. You've claimed you've negotiated with partners, La Cité and Collège Boréal, to save the college. I know that Guelph has already started sending those applicants letters to say, "Pick another university; pick another college." I'm guess what I'm asking is: Are those same

programs that were offered at Alfred again going to be offered there under this new management? Please enlighten us. I'd like to hear your comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The parliamentary assistant has up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Grant Crack: I guess I'd first like to start off by thanking the member from Leeds–Grenville for his advocacy on what is a very, very important issue in rural eastern Ontario.

I would like to just point out that the meeting in Kemptville on Saturday, that I was fortunate enough to attend—there was a real spirit of co-operation that came out of that meeting. I think the member from Leeds–Grenville would agree with me that everyone in that room understood that it was a University of Guelph decision to announce the closure of these two educational and research facilities in eastern Ontario. We know that the University of Guelph is an autonomous body. They make decisions. They're mandated to find efficiencies in their educational programs and the programs that they deliver. I can understand, as did everyone at that meeting—and most people would understand—that from a financial perspective, it was very difficult for the University of Guelph to maintain that commitment to move forward and continue these programs. They're looking at consolidating and, yes, taking programs and research from collège d'Alfred and Kemptville to southwestern Ontario.

Madam Speaker, when I did find out about this, about a week before the actual announcement—I can tell you that the actual announcement would have been quite different than what was made on the Wednesday during the March break. Fortunately, because of an existing partnership between Collège Boréal in Sudbury and collège d'Alfred, we were able to move quite quickly in bringing people together and stakeholders together in order to have an agreement in principle that programming, and perhaps research as well, at collège d'Alfred will continue in the future. We have struck a working group. Those talks are going on as we speak.

The issue with Kemptville is that there has not been, to my knowledge, a willing partner come to the table quickly. We all know that the University of Guelph has removed its commitment.

This was actually quite good news to some of the speakers in Kemptville on Saturday, Madam Speaker, because they realized that back in 1996-97, with the actual agreement to move agricultural educational programs and research from OMAFRA to the University of Guelph, that was not the best move. We know that was done by a Conservative government. I'm not here to judge that. I think the agricultural industry knows that that was not the right way to move forward.

Here we are, as a government, Madam Speaker. We're left holding the bag, so to speak, if I could use those words. We have worked very, very hard over the last couple of weeks, and I want to commend the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for the work that he has done in bringing together stakeholders from many

different areas to ensure that campus d'Alfred continues to provide the programming for our francophone students. That's critical, and we're doing the same for Kemptville.

Is a moratorium the right way to go? I can't make that decision. That's something that, when I was asked by the Citizen, which the member from Leeds–Grenville referred to, I said I'm willing and I'm sure the government is willing to look at that as an option. Those were my words; however they're written is out of my control.

It's great to hear also that the member from Leeds–Grenville gives accolades to the previous Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Minister McMeekin, who did provide for a moratorium in order for the community to get together.

This government is committed to moving forward. We respect agriculture across this province. We respect agriculture research and education in this province and in eastern Ontario, in both official languages, at two institutions.

I look forward to working on behalf of my constituents in Glengarry–Prescott–Russell and across eastern Ontario, across this province, in order to ensure that we provide top-quality education and research.

I'll do my utmost, Madam Speaker, as I said, in Kemptville. Everyone has my commitment that I will do my best to find a solution as we move forward.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Perth–Wellington has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given yesterday by the Minister of Agriculture. The member has up to five minutes in which to debate the matter, and the parliamentary assistant has up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Yesterday, I had a question for the Premier and Minister of Agriculture and Food. Her answer was not satisfactory to me and was not satisfactory to horse breeders or others in the industry.

I will read my question into the record: "Why should it take a lawsuit to force you and the NDP to pay attention?"

In the supplementary, I discussed our call for an immediate and permanent end to the government's so-called modernization plan that would build 29 new casinos while putting even more of the horse racing industry out of business. I stated that we would also establish a workable, transparent and affordable Slots at Racetracks Program. I asked the Premier, "Why won't you?"

1810

In her response, the Premier claimed that her record on horse racing is "very, very successful." Her claim is laughable, especially since she herself has already admitted that her government's decision to end the Slots at Racetracks Program was a mistake.

But the Premier's response also raises an important question: If her record on horse racing is so successful, why is the province now facing a potential lawsuit?

I have been speaking with leaders in the industry, who tell me that the Premier's spin is completely out of touch with reality. Just this morning, I spoke to a representative of the Standardbred Breeders of Ontario Association who is extremely concerned about what the Premier said. She tells me that she has watched countless question periods and feels that it's always the same rhetoric being spewed. As she points out, the Premier's typical response always focuses on racetracks. She needs to know, however, that the industry is more than just a racetrack.

The breeding industry is incredibly important because it provides the horse supply. Many breeders feel ignored by this government. Given what the Liberals have put them through, it's no wonder. That is why we're here tonight.

I asked the Premier why it took a lawsuit for her and the NDP to focus on this issue. Because of her mismanagement of this file, we can now expect staggering legal costs to defend the OLG and the province.

This didn't have to happen. I understand that the standardbred breeders sent this government a tolling agreement so that the discussion could take place and, hopefully, result in a resolution without the risk of losing their legal rights as the March 12 litigation deadline was quickly approaching. I'm told that the government refused to sign this tolling agreement. Standardbred breeders have been asking for a discussion on compensation for the last two years for the real losses they have sustained due to the government's cancellation of SARP. The breeders want to work with the government to establish a plan to rebuild the breeding sector, but obviously the government didn't want to work with them.

Breeders have specifically stated they did not want to litigate. However, the government ignored their requests and left them no choice. They now feel that they have no other way to preserve their rights. The government still has every opportunity to go back to the negotiating table and resolve this with the horse breeders.

Why did they refuse a tolling agreement when they had the chance? When will they and their partners, the NDP, ever take responsibility for the chaos they have created in this industry? We need to hear some credible answers without excuses and without delay.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The parliamentary assistant has up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Grant Crack: I'd like to thank the member from—help me.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Perth–Wellington.

Mr. Grant Crack: Perth–Wellington; I should have known that based on the fact that they had a wonderful plowing match there last year. I'd like to thank him for his advocacy on this.

I'd like to start off by just mentioning that he did make reference to an issue that was before the courts, so it would be inappropriate for me as a member of the government to speak to that at this particular point.

But I'd just like to bring to his attention and remind everyone that, in the past, there has been over \$440 million going into the horse racing industry. We as a

government realized the importance of making sure every dollar that's being spent can be accounted for in a very transparent manner, so we made some decisions a year and a half ago concerning how we were going to move forward with the SARP, the Slots at Racetracks Program. We made notification that that particular program, as it exists, would be terminated.

What we did as a government is, we created the Horse Racing Industry Transition Panel. We appointed three very respectful former members of this House: John Snobelen, Elmer Buchanan and John Wilkinson. They reached out to all the stakeholders in the horse racing industry, and I think that that they came back with some very strong recommendations to the government on how we could move forward in a very accountable and a very transparent way.

I can tell you that the Premier, in the last year, has taken very, very strong action in order to give the industry that long-term stability that is so required when public funds are involved. What we've done is we're working towards stabilizing the industry, and we have a comprehensive plan that builds on a solid foundation and a new partnership with the industry.

What we're going to do is we're going to use that plan and we're going to try to encourage the industry to grow its revenues, grow its future, by enhancing its fan base and growing wagering revenues.

We committed to \$400 million over the next five years—that's \$80 million a year—to stabilize the industry. The partnership that we're going to continue with the horse racing industry will support an economically sound and commercially viable model of world-class standardbred, thoroughbred and quarter-horse racing.

The Slots at Racetracks Program focused on the horse racing industry—not on the horse racing industry, but on the slot machines as well. It's clear that in order to move forward, we have to have more of the focus on the actual horse racing industry.

Our partnership plan reintegrates racing with the Ontario gaming strategy by providing new opportunities for the racing industry. We're also working to integrate horse racing into the Ontario lottery and gaming commission's modernization plan.

To support the horse racing industry, the OLG will share its business, marketing and responsible gaming expertise. We're going to work with the industry to market the horse racing industry and enhance the on-track experience. We're going to research potential new horse-themed lottery products to promote the integration of gaming and horse racing, and generate additional revenue. We're going to optimize the use of racetrack infrastructure as multi-gaming sites.

Madam Speaker, we are committed to this industry. It has been a difficult year and a half or two years, but it's the right way forward.

The opposition will continue to advocate for a return to that same old program. That's not going to happen. That was not transparent; that was not accountable. As a government, the onus is on us to make sure that as we

move forward, all our partners are transparent and responsible.

To conclude, I would just like to say that there have been a number of agreements reached with tracks across the province, and we will continue to work. I look forward to very shortly seeing something that comes to fruition, which would be an agreement with the Rideau Carleton Raceway in the very near future, as many stakeholders from eastern Ontario and in my riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell thoroughly enjoy the Rideau Carleton Raceway.

AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Leeds–Grenville has indicated his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. You have up to five minutes

Mr. Steve Clark: I have to tell you right from the start, Minister, that I'm disappointed that we're both here today.

This morning in question period, you told me the following: "We'll work hard with that member opposite. We'll work hard with the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell to see if a local partner can be identified that can continue those courses...."

For the people watching at home, I want them to know that it's usually the parliamentary assistant who is here for a late show. In fact, I know that the minister and his parliamentary assistant had some scheduling issues today. So I actually suggested to the minister that we cancel the late show and that he could co-chair a meeting in my riding with those local partners that have come through on Saturday, that the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell knows that have come forward. I didn't want to have this debate. I was hoping that we could perhaps have a meeting in my riding where we could get down to business.

I want to appeal to the minister on just how damaging this situation is in terms of post-secondary education, because today, for the first time—it was a sad day in my office—we got a copy of a letter that's going out to students who applied to Kemptville for next September. It tells them that the associate diploma program in agriculture will no longer be offered in Kemptville and that they will have to reapply to Ridgetown.

1820

There's a recognition in the letter of what this means to prospective students, Minister, when the letter states, "We apologize and understand that this change could have a significant impact on your plans for a post-secondary education." What an understatement, that the registrar would send that to a student.

Most of the students that I've heard from—I know that a hundred have already sent letters to the Premier supporting a two-year moratorium on the closure of both Alfred and Kemptville. For many students, this is their only opportunity for post-secondary education. This

decision that you've made—now distance becomes an obstacle and you're going to steal the opportunity for post-secondary education, I'd suggest, from a generation of agriculture students in eastern Ontario. As minister, by allowing the University of Guelph to walk away from its commitment to these campuses, I think that you're marginalizing agriculture in the province of Ontario, and I'm ashamed of it.

I mentioned this morning some of the things that we know already we're going to lose. I'm upset that the organic dairy education program, I'm told, will be leaving Alfred. I'm upset that three years ago we were celebrating a state-of-the-art robotic milking operation in Kemptville that the community fundraised to have. I understand from the university that the plans are to remove that program out of Kemptville. I am upset that we have so many skilled trades positions, so many men and women who have signed on for programs in Kemptville in the skilled trades, some of them to use the trade on the family farm. Those programs are not being transferred to Guelph or Ridgetown; they're disappearing. To say that this realignment of priorities by Guelph is going to fit with agricultural priorities in eastern Ontario—I don't buy that for a minute. We still need that research in eastern Ontario. We still need that post-secondary education.

The francophone community in the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell's riding is saying that they want to ensure that that takes place as well, not a dismantled program where significant pieces like the organic dairy program are moved somewhere else. I think that there are a number of programs that no one is picking up in both communities. I'm concerned about that. I don't know why there is resistance to actually working across party lines and doing that, like you did in New Liskeard with a New Democrat MPP and the then Minister of Agriculture, Mr. McMeekin.

What infuriates me the most is a fact I found out today—and you should be ashamed, Minister—that there were more students applying to attend the Kemptville campus than there were who applied to the Ridgetown campus. I can't believe—and I know my disbelief is shared by all of my colleagues in eastern Ontario—that we have more students who have come forward to register in Kemptville than we did in Ridgetown. Why are we having this debate? Why can't we have a two-year moratorium and deal with this issue?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister has up to five minutes to respond.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to thank the member for ensuring that we had some more time to spend together in this place this evening. I was somewhere else; I came back for this, and now I'll have to go out again. But I'm here myself, and my parliamentary assistant would have ably been able to be here as well. I thought that this was an important issue. It's an issue that I really do want to be here to respond to my friend's questions on. Frankly, there was a lot that he said, and I think my colleague the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell has said some of the very same things—not all; there were some things

that he said that probably aren't in keeping with our views, but for the most part, I think it's important that we understand and recognize the impact, in his local community and in the local community in eastern Ontario, of the decision that the University of Guelph has made.

I think at the same time it's important that we acknowledge that it is a decision for the University of Guelph to make. To suggest that I should somehow dictate to the University of Guelph as minister and say, "You're an autonomous organization but we're going to make you provide a program in a particular area because we think it's important that the community have that program there," is just not the way that we ought to be working with our post-secondary institutions. They have challenging roles as well. The University of Guelph has the autonomy to make these decisions. They made the decision for whatever reasons they did. There was an indication the program really wasn't working that well there at this point in time, as it was currently designed.

The same situation was the case in Alfred, which is in the riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. The member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, when he found out about this about a week ago, sprang into action and said, "Look, we've got to find a way to keep these programs going." So we've contacted local partners, and we are fortunate in that case that Collège Boréal had already been a partner at the Alfred campus, so they were familiar with it. They and La Cité stepped up and have signed an agreement in principle with the University of Guelph to keep those courses going, and indeed, Madam Speaker, those courses will continue.

I'm optimistic because I think the attention that these two institutions can bring to these issues and the passion they bring for providing francophone programs for francophone students is something that will lend itself to potentially even seeing some enhancement of opportunities at that particular campus. But there's still work to do to ensure that we get to that stage, and that due diligence now is being done by the institutions involved.

Madam Speaker, with regard to the Kemptville campus, it is a little more challenging. The fact is, there is not the obvious partner to step up like there was in Alfred. But that doesn't stop us from continuing to do work with—

Interjection.

Hon. Brad Duguid: The member is heckling, and she has no idea what I'm about to say. I've hardly said anything confrontational. This is an important issue to us—

Interjection.

Hon. Brad Duguid: To be frank, the member can keep on heckling all she wants. It's obvious that the member wants to politicize this. Madam Speaker, what we want to do is find solutions. The best way to do that is to work with the local members. I take the member for Leeds–Grenville at his word. I think we can work together on this. I think he will work well with the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

I have, and the member has, and I'm sure the member from Leeds–Grenville has as well, already begun reaching out to institutions to see what other institutions may have an interest in this area. One of the things the member and I had spoken about, I guess it was over the weekend, is that it's a community that's a vibrant community, that stands up when called upon and pulls together when called upon and challenged. I'm confident that they will try to do this in this case.

Certainly we as a government and the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell will do all that we can to assist and work with the local community. We'd love to see a day where the Kemptville campus remains open. We're pleased that the Alfred campus will, and we'll work together with the member to do our very best in the Kemptville situation.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1829.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
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Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	
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Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiles et de l'Immigration
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
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	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
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Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
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	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Attorney General / Procureur général
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
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
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	
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
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McDonnell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
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
Milligan, Rob E. (PC)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
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

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Oraziotti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
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
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	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Taras Natyshak
Laura Albanese, Steve Clark
Mike Colle, Joe Dickson
Rob Leone, Amrit Mangat
Taras Natyshak, Jerry J. Ouellette
Michael Prue
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Kevin Daniel Flynn
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Soo Wong
Steven Del Duca, Victor Fedeli
Catherine Fife, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Douglas C. Holyday, Mitzie Hunter
Monte McNaughton, Michael Prue
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Président: Grant Crack
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Donna H. Cansfield
Sarah Campbell, Donna H. Cansfield
Grant Crack, Dipika Damerla
John Fraser, Michael Harris
Peggy Sattler, Laurie Scott
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Rick Bartolucci
Laura Albanese, Rick Bartolucci
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Percy Hatfield
Mitzie Hunter, Jim McDonell
Randy Pettapiece, Monique Taylor
Lisa M. Thompson
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Phil McNeely
Teresa J. Armstrong, Steven Del Duca
Bob Delaney, Frank Klees
Jack MacLaren, Phil McNeely
Rob E. Milligan, Shafiq Qaadri
Jonah Schein
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tamara Pomanski

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

Chair / Président: Garfield Dunlop
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Bas Balkissoon, Grant Crack
Vic Dhillon, Garfield Dunlop
Cindy Forster, Lisa MacLeod
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Todd Smith
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Norm Miller
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Toby Barrett
Toby Barrett, Lorenzo Berardinetti
France Gélinas, Helena Jaczek
Bill Mauro, Phil McNeely
Norm Miller, John O'Toole
Jagmeet Singh
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Vanthof
Donna H. Cansfield, Dipika Damerla
John Fraser, Monte Kwinter
Jane McKenna, Rick Nicholls
Peter Tabuns, John Vanthof
Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Ted Chudleigh
Bas Balkissoon, Ted Chudleigh
Mike Colle, Vic Dhillon
Cheri DiNovo, Ernie Hardeman
Rod Jackson, Helena Jaczek
Paul Miller
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

Select Committee on Developmental Services / Comité spécial des services aux personnes ayant une déficience intellectuelle

Chair / Présidente: Laura Albanese
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

Continued from back cover

**INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS /
PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS**

Mr. Jagmeet Singh5875

**MEMBERS' STATEMENTS /
DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS**

Wind turbines

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson5875

Small business

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong5875

Pope John Paul II Day

Ms. Dipika Damerla5875

Canadian Women's Amateur Championship

Mr. Ernie Hardeman5876

Events in Hamilton Mountain

Miss Monique Taylor5876

Kidney Health Month

Mrs. Amrit Mangat5876

Infrastructure program funding

Mr. Victor Fedeli5876

Paralympic sledge hockey team

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn5877

Agricultural colleges

Mr. Jim McDonell5877

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Ontario Drug Benefit Program

Mr. Ernie Hardeman5877

Minimum wage

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn5878

Charitable gaming

Mr. Todd Smith5878

Ranked balloting

Ms. Mitzie Hunter5878

Agricultural colleges

Mr. Jim McDonell5878

Minimum wage

Mr. Bill Mauro5878

Hydro rates

Mr. Victor Fedeli5879

Agricultural colleges

Mr. Todd Smith5879

Environmental protection

Mr. Ernie Hardeman5879

Renewable energy

Mr. John O'Toole5879

Wind turbines

Ms. Laurie Scott5880

Ontario College of Trades

Mr. Jim McDonell5880

Lyme disease

Mr. Rick Nicholls5880

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

**Fair Minimum Wage Act, 2014, Bill 165, Mr. Naqvi /
Loi de 2014 pour un salaire minimum équitable,
projet de loi 165, M. Naqvi**

Hon. Teresa Piruzza5881

Mr. Bill Mauro5882

Mr. Jim McDonell5884

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong5884

Mr. Vic Dhillon5884

Mrs. Gila Martow5885

Hon. Teresa Piruzza5885

Mr. Jim McDonell5885

Mr. Wayne Gates5888

Mr. John Fraser5888

Mr. Todd Smith5889

Mr. Paul Miller5889

Mr. Jim McDonell5890

Mr. Paul Miller5890

Hon. James J. Bradley5893

Mr. Rick Nicholls5894

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong5894

Hon. David Zimmer5894

Mr. Paul Miller5894

Ms. Laurie Scott5895

Mr. Paul Miller5898

Mr. John Fraser5898

Mr. John O'Toole5899

Mr. Wayne Gates5899

Ms. Laurie Scott5899

Ms. Peggy Sattler5900

Hon. James J. Bradley5901

Mrs. Gila Martow5901

Mr. Paul Miller5902

Hon. Yasir Naqvi5902

Ms. Peggy Sattler5902

Second reading debate deemed adjourned5903

**ADJOURNMENT DEBATE / DÉBAT SUR
LA MOTION D'AJOURNEMENT**

Agricultural colleges

Mr. Steve Clark5903

Mr. Grant Crack5904

Horse racing industry

Mr. Randy Pettapiece 5904

Mr. Grant Crack..... 5905

Agricultural colleges

Mr. Steve Clark..... 5906

Hon. Brad Duguid..... 5906

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Tuesday 18 March 2014 / Mardi 18 mars 2014

Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families), 2014, Bill 21, Mr. Naqvi / Loi de 2014 modifiant la Loi sur les normes d'emploi (congés pour aider les familles), projet de loi 21, M. Naqvi

Ms. Catherine Fife.....	5853
Mr. Mike Colle.....	5855
Mr. John O'Toole.....	5856
Ms. Cindy Forster	5856
Hon. Tracy MacCharles	5857
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	5857
Mr. Victor Fedeli.....	5857
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	5860
Hon. Yasir Naqvi	5860
Mr. John O'Toole.....	5861
Mr. Wayne Gates	5861
Mr. Victor Fedeli.....	5861
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	5862
Third reading debate deemed adjourned	5863

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman	5863
Mr. Peter Tabuns.....	5863
Hon. Yasir Naqvi	5863
L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur	5863
Hon. Deborah Matthews	5863
Mr. Wayne Gates	5863
Hon. Yasir Naqvi	5863
Mr. John Vanthof.....	5864
Mr. Rosario Marchese.....	5864
The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac).....	5864

Legislative pages

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac).....	5864
------------------------------------	------

Visitors

Hon. Charles Sousa.....	5864
-------------------------	------

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

Executive compensation

Ms. Lisa MacLeod	5864
Hon. Bob Chiarelli	5864

Skilled trades

Mr. Garfield Dunlop	5865
Hon. Brad Duguid.....	5866

Government policies

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	5866
Hon. Deborah Matthews	5866

Job creation

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	5867
Hon. Deborah Matthews	5867
Hon. Eric Hoskins	5867

Fiscal accountability

Mr. Victor Fedeli.....	5868
Hon. Charles Sousa	5868

Hydro rates

Mr. Peter Tabuns	5869
Hon. Bob Chiarelli	5869

Home care

Mr. Steven Del Duca.....	5869
Hon. Deborah Matthews	5869

Pan Am Games

Mr. Rod Jackson.....	5870
Hon. Michael Chan	5870

Public transit

Mr. Rosario Marchese	5870
Hon. Glen R. Murray.....	5870

Ontario Securities Commission

Ms. Mitzie Hunter	5871
Hon. Charles Sousa	5871

Agricultural colleges

Mr. Steve Clark	5871
Hon. Brad Duguid	5872

Ontario Northland Transportation Commission

Mr. John Vanthof	5872
Hon. Michael Gravelle	5872

Co-op education

Mr. John Fraser	5873
Hon. Brad Duguid	5873

Flooding

Mr. Norm Miller.....	5873
Hon. David Oraziatti	5874

Health care

Mr. Peter Tabuns.....	5874
Hon. Deborah Matthews	5874

Member's birthday

Mr. Steve Clark	5874
-----------------------	------

Notice of dissatisfaction

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac).....	5875
------------------------------------	------

Continued on inside back cover