

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 100

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N° 100

2nd Session
41st Parliament

Monday
2 October 2017

2^e session
41^e législature

Lundi
2 octobre 2017

Speaker: Honourable Dave Levac
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Dave Levac
Greffier : Todd Decker

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



ISSN 1180-2987

Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 2 October 2017

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 2 octobre 2017

The House met at 1030.

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

Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): This being the first sitting Monday of the month, I ask everyone to join me in the singing of the Canadian national anthem.

Singing of O Canada.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): In our members' gallery, we have a visitor: Madame Meilleur, the former member from Ottawa–Vanier in the 38th, 39th, 40th and 41st Parliaments.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: On behalf of the member from York–Simcoe, I'd like to welcome the parents of page captain Rachel Marshall. Lisa and Dave are here to see their daughter in action today. They will be in the public gallery. Welcome.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to welcome Ashley Noble, a young woman from my riding, who is here to take in all of the politics of Queen's Park up close. Welcome, Ashley.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted to introduce the great Gerry Marshall, mayor of Penetanguishene, and his CAO.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's my absolute pleasure to introduce the family of our wonderful page Emerson Manning. We have Murray Tenebaum, Emerson's grandfather; Lori Tenebaum, Emerson's grandmother; and Chloe Manning, Emerson's sister. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Today I would also like to welcome to Queen's Park Gerry Marshall, who is our wonderful warden of Simcoe county. He is joined by Jeff Lees.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to welcome Rethink Breast Cancer to the Legislature today. Their mission is to empower young people worldwide who are concerned about and affected by breast cancer. They're here with us to mark the beginning of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Today is a very special day because we have a delegation of female parliamentarians from Iraq. I want all the members to recognize them as they're visiting our question period.

Please welcome Najat Sayer Mhana, member of Parliament in Iraq; Sabah Abdulrasool Abdulridha Al-

Tameemi, member of Parliament; Abeer Issa Mohammed Al-Luaibi, member of Parliament in Iraq.

In addition, we have Hamid Khalaf Ahmed, deputy chair of the Prime Minister's advisory council; Maha Amir Bash, head of an NGO and a member of the Iraqi minority council; Inas Ali Salman Alomairy, a teacher who works with NGOs doing work in women's rights; Kifah Naser Ahmed, senior adviser to the equivalent of the status of women in Iraq.

Of course, you introduced Madeleine Meilleur, who is accompanying the delegation, and we have Maryantonett Flumian, president of the Institute on Governance, who have sponsored these female members of Parliament from Iraq to visit Ottawa and here at Queen's Park.

Please welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Page captain Archana Jagannathan's parents, Priya and Ramesh, are in the public gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Gila Martow: My guest isn't here. He's probably stuck in traffic. But I want to introduce Roger Jones. He's part of the Society for the Preservation of Historic Thornhill. He worked very hard on the Thornhill Village Festival year after year. He's also a professional engineer of Ontario and a long-time member of the PC riding association of Thornhill.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I also want to introduce members of the Ontario Association of Architects who are visiting Queen's Park. Please welcome John Stephenson, president of the Ontario Association of Architects; Kristi Doyle, executive director of the Ontario Association of Architects; as well as members and staff from the association, including from my community of Ottawa. Please welcome Roberto Campos, who is the chair of the Ottawa Regional Society of Architects. Welcome to Queen's Park.

WEARING OF SCARVES, PINS AND POCKET SQUARES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Ottawa South on a point of order.

Mr. John Fraser: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe that you'll find we have unanimous consent that members be permitted to wear pink scarves, pins and/or pocket squares to raise breast cancer awareness.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Ottawa South is seeking unanimous consent to wear the scarves, pins and pocket squares. Do we agree? Agreed.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Ottawa Centre on a point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: On a point of order, Speaker: I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to observe a moment of silence before question period, as a sign of this House's condolences for those who lost their lives and were affected by the horrific violence around the world this past weekend, in Edmonton, Marseilles and Las Vegas.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent for a moment's silence. Do we agree? Agreed.

I would ask everyone in the entire House to please rise for a moment of silence for those impacted by the senseless violence.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Pray be seated.

It is therefore now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Deputy Premier. Today marks a momentous occasion. It is the 14th anniversary of Liberal scandal, waste and mismanagement. After 14 years of waste and political corruption, Ontario works harder, pays more and gets less.

The Hydro One fire sale is just one example. The Liberals make no mention of the sale until after the last election. When 80% of the province opposes the fire sale of Hydro One, what do Liberals do? They sell it off to the benefit of their insider friends. The Liberals just can't be trusted.

After 14 years, and after the Hydro One fire sale, how can we ever trust this Premier? How can we ever trust these Liberals again?

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm very grateful for this question, because we are celebrating 14 years, and let's talk about some of the progress that has been made.

Members of this House will remember that minimum wage had been frozen at \$6.85 for all of the years that that government was in power. From \$6.85, we're on our way to \$15 so that people can actually earn a living wage. It's an important improvement in the quality of life for many, many Ontario families.

Speaker, 14 years ago, the five-year graduation rate from high school was a shocking 68%. Only 68% of kids graduated high school within five years. We have increased that, thanks to the great teachers in our schools, to 86.5%. That is extraordinary progress over the 14 years in which we have been in office.

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

Interjections.

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

Supplementary: the member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Deputy Premier, because after 14 years of Liberal waste and political corruption, Ontario works harder, pays more and gets less. Five OPP investigations—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I sense a theme, and I'm going to get to the bottom of it immediately. The outbursts will stop.

Please finish.

Mr. Steve Clark: Five OPP investigations into the Liberals is just—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If you want to play that, I will. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, as soon as I sit down, you start. That's insulting.

Mr. Steve Clark: Five OPP investigations into the Liberals is just one example. That's right: Under the Liberals, we have had as many police investigations into this government as Tom Brady has Super Bowl rings. We've never seen anything like it either before. But, Speaker, it took Tom 15 years to set his record. These Liberals? It only took them 14. When it comes to scandalous behaviour and a lack of accountability, no one can match them.

After 14 years, because of this unprecedented five OPP probes, how can we trust this Premier or the Liberals ever again?

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, Speaker, let's think about where we were 14 years ago compared to where we are today: full-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds across the province. Remember when—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It goes both ways. The member from Lanark, come to order. And somebody else is really lucky.

Carry on, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: When we think about our kids, kids in low-income families now have access to free dental care. They did not have that when you were in charge. Now people under age 25, starting January 1, will have free prescription drugs. That is great progress over the last 14 years.

When it comes to post-secondary education, under their watch, people could not go on to college or university, because they simply couldn't afford it. Now, over 200,000 students have free tuition, and many, many more have access to grants and loans.

Think about the quality of our air. Think about our air. We have clean—

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

Final supplementary: the member from Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Back to the Deputy Premier, because after 14 years of Liberal waste and political corruption, Ontario works harder, pays more and gets less.

The \$1.2-billion cancelled gas plants scandal is just one example. While long-term-care homes are struggling to upgrade beds, like at the Osgoode Care Centre, or vulnerable seniors are being abused, as was the case in the last few months in the city of Ottawa, their government has been focused on managing things like the \$1.2-billion gas plants scandal that helped them win the 2011 election.

Barack Obama spent less money becoming leader of the free world than the McGuinty Liberals did to win that election, to save a few GTA seats.

Now this scandal has ended up in a criminal court. According to the Information—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Please finish.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I must have ripped off a Band-Aid too quickly for them over there.

According to the Information and Privacy Commissioner, they violated privacy laws and they obstructed investigations, and we even found out on Friday that Ontario's Chief Information Officer, David Nicholl, warned former McGuinty staffers not to delete emails.

Mr. Speaker, after 14 years, and because of the gas plants scandals, how can we trust this Premier? How can we trust this government?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We have come through the worst recession since the Great Depression, and we have now got the lowest unemployment rate in 16 years in Ontario. We have balanced the budget. We've been strong fiscal managers.

But think about social assistance. You froze social assistance rates; you slashed them, then you froze them. We have now changed the rules so that people on social assistance are able to keep more of what they earn. They're able to keep support for their children.

We shut down all of the coal-fired plants—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Infrastructure, come to order.

Member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, how are you doing?

Mr. Paul Miller: Good.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good.

Finish, please. Wrap up.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Ontario is a stronger, fairer, better place now than it was 14 years ago, and we're proud of the progress that we have made.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Deputy Premier, because after 14 long years of Liberal waste and political corruption, Ontario works harder, pays more and

gets less. That is the Liberal legacy. Doubling the provincial debt in just 14 years is an example of that.

Ontario is now the most indebted subnational jurisdiction in the world. We owe more than anyone else. While Liberal insiders doubled the debt, taxpayers footed the bill and Liberal insiders got rich. Whether it's Samsung, the Gandalf Group or the 30 big renewable mega contracts, it was always Liberal insiders that benefited while hard-working Ontario families paid more.

1050

After 14 years and a provincial debt of over \$300 billion, how can we trust this Premier and the Liberal Party ever again?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm grateful for these questions because they give us a chance to actually review where we have been over the last 14 years. Let's just think about this, Speaker: We have created 760,000 new jobs in Ontario since we were elected in 2003. My recollection is that they wanted to start by firing 100,000 people.

Our employment rate has dropped to 5.7%. It's been below the national average for two and a half years. Our economic growth is strong; we're leading all G7 nations when it comes to economic growth. Private sector economists are forecasting that our growth will outpace the rest of Canada over the next two years.

We have made investments in infrastructure. We have made investments in schools, in roads, in hospitals and in bridges. Those investments cost money. We're investing in them. It has created jobs and it's improving this society—

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

Supplementary: the member from Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Deputy Premier because, after 14 years of Liberal waste and political corruption, Ontario works harder, pays more and gets less.

The assault on household pocketbooks through increased fees and taxes is just one example. When this government took office, Ontario was the economic engine of Canada. Sadly, today we're a have-not province.

The Liberals added the Ontario health tax. We should have known it wouldn't end there. Families are now paying \$2.4 billion a year in service fees. Licence and vehicle registration fees are up \$503 million just in the last four years.

After 14 years and because of shameless taxes and fee increases, how can we trust the Premier or the Liberals ever again?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, all I can say is I'm really glad that party is not in office, because the investments that we have made have resulted in real change. The lowest unemployment rate in 16 years: That's something to be proud of. We've reduced our debt-to-GDP ratio significantly and we're on our way to do more.

We have a balanced budget, and that is allowing us to invest in the things that we care a lot about on this side of the House—free tuition for over 200,000 students, child care spaces, more long-term-care spaces, more support-

ive housing spaces. The most vulnerable in this province are better off now, Speaker, under our government than they would have been under them. They are better off because we've made that a priority.

They're the ones who froze social assistance rates. They're the ones who put in onerous rules to prevent people from getting help. They're—

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

Final supplementary: the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question is for the Acting Premier, because after 14 years of Liberal waste and political corruption, Ontario works harder, pays more and gets less.

The loss of hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs is just one example. Manufacturers have been dealt blow after blow by this government: soaring electricity costs, cap-and-trade and now more red tape.

Business owners and managers have been raising the alarm, but this Liberal government continues to insist that they know better. Liberal denial doesn't help the communities and families who are hurt as these companies close shop: Heinz, Caterpillar, St. Thomas's Ford plant, Brockville's Proctor and Gamble, Peterborough's General Electric, Bacardi, Wescast—too many to name here.

Mr. Speaker, after 14 years and because this Liberal government's decisions continue to kill manufacturing jobs in Ontario, how can we trust this Premier and the Liberals ever again?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: My question is, how can we trust them when all they do is distort the facts?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Withdraw.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let's look at the facts, Speaker: 760,000 more—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, come to order.

Finish, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, second time. I may go past the warning if I even attempt to sit down and he says it again.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, of course the opposition will pick up on where the jobs have been lost. That has been a serious issue. But I have yet to hear him talk about the 760,000 net new jobs. Let's be clear: 760,000 more jobs have been created than we have lost. Whenever a company chooses to close, we are there to help those employees—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The member from Leeds-Grenville, the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke and the member from Huron-Bruce, come to order.

Finish, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: There's a certain irony when he talks about the loss of the Ford plant. They would have let the auto industry die. Their advice was to let—

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

New question: the leader of the third party.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Before I begin, I really just want to quickly congratulate my colleague Jagmeet Singh for a decisive win of the leadership of the federal New Democratic Party.

Applause.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thank you. He will be touched that we gave him a standing ovation, I know.

My question is for the Deputy Premier. There is a crisis in hospitals in Ontario. It is the new normal to hear horror stories of people waiting for days in emergency rooms and being treated on stretchers in hospital hallways with no privacy and no dignity.

Last week, the Premier finally admitted that there's a problem, but her solution is to maybe, sometime in the future, reopen 150 beds that she closed in Toronto. One hundred and fifty beds will not fix this crisis—not in Toronto and certainly not in the hundreds of communities across this province that are suffering under the weight of the Premier's cuts and freezes to hospitals. Just last week, we learned the hospital in Thunder Bay, which has been in a near-constant state of gridlock for years, was forced to admit 400 patients in a hospital built for 375.

What is the Liberal government's plan to fix the mess that they've created in our hospitals?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I remain incredulous, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, that the leader of the third party continues to disparage the fact that there is a proposal that has come forward from, I believe, half a dozen hospitals in the GTA to help address the capacity challenge that they are facing, particularly in advance of the coming winter. We, as yet, don't know what the impact of the flu will be. They've come forward with a very reasonable proposal for opening 150 beds at the old Finch site of the Humber River Hospital.

We didn't close those beds, by the way; we transferred them to the brand new, \$4-billion Humber River Hospital, which is now providing the highest quality of care.

For the leader of the third party, this is her opportunity to be clear on this issue: Does she or does she not support the proposal coming forward from the hospital system—supported, by the way, by the Ontario Hospital Association? Does she or does she not support their proposal for opening 150 beds for transitional care?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I think it's incredulous that the Minister of Health can't fix the problems that he has made and that he has to wait for the hospitals to come together to beg for some kind of solution because of the crisis they have created in our hospital system.

Brampton Civic's acute care beds have been, by their own account, over capacity for more than two years. But it's not just Brampton Civic. Etobicoke General Hospital's acute care beds have also been over capacity every single day from January to May of this year. In January, capacity reached as high as 122%, and this is when safe capacity is supposed to be 85%.

When will this government admit that the problem is province-wide and do something for the people forced to endure overcrowded hospitals in communities like Brampton and Etobicoke?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are doing something. We allocated \$24 million in the spring budget precisely to address this capacity challenge that is faced across the province in different hospitals—a budget that that member, that leader of the third party, voted against. And she still hasn't given a reply as to whether she supports the Humber proposal or is against the Humber proposal.

1100

We know that we face capacity issues. That's precisely why—ironically, with the NDP specifically and emphatically asking us to address the capacity issues in our hospitals, when we do just that, they're the first and frankly the only ones to stand up and oppose it.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is my third, right, Speaker? Not my new question. I'm on my third. Thank you.

The remaining question goes back to the Deputy Premier. The bottom line is, notwithstanding the boasting that this minister is doing, they shorted the hospital sector \$300 million of what they asked for in the last budget. They didn't step up to the plate, even though they were begged to by the hospital association.

Trillium Health Partners in Mississauga is also over capacity. The beds there have been running as high as 109%.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of the Environment, come to order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Since January, the hospital has been forced to use “unconventional beds,” meaning hallway medicine. These figures represent real people in Mississauga, many of them who experienced the worst days of their lives dealing with an accident or sickness that forced them to go to the hospital.

When will the government heed the call of the Ontario Hospital Association and provide immediate investment in our hospitals? When will they actually do something to help people in Mississauga?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I was honoured to be at Trillium in Mississauga to announce, beside the finance minister and the Premier, a brand new hospital for that community, a hospital which will provide even a higher level of care to a greater number of individuals. This is the situation throughout the province. We have 35 hospitals that are new hospitals, either being built or in the planning stage. We continue to make those investments. We've added more than 1,000 hospital beds in the last several years.

We just talked about—I can only imagine that the leader of the third party, by her silence, is against the Humber River proposal. She'll have to explain that to the hospitals and communities that would benefit with that specialized care for seniors in a transitional capacity. We're making those investments. We'll continue to make those investments, and we're seeing the impacts across the province.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Deputy Premier. On Friday, in Sudbury, there were 22 people forced into “unconventional bed space” because the hospital was over capacity. That's 22 Ontarians forced to receive treatment in hallways or even broom closets. One person not getting the care that they deserve is too many; 22 people is nothing short of a crisis. This happens every single day in Ontario. This is the new normal for people who are sick.

The last Conservative government fired 6,000 nurses, closed 28 hospitals and slashed over 7,000 hospital beds. The Liberals have cut or frozen hospital budgets for years now. Now that the Premier has finally admitted that there's a problem, her solution is 150 beds in Toronto. Can the Liberal government tell us how they expect 150 beds in Toronto to be enough?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Chief government whip.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The Humber River proposal, the Finch site, is just one of a number of proposals that we've received from the hospital system, a proposal and approach that is supported by the Ontario Hospital Association and reflects the \$24 million this fiscal year that we've indicated we're investing specifically in capacity and ALC beds. We continue to invest.

Again, it's unfortunate that the third party is disparaging the PCs despite their record on health care, because they're a close second. They closed more than 9,000 beds: 24% of all the acute beds in the province, 13% of the mental health beds in this province. They delisted home care, they reduced the number of drugs on the formulary and they fired thousands of nurses. They committed to finding another \$600 million in cuts in health and education in the last election.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: SickKids hospital is also over capacity. This is a world-class hospital, something Ontarians can be proud of. But even this hospital, where staff care for some of the most serious, devastating illnesses and accidents that affect children, is not getting what it needs from the Premier.

The Premier must know that this is a crisis. She must know how it affects the people of this province, the children of this province, and still the government's only solution is to reopen 150 beds that they closed in Toronto?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm the first to accept and even embrace constructive criticism, but there's a point in the dialogue, in the debate, when I think we need to ask ourselves: Are we—or one party—by repeatedly calling a crisis, calling an emergency, frightening people about the condition in our long-term-care homes, frightening people about the conditions of our hospitals?

I had this discussion last week with the president of the Ontario Hospital Association. There's a point at which I think we need to realize the impact of what we say among Ontarians. We need to have that balanced approach.

I'm the first to accept criticism where criticism is deserved, Mr. Speaker, but I think we need to do that in a measured way which truly aims at making the system better, not instilling fear in Ontarians.

Interjections.

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

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The people of Ontario don't need the NDP to scare them about going to the hospital; they're telling me they won't go to the hospital because they're scared. That's the reality that is happening in our hospitals.

Do you know what? Ten years of freezes and cutbacks result in what we're seeing today. This government has been in office for 14 years, and this is what they've done to our hospital system? Shame on them.

University Health Network hospitals are over capacity. Humber River Hospital: over capacity. Michael Garron Hospital: over capacity. SickKids: over capacity. One hundred and fifty beds will not fix the mess this Liberal government has helped to create.

When will the government admit that the hospitals need more than what they have been allocated, finally invest in the good-quality health care that Ontarians need and deserve and promise that, moving forward, they will at least be funded to cover inflation, to cover population growth and to cover the unique needs of our communities?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Here's an example of the increasing capacity and the infrastructure investment that we're making in Hamilton alone: Hamilton Health Sciences' Juravinski Hospital and Cancer Centre, a \$200-million project, completed in 2012; St. Joseph's Healthcare's West 5th Campus, a \$500-million—

Interjections.

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

Finish, please.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The Ron Joyce Children's Health Centre, a \$70-million project completed that will facilitate 70,000 visits annually; Hamilton General Hospital, \$44 million to consolidate different services into a new 100,000-square-foot facility; and \$581 million for the West 5th Campus on Hamilton Mountain.

These are just several examples, in Hamilton alone, of the investments that we've been making and are making and will continue to make.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is for the Acting Premier because, after 14 years of Liberal waste and political corruption, Ontarians are working harder, paying more and receiving less.

Speaker, the cuts to Ontario's hospitals are but one example. This government was responsible for Ontario's public hospitals suffering through four years of frozen budgets. This government continued to cut funding, pushing our hospitals to a breaking point.

The Auditor General warned this government that hospital beds were unnecessarily being occupied by patients waiting for long-term care or home care, causing delays. This government failed to act, resulting in the dangerous levels of overcrowding faced by our hospitals today. Patients continue to wait on stretchers in the hallways. With flu season around the corner, Ontario hospitals are on the verge of a serious capacity crisis.

Mr. Speaker, after 14 years of hospital cuts and frozen budgets, how can we trust this Premier or these Liberals ever again?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we have invested and increased the budget in our health care system every single year since taking office. That includes the most recent budget, where we increased the hospital operating budgets by \$500 million, which is on top of the previous year of \$500 million in new investment. We are investing in new hospitals, in the operating of hospitals, including in St. Thomas itself and across the province.

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It's regrettable that a party that closed, I think, 27 hospitals—

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Twenty-eight.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Is it 28 hospitals—that closed almost 10,000 hospital beds, that made cuts across the system, is a party that now is asking us to fix the mess that they created. We've fixed that mess, and we're continuing to invest to make the best possible system in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary: the member from Niagara West–Glanbrook.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My question is for the Deputy Premier. After 14 years of Liberal waste and political corruption, Ontario works harder, pays more and gets—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Originally, there appeared to be a concern about certain terminology, and I am now suggesting to the members of the opposition that the terminology is not acceptable to the House. It won't be used, and I will ask you to stop using it.

Finish, please.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Mr. Speaker, eHealth is just one example—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Beaches—East York, second time.

Please finish.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Speaker, eHealth is just one example of this political mismanagement and scandal. This government has been making and breaking delivery promises on eHealth almost as long as they've been in power.

Cronyism, overpaid consultants, outrageous expenses, lawsuits and settlements—the Liberals seem to have unlimited creativity when it comes to finding ways to throw away our money on eHealth.

As the Toronto Sun summed up the Auditor General's damning report last November: "\$8 billion and 14 years later" we still do not have a working electronic health record system.

After 14 years, because of the eHealth fiasco, how can we trust the Premier or the Liberals ever again?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm proud of the fact that over 80% of our family doctors are utilizing electronic medical records in their offices. In fact, virtually every Ontarian who has intersected with our health care system has an electronic health record. We find that is making for better information and better decisions by front-line health care providers as well as empowerment to the patients themselves.

We have come a long way. We have remote clinical consultations, nearly three quarters of a million that are happening with Telehealth Ontario, where face-to-face interactions digitally are happening between consumers of health care and providers of health care. We have the Ontario Laboratories Information System, where 92% of all our hospital, community and public health lab data is available in that repository, and there are more than 100,000 users of that data. We have a Digital Health Drug Repository that tracks, among other things, the medications that are prescribed by health care providers.

Obviously this is a moving target as we continue to evolve our digital health care system, but I'm proud of the work that we've done today.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Deputy Premier: A couple of months ago, Sears Canada was given the court's approval to begin liquidation sales. So far, 59 locations have been closed and more than 1,200 employees have been affected. The saga continues as we learn that Sears Canada is filing a petition to terminate their pension plan. And now Sears just announced on Saturday that they will be closing another 10 stores, including one in Hamilton.

New Democrats have called on the Premier to actively work to protect the pensioners here in Ontario from being shut out from what they've earned over a lifetime. The

lack of pension protection in this province is unacceptable.

Sears pensioners need to know: Will the Premier step up? Will she put pressure on the federal government to make changes to the bankruptcy, insolvency and CCAA processes so that hard-working current and former employees are given priority to get paid the pensions they're owed?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Sears remains subject to the Pension Benefits Act. I know that the Financial Services Commission of Ontario, FSCO, which administers the PBA, including the Pension Benefits Guarantee Fund, is continuing to monitor the situation. Filing for bankruptcy does not affect the assets in the pension plan. Monthly pensions will continue to be paid to the plan beneficiaries. In the event of a windup, a claim could be made on the Pension Benefits Guarantee Fund. The PBGF is unique to Ontario, the only jurisdiction in Canada to offer such a fund. Right now, pensioners receive \$1,000 through the fund.

We are implementing changes to increase pensioner payments from \$1,000 to \$1,500. We care about retirement security for the people of Ontario, and that's why we moved forward with the changes to the funding framework for the defined benefits pension plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm surprised the energy minister is answering this, but anyway, the Ontario government should have been prepared for the end of Sears' pension security. This has been expected for some time, and while today it might be Sears, tomorrow it will be another company, and there have been many in the past. This needs coordinated action from both levels of Liberal governments. Unfortunately, the Pension Benefits Guarantee Fund, which was just mentioned, will only guarantee pension shortfall coverage up to \$1,500.

The system still leaves many former Sears employees without full benefits. I remember 10 years ago, when Mr. Arthurs, appointed by your government, studied the PBGF and said the recommendation should be \$2,500. So it's no big improvement to \$1,500. You're still far short of what benefits are for people. When are you going to do something about it?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question and the concern the member has for our pensioners and retirees. We've seen it time and time again when these things occur. If it wasn't for the backstop that the Ontario government, the only province, the only jurisdiction in North America which provides a pension guarantee—of those Sears employees, should they be affected, 90% will be fully covered as a result of our pension guarantee.

We recognize that more needs to be done. That's why we've modernized our pension reforms to enable many of those pensioners and those who have existing programs to diversify to other holders to protect their interests. We'll continue to do more and we'll work alongside the member to try to make sure that everyone is protected in the province of Ontario.

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, food is what sustains us and gives us the energy to get up every morning, to work, to learn and play, and to go about our daily lives. Without a strong farm and food sector in the province of Ontario, we would not be able to enjoy the bounty and diversity of foods that we love and share with our friends and families at this time of the year, particularly at Thanksgiving.

As you know, our agricultural communities across this great province work extremely hard each and every day to provide us with more than 200 foods grown and harvested right here at home. This week is dedicated to this hard work as we begin Ontario Agriculture Week.

Minister, this week allows us to celebrate the contribution that our farm and food sector has given to our province for over 150 years. Can the minister please share with us how our government is celebrating our—

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

Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, and responsible for small business.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member from Barrie for her passion about agriculture—and, of course, she's a very good singer of Good Things Grow in Ontario.

This is Agriculture Week in the province of Ontario and we're taking time to recognize our farmers and farm communities that contribute to our communities and our economy. We are blessed in Ontario with nearly 50,000 family farms, contributing in excess of \$37 billion to Ontario's GDP.

Just last Friday, in my riding of Peterborough, I was joined by my colleague the member from Northumberland—Quinte West to announce \$500,000 in funding from the Greenbelt Fund for various farm and food processing across the province of Ontario. I must say that one of the recipients was the very fine Millar egg farm in the great riding of Peterborough.

Today we're also welcoming the Wine Council of Ontario, the Ontario Craft Cider Association and the Ontario Craft Brewers to celebrate their success.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Minister, for that response and for the important message. It's great to hear that our government is investing in our farm and food sector to boost availability of local food. I'm also pleased to know that we'll be welcoming guests to Queen's Park who represent our farmers, and food and beverage makers.

Minister, Ontario Agriculture Week will come and go, but we need to acknowledge the hard work Ontario farmers do each and every day to ensure that we have food on our tables.

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I know my constituents in Barrie certainly enjoy foods grown and harvested locally. They purchase Foodland Ontario-branded products at the supermarket and visit local farmers' markets, including the ones in Barrie and

Innisfil. They want to know how the province is recognizing the long heritage of farming in the province of Ontario.

Will the minister please tell this House how our government is honouring the province's agricultural sector and working to build up its future success?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member from Barrie for her supplementary. I want to acknowledge the Dafoe family this morning, who hosted the Peterborough County Plowing Match on Saturday. I can tell you that the minister had a very straight furrow.

I'm also pleased to announce today that through our Ontario Farms 150 commemorative sign program, we'll be looking for those farms and farm families across the province of Ontario who have had their farm for over 150 years, and we'll be providing them with the appropriate signage. I encourage all members from all sides of the House to make applications.

I also want to acknowledge the work of organizations like the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance and, of course, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, which represents over 30,000 family farms in the province of Ontario, and to recognize their long history of farming in this great province. In fact, the OFA will be here at Queen's Park tomorrow.

We're starting to launch our Bring Home the World food campaign to raise awareness about the wide variety of foods that are grown, harvested and made right here in Ontario. We acknowledge—

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

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is for the Acting Premier, because after 14 years of Liberal waste and political scandal, Ontario works harder, pays more and gets less.

Kicking 3,500 children off the wait-list for life-changing IBI autism therapy just because they were five years old is one example. It took three months—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The member from Kitchener—Conestoga, come to order. The chief government whip is warned.

Finish, please.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It took three months, a new minister and the advocacy of thousands of families for the government to realize that autism doesn't end at five. After 14 years and the government kicking children off autism therapy wait-lists because of their age, how can we trust the Premier and the Liberals ever again?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. We have opportunities over the course of our political career to make decisions, and those decisions are always captured in Hansard. They're captured out there and people report on them. The member

opposite talks about our record on autism, which is, I would say—when it comes to the allocation of resources, we are the best government in all of North America when it comes to focusing on autism.

But here's the irony in the question: The Leader of the Opposition sat in Ottawa for years. He had a decision to make, to support a national autism plan, and he voted against that. So, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about autism and what we're doing for children, and we compare both records, please don't make any confusion.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary: the member from Whitby–Oshawa.

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is for the Deputy Premier, because after 14 years of Liberal waste and political scandal, Ontario residents work harder, pay more and get less.

The Liberal government's arbitrary and cold-hearted approach to school closures is yet another example. Speaker, months ago, they had 600 schools on the chopping block. The Ontario Alliance Against School Closures says that in the five years leading up to the release of the ministry's revised pupil accommodation review guideline, 277 schools were closed.

After 14 years and school closures, how can Ontario residents trust the Premier or the Liberals ever again?

Hon. Michael Coteau: To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I'm pleased to rise in this House and speak to our government's record on schools and education in this province, because the member opposite is asking the question but is ignoring the 11 schools that were built or expanded significantly in his own riding.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to invest in Ontario's publicly funded education system, and you are seeing the results, from full-day kindergarten to graduation rates that are—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Come to order, both sides—especially the questioner.

Finish.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Mr. Speaker, you are seeing the results, from full-day-kindergarten investments to graduation rates in this province—86.5% of students are graduating versus the 68% that were graduating when that party was in power.

We will continue to invest in Ontario's publicly funded education system because it is the right investment for the people of this province.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Deputy Premier. Ontario's long-term-care wait-list tops 30,000 people right now. Just like our hospitals, the level of care in these homes is suffering under this Premier and her Liberal government.

Last week in Ottawa, there was yet another incident in a home, this time involving verbal abuse of a senior in care. These stories keep coming up. It seems that every day I hear from family members who are telling me

about the horrific conditions their loved ones face in long-term care. This is not a case of a few bad apples, as the Conservative member from Nepean–Carleton said. The issues in long-term care are systemic. They stretch to every corner of this province.

Will the government finally acknowledge that long-term care is in a state of chaos and expand the scope of the Wettlaufer inquiry to find and fix the serious problems in our long-term-care system?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Absolutely, the safety and well-being of every single resident in our long-term-care homes is the top priority for me and for my ministry. We're working hard to provide that high level of care that ensures that safety and that security.

I have been clear, and I'm going to be clear again, that non-compliance with the Long-Term Care Homes Act is absolutely unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Mr. Speaker, that's part of the reason why I introduced legislation just last week to strengthen the fines, the penalties and the measures available to my ministry and me as minister to ensure the compliance that we expect with the act. If we receive a complaint or hear of a situation which is unacceptable, we conduct an immediate inspection and we act on the result of that inspection immediately.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In response to the incident in Ottawa last week, the Liberal member from Ottawa West–Nepean said, "All Ontarians should be able to grow old with dignity in a safe, secure and compassionate environment." And do you know what? I agree with that, Speaker. I agree with that 100%.

What we have in Ontario does not come anywhere close to meeting that standard right now. Ask any family member of a loved one in care. They will tell you about the constant state of worry that they face every single day, wondering what's happening to their parent or grandparent or spouse.

The Conservatives think the issue in long-term care is a few bad apples; the Liberals think the issue is Elizabeth Wettlaufer. When will the government finally admit that the chaos in long-term care is ongoing and affects the whole system and everyone in it?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Again, I have the responsibility—as does my ministry, but ultimately it rests with me—to ensure the safety and security of every resident in long-term-care homes in this province. It's a responsibility that I take extremely seriously.

I look forward to the debate, and I anticipate and hope that the third party will support the increased compliance measures, including fines and penalties, the ability to suspend licences and other powers, so that we can ensure that the highest quality of care is being provided and that safety and security exists.

Mr. Speaker, I will work with all parties to ensure that we do the absolute utmost to provide that level of care. We owe it to those nearly 80,000 Ontarians who call home a long-term-care home. That is their home. We have the responsibility, and I take it very seriously.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Ted McMeekin: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services.

I know it's a priority of this government to help survivors of human trafficking heal and rebuild their lives and to prevent human trafficking from occurring in the first place. Last year, the government created Ontario's first-ever strategy to begin to tackle this horrendous crime.

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This past week I was pleased to learn about the new funding that was rolled out to support community partners across this province in their efforts to combat human trafficking and support survivors. Native Women Inc. Hamilton-Wentworth received over \$700,000 to support their emergency shelter, transportation needs and culturally respectful care. I was pleased to be able to announce that in Hamilton.

Speaker, could the minister please tell us more about the funding announced at last week's announcement?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you to the member for his question and for his continued advocacy to support survivors of violence in the Hamilton area.

I was pleased to announce last week that our government will be providing funding through both the Anti-Human Trafficking Community Supports Fund and Indigenous-Led Initiatives Fund of almost \$19 million toward 45 projects aimed to provide wraparound services and supports to survivors of human trafficking. This is the first time that funding like this has been available on this scale in Ontario or even anywhere in Canada.

I'd like to thank everyone in the anti-human-trafficking community who has assisted us with our strategy and with the need to create these funds. Our partners have told us how important it was for Ontario to move forward on our strategy. Last week's announcement is just the latest step.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted McMeekin: I want to thank the minister for that great answer. I also want to thank all the service providers that work tirelessly to put an end to this crime and to ensure that survivors have the supports they need, and that we can all play a part.

Ending human trafficking is a very important step toward ensuring that survivors can live safely, free from threat, fear or experience of exploitation and violence. We know that service providers, law enforcement officers and our government play a great role in making this happen.

Human trafficking affects some of the most vulnerable people in our society. That is why I am pleased that the government launched its \$72-million strategy to end human trafficking last year. I'm sure that the additional funding announced last week through the community supports will help.

Could the minister please update the House on continued government efforts to support survivors and put an end to this ongoing crime?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Minister of the Status of Women.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I want to thank the member for this important question and for being a strong advocate for his community.

Speaker, human trafficking is a brutal crime that affects the young and vulnerable in our communities. It is absolutely unacceptable, and it's something I want you to know that we are working hard to fight, with our community partners.

That's why I was so pleased to be along with my colleague as we announced that we are giving vital assistance to dozens of organizations on the ground that work tirelessly to protect and support survivors. This funding gives support and resources to groups that are dealing with survivors of this heart-wrenching crime.

But Speaker, I want you to know that our work to end human trafficking doesn't stop there. Here are some of the things we're doing. In addition to the Anti-Human Trafficking Act, which allows for restraining orders and compensation, we're also creating a new Human Trafficking Lived Experience Roundtable. We've also enhanced funding to 47 service partners through the victim crisis assistance program and expanded the victim/witness—

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

New question.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My question is for the Deputy Premier.

After 14 years of Liberal waste and political scandal, Ontario works harder, pays more and gets less.

The Liberal cap-and-trade scheme is just one example of how they have made life harder for the people of Ontario. The Premier rushed the legislation, which enables the Liberals to continue doling out billions of our hard-earned dollars to Liberal friends. That's on top of the billions being sent to California, where Ontario businesses are forced to buy carbon credits. Speaker, it takes my breath away.

Earlier today, I heard a member opposite arrogantly say, "Get over it." But after 14 years of scandals, wasteful spending and bad policy, like their disastrous cap-and-trade scheme, how can we trust the Premier or her Liberals ever again?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Chris Ballard: Thank you to the member opposite for that. I'll tell you what takes my breath away, Speaker. It's the amazing progress that this government has made in the past 14 years to make sure that our children have fresh air to breathe. Since this government closed the coal plants, there hasn't been a smog day in Ontario; there hasn't been the orange haze hanging over the GTHA. That's real progress.

I can tell you that the foundation of what we're doing in this province is to make the reduction of greenhouse gases fair and equitable for all businesses across the

province. I'm still waiting to hear a plan from the other side.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary: the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is for the Deputy Premier.

After 14 years of Liberal waste and political scandals, Ontarians work harder, pay more and get less. Infrastructure to the Ring of Fire—or the lack thereof—is just one example. This government first promised to develop the Ring of Fire in 2010. In the throne speech, they called it “the most promising mining opportunity in Canada in a century.”

In 2014, they promised \$1 billion to build transportation infrastructure to the Ring of Fire. Since then, the Premier has made a lot of promises and some excuses, but still we've seen no shovels in the ground. Northern Ontarians are running out of patience with this government.

Mr. Speaker, after 14 years of waste and scandal, and because of the broken promises about developing the Ring of Fire, how can northern Ontarians trust the Premier or the Liberals ever again?

Hon. Chris Ballard: To the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

Hon. David Zimmer: Thank you very much for that question.

Of course, the Ring of Fire does represent a historic opportunity to really effect—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark, second time.

Finish, please.

Hon. David Zimmer: Because of that historic opportunity to affect the economic underpinnings of this province—that's why this government committed \$1 billion to infrastructure development in the region. We are going to build on that infrastructure development in the region.

Just recently, we invested about \$785,000, along with the federal government, to enable the Webequie, Eabametoong, Neskantaga and Nibinamik First Nations to complete an all-season community service corridor study. That's the first step in unlocking the potential of the Ring of Fire commitment.

This is a commitment that the opposition parties should help us with, instead of putting roadblocks in the way. We are going to open the Ring of Fire—

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

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Deputy Premier.

A few weeks ago, I met Denise Skowronnek. Her brother Daniel Reale used shoelaces that he wasn't supposed to have to take his own life while admitted to St. Joseph's West 5th site in Hamilton. Dan was the 11th person to die by suicide while admitted to the West 5th site in the last 18 months.

Carol Patenaude's daughter Nicole—just 20 years old—died by suicide while released from the hospital on a day pass.

Families of loved ones who need mental health care should be able to expect that their loved ones will be safe and receive excellent care that gives them every chance at recovery. When that doesn't happen and tragedies occur again and again, families deserve answers.

That's why I, together with these families, have called for a coroner's inquest into the deaths of Daniel and Nicole and all of the others who tragically lost their lives. Will the government support this call?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I do appreciate the question.

Mr. Speaker, no family should have to endure the pain of a loved one, a family member, a friend or a colleague whose life ends in suicide.

Let me, on behalf of everyone in the Legislature, as well—and I know the leader of the third party has done this—express my deepest sympathies to the families of all 11 individuals who, over this period of 18 months, regrettably and unfortunately, lost their lives in this way.

In response to the third party's call for a coroner's inquest, it's important to know that the coroner and the coroner alone has and retains that right to decide upon and begin an inquest. It's entirely at his discretion. It's important, and I think we would all agree, that the office of the coroner operate at arm's length from the ministry and the government, and that's why we leave the discretion with the coroner himself.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Mr. Speaker, I sincerely hope that a coroner's inquest will come to pass and that it will also focus on the resources that front-line staff need and the funding that our hospitals require.

We know that mental health care workers in Hamilton—all health care workers in Hamilton, and across the province—are doing the best they can, but they're not being given the resources they need. Hospitals have faced budget cuts, layoffs and bed closures in communities desperate for better care, including my city of Hamilton. After years of cuts, St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton is facing another \$7 million in cuts, thanks to the current government, while Hamilton Health Sciences is facing another \$20 million in cuts this year.

Will the government support the families' call for the coroner to consider these factors in any inquest that actually happens?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, unlike the leader of the third party, I'm not going to prejudge or pre-assume what any potential investigation or inquest might find in terms of a relationship to these 11 unfortunate suicides.

Back in 2015, I personally asked the Ontario Hospital Association what more we could do to prevent suicides in our hospitals. I asked the OHA if it would create a task force of experts and individuals with lived experience to develop recommendations for preventing deaths by sui-

cide by patients and clients under hospital care. We recently received the report of recommendations from the suicide prevention task force. In fact, these recommendations have now only recently in past weeks been shared with all the OHA, all hospital members, all hospitals across the province. I believe that this will be one step, but one important step, so that we can all come together to make sure we're doing what is required to prevent these tragedies from taking place in the future.

SENIORS

M. Shafiq Qaadri: Ma question est pour la ministre des Affaires des personnes âgées, the Hon. Dipika Damerla. Seniors' affairs are particularly important in my own riding of Etobicoke North, as we have a very healthy, vibrant and growing contingent of seniors. As you may know, Speaker, yesterday, October 1, marked National Seniors Day in Canada. It was also the United Nations International Day of Older Persons.

The Ontario seniors' community is over two million strong and will more than double in the next 25 years. For the first time in Ontario, there are more seniors over the age of 65 than folks under the age of 15. As you will know, Speaker, seniors have played an important role in building up the communities of this province and have achieved so much and contributed so greatly to a diverse and prosperous Ontario.

My question is this: Will the Minister of Seniors Affairs please inform the House about what the government is doing to support seniors in communities across the province of Ontario?

L'hon. Dipika Damerla: Merci beaucoup pour la question. I also want to join in celebrating and congratulating on the occasion of National Seniors Day and international seniors' day, which was yesterday. In fact, I was joined by the member from Trinity–Spadina yesterday as we celebrated National Seniors Day and international seniors' day at the waterfront.

Our government is fully committed to helping seniors age well, to be safe and live active, independent lives in comfort and dignity. That is why we continue to invest in numerous programs to better support our seniors, and I look forward to speaking more about it in the supplementary.

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

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Thank you, Minister, for your stewardship of this file. The Seniors Community Grant Program is one that is particularly popular among my own community groups in Etobicoke North. These groups are integral parts of communities and work to provide seniors with space to share, learn and prosper, and opportunities to enjoy new and exciting experiences. When the seniors' community grant was developed in 2014, it opened doors for many of these groups to expand their programs and offer unique experiences to Ontario seniors across the province.

I know the minister was recently in Scarborough to make a related announcement. Would she please inform

this House about the next round of seniors' community grants?

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

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I again want to thank the member from Etobicoke North for the very important question. As he mentioned, the Seniors Community Grant Program is an integral part of the services we provide our seniors, and it has so far supported more than 1,300 initiatives, benefiting almost 440,000 seniors across the province.

Last Monday, I joined with Habitat for Humanity in Scarborough to announce the opening of applications for the next round of grant funding. In addition to the grants that have been awarded in the past, we have created a new dedicated stream this year for larger-scale initiatives. Under this new grant stream, organizations could be eligible to receive up to \$100,000 for projects that are regional or provincial in scope. Applications are now open until the end of November.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Members of provincial Parliament are invited to join me. With our courageous Iraqi parliamentarians, we're going to have our photo taken on the grand staircase in just a few minutes after question period. Everybody is welcome to join us.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order, the member from Kitchener–Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'd just like to welcome my guests, Ron and Shirley Levene from the great riding of Waterloo region.

MEMBER FOR BRAMALEA–GORE–MALTON

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy Premier, point of order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: On behalf of the Liberal caucus, we wish to offer our congratulations to the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, Jagmeet Singh, on his leadership win.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1146 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DAVID JOHNSTON

Mr. Ted Arnott: "Aren't we fortunate to have the opportunity to serve?" That was how the Governor General, His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston, replied to me after I wrote to thank him for his outstand-

ing contribution to our country and to acknowledge with gratitude the extension of his term as the Queen's representative in Canada.

Today David and Sharon Johnston officially depart from Rideau Hall after seven years of the opportunity to serve.

I came to know David Johnston well when I represented the riding of Waterloo–Wellington from 1999 to 2007 and he was the president of the University of Waterloo. I came to look forward to our every interaction and meeting. He was brilliant, positive, focused and caring. His leadership and creativity helped vault U of W to the forefront of Canadian universities, which also served to strengthen our local economy in immeasurable ways, including helping Waterloo region become a high-tech powerhouse.

It turned out to be superb preparation for his next challenge: “Contemplare meliora,” or to envision a better world, which he adopted as a motto. He would choose to make his priorities strengthening learning and innovation, encouraging philanthropy and volunteerism, and supporting families and children. Through his events, speeches and writing, he challenged all of us to reach higher and achieve more, each to our fullest potential.

Is Canada a better place for his efforts? Without question, it most certainly is. And through his energy and personality, the reach and scope of the role of Governor General was animated, strengthened and enlarged.

Yes, we are indeed fortunate to have the opportunity to serve, and David and Sharon Johnston's service will long be remembered as exemplary. On behalf of the Ontario PC caucus, we offer our thanks and wish them good health and much happiness in the years to come.

SHEILA KOFFMAN

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I rise to celebrate the life and mourn the passing of Sheila Koffman, who was not just known to the residents of Parkdale–High Park but right across the downtown Toronto corridor. She was the owner of Another Story bookstore on Roncesvalles and a social justice activist. The store itself started decades back on the Danforth, and she managed to keep it alive by really highlighting the work of other social justice activists, people who were writers of colour, who were queer writers, and children's authors as well. She was very well known throughout the elementary and post-secondary school system in Toronto for being the person and the place where you could get books that you just couldn't get anywhere else. She was a board member of the Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre.

I want to tell everybody that on October 21 we're going to have a New Orleans-style parade down Roncesvalles from Another Story bookstore to the Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre in her honour. There will be a number of speakers who will be celebrating her life. She died way too early at 72, but we all thought she was even younger than that. That's the kind of person Sheila Koffman was.

We'll miss you, Sheila, but your legacy is still lasting. It's the 30th anniversary of Another Story bookstore.

RIDING OF ETOBICOKE NORTH

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Speaking of development in the great riding of Etobicoke North—where to even begin? For example, we have currently under way a \$400-million expansion of Etobicoke General Hospital. We are doubling the size, the footprint, of the hospital itself, and as a doctor and parliamentarian, I can tell you how delighted I am. We're going to be having a new cardiology wing, a new respirology wing, a neurology wing, a new emergency department, and folks who need dialysis will not need to travel all the way to Brampton.

We have, as well, eight stops of the \$1.2-billion Finch LRT, custom-made, custom-tailored for my riding in Etobicoke North.

As you know, starting this September, so many students are benefiting from free college and university tuition. For families making under \$50,000, two- and four-year college is going to be free.

OHIP+ starts in a couple of months, January 1, 2018. For folks from zero to under 25, medications will be free.

In January 2019, we are scheduling a massive increase of the minimum wage, as well as rent control.

Speaker, all of these magnificent developments are going to affect the lives, the pocketbooks and, ultimately, the prosperity and future education of the great people of Etobicoke North.

SARA CARSON

Mr. Victor Fedeli: The show is called America's Got Talent, but over the past few weeks millions of viewers learned that North Bay has talent too, in the name of Sara Carson and her dog, Hero. As many are now familiar, Sara is a highly skilled dog trainer and for weeks this summer, she and Hero wowed television audiences with their act. Judges Simon Cowell, Mel B, Heidi Klum and Canada's own Howie Mandel praised her week after week, and week after week, she advanced further into the competition until she reached the show's finale.

While Sara didn't take home the top prize or the \$1-million payout that goes with it, she managed to advance to the top five, which is an amazing feat in itself. But even before this, Sara was considered one of the top trick dog instructors in the world and has taught numerous classes on social media for the past several years. Sara is a true local inspiration and success story, and you can learn more about what she does on her website: thesupercollies.com.

Congratulations, Sara, and thank you for thrilling not just Nipissing, but America's Got Talent viewers everywhere. We can't wait to see what you're doing next.

RON AND SHIRLEY LEVENE

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to recognize two outstanding constituents from Waterloo region who are

here with us today. Ron and Shirley Levene have called Waterloo home since 1987, where they raised their three sons, Casey, Leejay and Elli. Tragically, the Levenes suddenly lost their 18-year-old son Leejay in 2007. Leejay was an incredibly talented artist and musician, and his parents have dedicated themselves to keeping his memory alive by giving back to the community.

Each year, the Levenes partner with a local charity and together they print 3,000 calendars of Leejay's art, with all of the proceeds going to charity. The 2018 calendar supports the work of Child Witness Centre, a program that provides support to children and youth who have been a victim of or witness to abuse or violence. I'd like to commend Shirley on her dedication to this project. She works every day to give back to Waterloo community organizations. Her work has been recognized across the region, including a nomination for Oktoberfest woman of the year.

Shirley and Ron are also proud Waterloo Rotarians and respected members of Waterloo region's Jewish community. In Leejay's memory, the Levenes are doing the work of "tikkun olam"—pursuing social justice and healing the world.

I would like to thank the Levenes for their generosity and compassion. Waterloo region is a stronger community because of their leadership. May Leejay's memory be a blessing to all of us.

EVENTS IN NORTHUMBERLAND— QUINTE WEST

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, it's that time of the year when Ontarians all across the province have the opportunity to experience the bountiful harvest of locally grown fruits, vegetables, honey and other produce that our farmers have been working hard to produce all summer.

This year marks 150 years since Canada's Confederation, but communities in Northumberland–Quinte West have been holding these events since long before Canada was established.

In the last several weeks, I've been criss-crossing my riding to attend and celebrate fall fairs and festivals in each of our communities. In Port Hope, I was there to kick off the 186th Port Hope agricultural fair, and the following weekend, Cultivate, a festival of food and drink.

Families have been visiting Roseneath Agricultural Society's fair for over 148 years to experience the exhibits, the annual tractor pull and to take a ride on the historical carousel.

The Percy Agricultural Society celebrated its 167th Warkworth fair this year, with many entries for their best in produce, pies and other baked goodies. Trenton held its first annual autumn market place in the downtown square. And of course, Speaker, my hometown, the heart of apple country—Brighton Applefest showcasing all things apple, with close to 20,000 people attending.

These events go on and on, and I want to congratulate all the volunteers who made that happen.

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OKTOBERFEST

Mr. Michael Harris: Halt deine Lederhosen fest—hold on to your lederhosen because the 49th annual Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest is once again is rolling out the barrels for Canada's greatest Bavarian festival. In the true spirit of Gemütlichkeit, 15 festhallen across our region are opening their doors October 6 through to the 14 to young and old, whether German for life or just for the day. As usual, our royal festival family, Onkel Hans, Tante Frieda unt Ziggy unt Zaggy Steiner, will be on hand with over 480 volunteers and 1,300 community and service club volunteers for the second-largest celebration of German heritage in the world.

Drawing on Waterloo region's long history of German roots, our annual celebration has had something for everyone since its launch in 1969, from Canada's largest Thanksgiving Day parade to 48 family, cultural and sporting events and many festhallen events. And while zee spigot and zee mallets won't be tapping the first kegs until Friday morning, the volunteers and board of directors have long been hard at work preparing and hosting pre-festival events. Just this weekend, the Oktoberfest gala ball was held at the new Lot42 space in Kitchener, where 21-year-old Mikaila Emrich was crowned Miss Oktoberfest 2017. This Thursday, the KW Oktoberfest women of the year will be named at the same Lot42 as the barrels get set to role.

So we invite all to come down to Kitchener-Waterloo for fun-filled, safe festing. Or, as we say in the region: Ein, Stein, drive safely.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Ein Prosit.

EPILEPSY DURHAM REGION

Mr. Granville Anderson: On Saturday I was pleased to take part in the annual Pull Together for Epilepsy Fire Truck Pull in my lovely riding of Durham. Individuals formed teams of 10 people each, and they worked together to pull a fire truck 100 feet. There were four teams, and I was so honoured when I was asked by the executive director, Dianne McKenzie, to be on one of those teams. All funds raised support Epilepsy Durham and support those living with epilepsy in our wonderful communities throughout Durham.

The pull is an exciting event, and it brings people in the community together to demonstrate to those living with epilepsy that they are not alone. There are over 36,000 people in Durham region who live with epilepsy. To put that in context, that is one in every 100.

Services commonly provided by Epilepsy Durham include one-on-one support services, advocacy, employment, social skill and human rights support for individuals living with epilepsy, their siblings, youth and seniors.

This is a fun event for family and friends to come out and enjoy and support such a great cause. I would like to applaud the great work Epilepsy Durham Region does in

support of our community, as well as congratulate them on their 30th anniversary. They have served our community for 30 wonderful years.

BREAST CANCER

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I rise today to highlight that October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. I'd also like to take this time to acknowledge Rethink Breast Cancer, which is here at the Legislature today. Rethink Breast Cancer is bringing awareness to our younger generations through their groundbreaking approach. The organization provides information on breast cancer education, resources, advocacy, community-building and fundraising.

Rethink has taken an active role in advocating the government and industry on behalf of patient groups. They are shining a light on the process of public reimbursement of cancer drugs and what can be done to improve access and shorten wait times for care. Access to these drugs and treatments is critical to ensure that our loved ones are here for as long as possible.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among Canadian women and will affect one in eight women during their lifetime. According to the latest statistics, it is estimated that 26,300 women and 230 men in Canada will be diagnosed with breast cancer, and almost 5,000 women and 43 men will die from the disease in 2017.

It is important to be mindful of the signs and symptoms of breast cancer, which include a lump in the breast or armpit, changes in the breast shape or size or skin changes. The Ontario Breast Screening Program and making mammograms part of routine medical care are the best methods for early detection of breast cancer. Finding the cancer early means more treatment options and a better chance of survival.

As October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, I encourage all Ontarians to get involved within their community to raise awareness regarding this terrible disease. I would also encourage all women to speak with their health care professionals regarding their screening options and risk factors.

PETITIONS

LONG-TERM CARE

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

"Whereas the government first promised a legislated care standard for residents in the province's long-term-care homes in 2003, but are yet to make good on their promise;

"Whereas the Long-Term Care Homes Act 2007 empowered the provincial government to create a minimum standard;

"Whereas the most detailed and reputable study of minimum care standards recommends 4.1 hours of direct care per day;

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

"To legislate a care standard of a minimum of four hours per resident each day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix."

I agree with this and will pass it on to page Adam.

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

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nickel Belt.

Are you clapping for me?

M^{me} France Gélinas: No, I—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh, for him. I'm sorry.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Well, absolutely, Speaker, I'm clapping for you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Petitions.

ANTI-SMOKING INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'd like to thank Isabelle Roy for signing this petition. It reads as follows:

"Whereas in the past 10 years in Ontario, 86% of all movies with on-screen smoking were rated for youth, and the tobacco industry has a well-documented history of promoting tobacco use on-screen; and

"Whereas a scientific report released by the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit estimated that 185,000 children in Ontario today will be recruited to smoking by exposure to on-screen smoking, and more than 59,000" of them "will eventually die from tobacco-related diseases incurring at least \$1.1 billion in health care costs; and

"Whereas the Ontario government has a stated goal to achieve the lowest smoking rates in Canada, and 79% of Ontarians support not allowing smoking in movies" for children;

"Whereas the Minister of Government and Consumer Services has the authority to amend the regulations of the Film Classification Act via cabinet;

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"To examine the ways in which the regulations of the Film Classification Act could be amended to reduce smoking in youth-rated films released in Ontario."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Ariana to bring—

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

INCLUSIVENESS

Mr. John Fraser: I have a petition here from World-Changing Kids:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there has been an increase in fear and hate towards people in our communities who practise different religions and who are from different cultures and races than the majority of the population; and

“Whereas many of our friends are feeling frightened and alone in the face of any form of discrimination and hate; and

“Whereas we want to show the world that the hate seen in Ontario does not reflect the people of our province; and

“Whereas we believe that everyone should feel welcome and safe in our communities. It is the diversity of our province that makes it so wonderful;

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

“That all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario stand up and speak out against all forms of hate and discrimination and stand together in love and kindness.”

I agree with this petition and I’m going to give it to page Duncan.

GUIDE AND SERVICE ANIMALS

Mr. Michael Harris: I have a petition here on open access to registered service dogs and owners.

“Whereas Ontario Regulation 429/07 under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 indicates, ‘If a person with a disability is accompanied by a guide dog or other service animal, the provider of goods or services shall ensure that the person is permitted to enter the premises with the animal and to keep the animal with him or her unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law from the premises;’ and

“Whereas the Ontario Human Rights Code speaks to the ‘duty to accommodate persons with disabilities ... in a manner that most respects the dignity of the person;’ and

“Whereas, despite these provisions, many who require, have been medically recommended for and own professional, trained service dogs, including children with autism, PTSD sufferers and others, continue to be denied access to public places; and

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“Whereas, in one such case of a Kitchener boy with autism being denied access to have his professional, trained service dog at a Waterloo Catholic District School Board school, an Ontario Human Rights Tribunal ruled against specified accommodations for the boy and his dog at school; and

“Whereas Bill 80, the Ontario Service Dog Act, has been introduced at the Ontario Legislature to strictly prohibit ‘denying accommodation, services or facilities to an individual or discriminating against an individual with respect to accommodation, services or facilities because the individual is a person with a disability who is accompanied by a service dog’; and

“Whereas service dogs perform a series of vital tasks to support those living with disabilities, including serving in guidance, seizure response, mobility assistance, autism and PTSD support, among other medically acknowledged services; and

“Whereas ongoing denial of access means those requiring service dogs are continuing to face further

hurdles beyond the impacts of disability to be allowed the public accommodations they deserve;

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

“Open access to registered service dogs and owners:

“Endorse the legislative requirements of Bill 80, the Ontario Service Dog Act, to end continued discrimination and ensure those requiring service dogs are no longer denied the essential public access they should already be guaranteed.”

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition, sign it and will send it with Benjamin to the table.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario called, “Support Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence.” It reads:

“Whereas half of all Canadian women have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, and approximately every six days a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner; and

“Whereas a 2014 national survey showed that Canadian workers who experience domestic violence often disclose the violence to a co-worker, and that the violence frequently follows the worker to work; and

“Whereas the experience of domestic violence and sexual violence can cause significant physical, mental, emotional and financial hardship for survivors, their families, and society as a whole; and

“Whereas workers who experience domestic violence or sexual violence should not have to jeopardize their employment in order to seek medical attention, access counselling, relocate, or deal with police, lawyers or the courts;...

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

“That the Legislative Assembly pass Bill 26 to provide employees who have experienced domestic violence or sexual violence (or whose children have experienced domestic violence or sexual violence) with up to 10 days of paid leave, reasonable unpaid leave, and options for flexible work arrangements, and to require employers to provide mandatory workplace training about domestic violence and sexual violence.”

I fully support this petition, affix my name and give it to page Greg to take to the table.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Ms. Daiene Vernile: This is a petition that’s titled “Ban Fur Farming in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas a poll conducted by Environics ... showed that 92% of Canadians are in favour of better animal protection laws. Another poll conducted by Humane Society International ... showed 68% of Canadians support a ban on fur farming;

"Whereas numerous countries and regions recognize that animals' basic needs cannot be met in any fur farm housing system and have already banned fur farming, the import and/or sale of fur products. The United Kingdom, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Serbia, Denmark, the Netherlands" have passed legislation banning fur farming;

"Whereas animals on fur farms are subjected to long periods of inactivity, lack of stimulation and are restricted from performing natural behaviours ... leading to frustration, stress and stereotypical (abnormal repetitive) behaviour...;

"Whereas confining and killing animals such as fox, mink, chinchilla and rabbit solely for an unnecessary luxury item like fur is inhumane and cruel;

"We, the undersigned, believe fur farming is inherently cruel and we petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to consider implementing a ban on fur farming."

You can see that I have quite a few here. I will send them down with page Milind.

ORGANIC PRODUCTS

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

"Whereas Canada is now the fifth largest organic market in the world and expanding by over 10% annually;

"Whereas the federal government adopted the Canada organic standards in 2009 for products labelled organic that are traded outside of their province of origin;

"Whereas the Canada Organic Trade Association rated Ontario lowest amongst all provinces for regulation, support and development of organic products;

"Whereas anyone in Ontario is free to use the term 'organic' on any product, even if they are not certified, as long as they do not use the logo or trade across provincial borders;

"Whereas this opens the door to fraud as the market grows, and whereas five other provinces have already enacted organic legislation to address this gap;

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

"To pass Bill 153, Organic Products Act, 2017."

I agree with this and will pass it off to page Michael.

LYME DISEASE

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario does not have a strategy on Lyme disease; and

"Whereas the Public Health Agency of Canada is developing an Action Plan on Lyme Disease; and

"Whereas Toronto Public Health says that transmission of the disease requires the tick to be attached for 24 hours, so early intervention and diagnosis is of primary importance; and

"Whereas a motion was introduced to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario encouraging the government to adopt a strategy on Lyme disease, while taking into account the impact the disease has upon individuals and families in Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the government of Ontario to develop an integrated strategy on Lyme disease consistent with the action plan of the Public Health Agency of Canada, taking into account available treatments, accessibility issues and the efficacy of the currently available diagnostic mechanisms. In so doing, it should consult with representatives of the health care community and patients' groups within one year."

I wholeheartedly support this. I affix my name to it and send it with page Eva.

DENTAL CARE

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I have a petition that is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas lack of access to dental care affects overall health and well-being, and poor oral health is linked to diabetes, cardiovascular, respiratory disease, and Alzheimer's disease; and

"Whereas it is estimated that two to three million people in Ontario have not seen a dentist in the past year, mainly due to the cost of private dental services; and

"Whereas approximately every nine minutes a person in Ontario arrives at a hospital emergency room with a dental problem but can only get painkillers and antibiotics, and this costs the health care system at least \$31 million annually with no treatment of the problem;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in public oral health programs for low-income adults and seniors by:

"—ensuring that plans to reform the health care system include oral health so that vulnerable people in our communities have equitable access to the dental care they need to be healthy;

"—extending public dental programs for low-income children and youth within the next two years to include low-income adults and seniors; and

"—delivering public dental services in a cost-efficient way through publicly funded dental clinics such as public health units, community health centres and aboriginal health access centres to ensure primary oral health services are accessible to vulnerable people in Ontario."

I agree with this petition, will affix my name and send it to the table with page Emerson.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario on industrial wind turbines that states:

"Whereas residents of Ontario want an immediate moratorium on all further industrial wind farm development;

“Whereas residents living in close proximity to proposed turbine locations are concerned about the impact on their health, the local environment, declining property values and the lack of local decision-making on industrial wind farm projects;

“Whereas unaffordable subsidies paid through the feed-in tariff program are causing electricity rates to skyrocket;

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

“To place a moratorium on all further industrial wind farm development, restore local decision-making, and to cancel the feed-in tariff program.”

I support this petition, affix my signature to it and will give it to page Ariana.

PHARMACARE

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition that reads:

“Universal Pharmacare for All Ontarians.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas prescription medications are a part of health care, and people shouldn’t have to empty their wallets or rack up credit card bills to get the medicines they need;

“Whereas over 2.2 million Ontarians don’t have any prescription drug coverage and one in four Ontarians don’t take their medications as prescribed because they cannot afford the cost;

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“Whereas taking medications as prescribed can save lives and help people live better; and

“Whereas Canada urgently needs universal and comprehensive national pharmacare;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support a universal provincial pharmacare plan for all Ontarians.”

I couldn’t agree with this more. I’m going to affix my name to it and give it to page Eva to bring to the Clerk.

GO TRANSIT

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Member for Etobicoke North.

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Thank you, Speaker, for the recognition.

I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Cambridge, Ontario, is a municipality of over 125,000 people, many of whom commute into the greater Toronto area daily;

“Whereas the current commuting options available for travel between the Waterloo region and the GTA are inefficient and time-consuming, as well as environmentally damaging;

“Whereas the residents of Cambridge and the Waterloo region believe that they would be well-served by commuter rail transit that connects the region to the Milton line, and that this infrastructure would have

positive, tangible economic benefits to the province of Ontario;

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

“Direct crown agency Metrolinx to commission a feasibility study into building a rail line that connects the city of Cambridge to the GO train station in Milton, and to complete this study in a timely manner and communicate the results to the municipal government of Cambridge.”

I send this to you via page Rachel.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Unfortunately, this concludes the time we have available for petitions this afternoon. I regret that I wasn’t able to recognize everyone who had a petition today.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FAIR WORKPLACES, BETTER JOBS ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 POUR L’ÉQUITÉ EN MILIEU DE TRAVAIL ET DE MEILLEURS EMPLOIS

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 13, 2017, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 148, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 and the Labour Relations Act, 1995 and to make related amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 148, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d’emploi et la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail et apportant des modifications connexes à d’autres lois.

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

Mr. Mike Colle: It’s kind of difficult speaking today, given the horrific situation in Las Vegas and what happened to those innocent people, but I guess we have to continue on somehow.

I’m here to speak today to Bill 148, the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017. This is the beginning of second reading debate.

As you may know, Mr. Speaker, after first reading this bill went out for public consultation in 10 different communities across Ontario, which is pretty unusual. But given the complexity and the impacts of this bill, which is quite a game-changing bill, I think it was appropriate to go out and listen to people in Thunder Bay, Ottawa, Kingston, Toronto, Kitchener, and Niagara Falls.

I was in a lot of those public hearings, and it was very compelling to hear people on both sides of the issue. There were some compelling stories about how this change to labour relations laws might affect some employers, small and large. They were really sincere. They weren’t there for ideological reasons. They just said, “Some of these changes may be hard for us to handle.” On the other hand, there were also all kinds of people who came up and said, “I cannot survive on \$11.40 an

hour.” These were people who sometimes had two or three jobs. These were people who wanted to work, but they could not pay the rent at the end of the month. In fact, many of them got into debt at the end of the month and had to go to a cash advance or borrow money from family and friends. These were people who came before, made deputations—and, as I said, they were trying to put across their concern or their support for this legislation.

There’s no doubt the changes in this legislation are quite far-reaching in that the Labour Relations Act and the Employment Standards Act haven’t been updated, in some cases, in over 20 years. This update or modernization had to be done. Mr. Speaker, you’ll well know that the workplace in Ontario, in small and large communities, has changed. Most jobs people have that are full-time with benefits, a pension and full hours are a real gift. But what’s happening more and more is that there is more part-time work, temporary work and contract work, where you don’t know if you’re going to get the hours you want, you don’t know whether you’re going to be called in and you don’t know whether or not you’re going to have a paycheque in two or three weeks.

Again, there are over 1.6 million Ontarians who work hard and get paid minimum wage, or certainly under \$15 an hour. Therefore, they’re asking the Legislature—they’re asking, really, their employers, everyone, how we can deal with this income inequality in Ontario, where a lot of people, through their good fortune and hard work, are making a good living. They may belong to a union; they may work for a big company. They, God bless them, are making good money. But there are all kinds of people who find themselves working harder and harder, multiple jobs, and there’s a growing gap between those making more and more money and those who are working hard and, again, are not able to pay the rent. These are not people who want to go to social assistance, as we heard in the deputations across the province; these are people who want to work. What they’ve said loud and clear is that they need an increase in the minimum wage. The present rate we’re increasing minimum wage is just not going to do.

We had the workplace review, which went on for a couple of years, and they made a lot of recommendations that have been incorporated in this bill. For instance, after five years, the bill calls for at least three weeks of paid vacation every year. That’s a change, an improvement. It also calls for 10 personal emergency leave days, including two paid days, a year. Those are new provisions in Bill 148.

Employees can turn down a shift without fear of losing their job if they are not given four days’ notice. Employers must pay workers the equivalent of three hours’ wages when a shift is cancelled within 48 hours of a scheduled start time—another thing that employees asked for.

There’s also a provision here that says “equal pay for equal work.” It’s quite common, in Newmarket or in Clappison’s Corners, where you’ll have a full-time worker working beside a part-time worker. The full-time

worker in Clappison’s Corners is making twice as much as the part-time worker at Clappison’s Corners, working side by side on the job. Is it fair that that worker at Clappison’s Corners who is working part-time makes less than the worker right beside them who is employed full-time? One will make 11 bucks an hour; the other person will make 20 or 25 bucks an hour. That’s what happens right now.

This bill, Bill 148, calls for equal work for equal pay. I know that it’s a revolutionary idea that’s opposed by the critics. They say, “Well, we can’t have this,” and they’re opposed to the other provisions. We heard them. We’ve heard the big banks all across Canada—not all the big banks, but certainly TD. We heard Magna come out and say, “This is going to mean the end of the world as we know it.” Magna: I think that Frank Stronach made \$53 million when he was CEO of Magna—a \$53-million salary.

1340

It’s interesting. Magna forgets that when the Ontario taxpayers bailed out the auto industry, Magna was one of the big beneficiaries of the bailout. They were crying for help: “You’ve got to help the auto industry.” The taxpayers of Ontario bailed out the auto industry in 2008 and 2009. That was then. Now, all of a sudden, Magna and some of the big companies say, “Oh, this is going to be impossible.” Well, it’s a bit disappointing. I can see that they would have concerns—and they’re legitimate concerns in some part—but I think they sometimes protest too much.

I know that the CEO of Loblaws—a great Canadian company. I was really disappointed when I saw Galen Weston Jr. come out and say, “I don’t think we can do this. This is going to cut into our profits.” Multi-million-dollar profits every year—and God bless him. Loblaws employees are good people; it’s a good Canadian store, but it’s disappointing to see Galen Weston Jr. say they can’t do this.

You know what I think? We’ve got to look at the example of the CEO of Sobeys, another great Canadian company. Their president, Michael Medline—here’s what he said, which is quite refreshing. This is completely opposite to some of the others. The Magna CEO is saying, or the Loblaws CEO, or the Toronto-Dominion Bank, they say, “No, we can’t do it.” The CEO of Sobeys says:

“We’re trying to have our employees be a competitive advantage even more than they are today, so the idea of financing that off of fewer employees to serve our customers is counterproductive and doesn’t really fit the values I like. So therefore, we’ll be finding savings but it won’t be on the backs of our teammates,” Medline said in an interview after the company reported earnings.”

Here’s the example that you would think others would follow, especially these big companies: Find a way of ensuring that your workers are appreciated with a living wage. That’s what we’re talking about here. The wage will go up to \$14 from \$11.60 in the first year, and then it would go up to \$15. Is it challenging for some small

employers? Yes, there will be some challenges. That's why the minister of small business and the Minister of Economic Development have been talking to small businesses, have been talking to different sectors, trying to find ways of helping in the transition and finding ways of helping them get through this, because ultimately, there has to be a change, but sometimes change is difficult. Therefore, we're looking at ways of helping people transition through this.

Again, as I said at the beginning, at some of the deputations across the province we heard loud and clear about some of the challenges that the increased minimum wage and the new labour laws that have come in place—greater labour protections. Some of them said, “Don't bring in those labour law changes now.” The rapidly changing workplace really cries out for more support for workers. I'm sure, if you look around in your own communities, you'll see that more and more people are working at minimum wage, temporary, as I said, and contract wage. They don't have a pension; they don't even know if they're going to be working a month from now. Many of them work two or three jobs. Again, these are people who want to work; they're not asking for a handout. They're just saying, “Give us a fair, living wage.”

Whether it's the price of gasoline at the pump or whether it's the price of milk, the millionaire pays the same for the gasoline fill-up at the pump as does the minimum wage worker. There's no discount if you're poor. Therefore, the minimum wage worker pays the same for many products as the person who's making good money. God bless the millionaires and the people who are making good money; we don't begrudge them, but what we do is say that we want working people to get a fair wage.

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Colle: I know that my Conservative friends are against that. The Conservatives feel that everything is fine in their world. Well, we want to say loud and clear, Mr. Speaker, that everything is not fine for minimum wage workers, for temporary workers or for precarious workers. The need to help these people is quite apparent. So maybe my Conservative colleagues should start asking working people what they think of the minimum wage—not to ask the bank CEOs, not to ask the Magna CEOs. Ask working people what they think about paying the bills, paying the rent, and about the need to get rid of this income inequality.

As we've said before, in Ontario we've had very good economic activity and growth in the last number of years, thanks to the hard-working people of Ontario, the entrepreneurial spirit of Ontario, the get-up-and-go of the people of Ontario. The economy is doing quite well. It's never doing as well as we want, but it's doing quite well. This is why we think that now is the appropriate time to share some of the economic gains with working people who work on the margins. These are people who don't ask for any handouts.

These are people like Etta. She worked her whole life as a bookkeeper. She is about 68 years of age. Etta works

as a crossing guard to supplement her income. She works selling Avon products. She even walks children back and forth at the end of the school day. She came to me—I remember it very clearly. She said, “Mike, is it okay, because I can't make ends meet, despite all my jobs”—despite working her whole life—“can I apply to get some food support at the food bank?”

This is not uncommon in communities across Ontario, where people are working hard. But if you're working hard and making 11 or 12 bucks an hour, you cannot keep pace with the cost of living because the rent, especially if you live in the GTA—if you're making 11 bucks an hour and you're paying 1,000 bucks or 1,200 bucks a month rent, and if you've got kids and are paying for their clothes and paying to put food on the table. At the end of each month, these people are saying, “All this work that I do—I need some help. I can't seem to make ends meet month after month after month.”

That's why we heard in the delegations that came—we heard from some small businesses. We heard from the city of Cambridge and the companies that do business with the city of Cambridge, who said that they give everybody a living wage. What a revolutionary idea: a living wage.

I know the Conservatives don't believe in a living wage. It's sad that the Conservatives are so opposed to helping working people. I just, for the life of me, can't believe who they think would be hurt by giving people a couple of more bucks an hour. These are people who want to work. These are people who have families, have to pay rent, have to pay for food, and right now, if you ask them, they are not able to make ends meet. So they're asking their employers to work with them, to give them better protection on the job, to improve labour conditions and labour protections so they can work safely and have reasonable hours and get equal pay for equal work. On top of that, they're saying, “Give us an increase to the minimum wage.”

Then the big Conservative economists come and say, “Well, this going to be the end of the world as we know it, so don't do it.” But we know for sure—we heard from the \$15 and Fairness campaign; we heard from a professor from the University of Waterloo at the deputations—

Interjection.

1350

Mr. Mike Colle: The New Democrats were against an \$11 minimum wage, so don't talk.

Anyway, what they said is that when a person who is working minimum wage makes more money, they're going to spend the money locally. If they get that \$14 an hour, \$15 an hour, they're not going to spend the money offshore. They're going to spend the money in the local community, buying milk, groceries, shoes. When the local workers get a few more dollars, they're going to spend them at their local stores, so it helps the local economy. The big Conservative economists, the Fraser Institute and all these right-wing think tanks don't talk about that. They don't talk about the money being spent locally

by these working people who are going to buy more shoes, perhaps buy more food for their kids, and pay the rent. The Conservatives don't like this. I'd like to hear their explanation of why they don't like people who are working hard to get a fair wage. And if they think \$11.40 is a fair wage, well, I don't know what planet they're living on.

That's why, after all these consultations about improving the workplace, one thing that came out loud and clear from all the delegations was, if you're going to really help people, sure, strengthen our labour laws, but ultimately you've got to get to the point of reducing the income gap. We need to do something to make sure people at the bottom of the wage scale get a few more dollars in their pockets so they can live a good life after they work hard.

Again, I just find the Conservatives totally out to lunch on this. How they can attack working people who—all they ask for is, "I want to work." These are people who want to work. Give them a few more dollars, and they say, "No. Give the money to the CEOs of TD Bank or Magna." I think they have enough money. Give it to the working people.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's always a privilege to get up in this House.

It is hard when I hear some of the words opposite come across here, because the studies are showing that—the Financial Accountability Officer—a very inefficient way of helping the people in poverty. That's all we can expect out of this government. People are coming and they can't make ends meet anymore.

Last week, I had a person come in, Dennis, from my riding, talking about needing help. He's 71 years old. He said, "I can't retire. I can't afford—my pension, to live without working. I would like to quit working. I'd like to retire but I can't afford to under this government."

Costs and benefits—this government has not helped anybody.

Let's be frank: The only reason they're getting serious about this is because the polls are so bad and people are starting to hold them accountable for all the trouble and the increases and costs that they've caused over the last 14 years. You have to remember, they are taking more than double the revenue than when they came to power, and we don't see the results. It's wasted and squandered—windmills in my riding going up—to the large corporations that gave donations. They want to talk about where the money is going. It's going back to their own people, their own donors. What do another 390 windmills do in this province when we already have a surplus? Should we not be putting that money towards poverty, targeting the groups who need help, instead of this scattergun approach that's going to sound good to everybody but doesn't do anybody any good? We're talking about the cost of living going up more than \$1,500 next year, just to cover the costs of this legislation.

We know there have to be some changes. We're not arguing with the part-time. But one of the biggest

offenders is the government. We're talking about the LCBO—people in my riding working 14 years and still part-time. That's a government job. They have the ability to change that, but they've done nothing. It's time something happens.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I listened intently to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence in his debate, and he made some really interesting comments. He said people cannot make it in today's Ontario. Well, that's because the minimum wage has been low for so long. We have been calling on this government to increase the minimum wage. They increased it just a little over a year ago to \$11.40 an hour and thought that they were making a miraculous move. Now all of sudden people can't afford to live on \$11.40. Welcome to this planet, because that was one of the comments he made: "What planet are people living on?"

Well, this is the planet that people are living on. People have not been able to afford to live in this province for quite some time, so I'm happy that they're moving forward with the \$15 minimum wage, but it's really probably too little, too late. People know that this is an election ploy for the government. They really don't have the people's best interest at heart. They have the Liberals' best interest at heart in making it through another election. I can't see it happening.

Do you know, Speaker, that the number of people working more than one part-time job to make ends meet has jumped 20% since Premier Wynne has become Premier in this province? Some 20%—people are working harder and harder. They're working more jobs. They're making less. It's just not okay.

Something else that the member talked about—it may be for a different conversation. He talked about Magna being the beneficiary of an auto bailout. If we're not putting stipulations onto companies when we're bailing them out, then whose fault is that? We should be working to ensure that jobs are sustainable in the province of Ontario.

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

Mr. Joe Dickson: It's an honour and a pleasure to stand and speak in reference to Bill 148. The synopsis is, of course, that probably everyone here in this forum wants to see those people in need benefit fairly from Ontario's growing economy. While business is expanding and creating wealth, not everyone is feeling it.

I recall, back a couple of years ago, when a very good member here—actually, he was a Tory member, Jerry Ouellette. We were at a public function in Durham region. A question was asked: "What can you do to better improve the economy, better improve one's life and help provide a living wage for a lot of people?" It came up at that discussion. He said, "There's one simple thing. You've already started it, and it's going to be the greatest benefactor in all of Durham region, and that's the 407 east extension. That helps create more jobs."

If you've ever been out to Durham region, you'll see it's all the way along to Harmony Road in Oshawa and it's on the way to Highway 115 which runs north and south and will go all the way to Peterborough. So it's a win-win-win, and Jerry's statement was eloquent. This will lead you to pay up to \$15—starting at \$15 an hour by 2019.

I was talking to my wife late one night and she said, "Do we have anyone in that category"—because I'm not involved with the business in Ajax—"that is lower than the minimum wage, or right around it?" I said, "I don't know." So we went and checked and, sure enough, we have an employee who is just over the minimum wage, so they're in the \$12 range. As an incentive to that employee, we explained to them that this legislation hopefully will pass as quickly as possible, so we bumped it ever so slightly—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I find it interesting that with 14 years to get to the \$15 minimum wage, if that's where we want to go, and all of a sudden the light goes on and "Boy, our poll numbers are in the tank so we better get this done." Hopefully it will prop them up a little bit.

But I also find it interesting that we have seen hydro rates increase. Hydro rates increased 300% over this last number of years, and that's what has contributed to people not being able to pay their bills. It's interesting that, had the NDP not propped up this government when we had a minority here, probably we wouldn't have the Green Energy Act around today. I think they have to take some responsibility for that.

1400

Even the Premier said a number of years ago that she favoured a phased-in approach to increasing the minimum wage, and now we are in the position that we are going to increase the minimum wage 30-some per cent on January 1. Nobody is arguing that people don't need more money; it's just that the period of time that they're doing this is going to be difficult on a number of businesses to accept that. We are getting calls from different businesses to say, "We're going to have an issue hiring students this summer because of the fast increase in the minimum wage."

I think it's too bad this is happening. Businesses are the job creators, in case nobody on the other side of the floor knows that. If you put too much pressure on them, they are going to maybe do some drastic things in order to keep their businesses or they're going to go out of business, or maybe some more of them are going to move south of the border. If you haven't considered that, then I wish that you would consider that as we go forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. The member for Eglinton–Lawrence can now reply.

Mr. Mike Colle: I thank the members from Stornont–Dundas, Hamilton Mountain, Perth–Wellington and Pickering–Ajax for their comments. There's a lot to respond to.

I just want to say again that, since 2003, we have raised the minimum wage 10 times, and what we found is that, at this point in time, when we did the workplace review, which was comprehensive, the word came back, loud and clear, from all the advocacy groups, all the people who care about working conditions, that, "Ultimately, you can do all these labour reforms, but you've got to do something about the minimum wage," and the normal increase wasn't going to be enough. We listened to them and said, "Okay, we're going to increase it to \$14 and then \$15."

I know this is hard for the Conservatives to understand, but you can't just talk to business. You've got to also talk to working people. All they say is, "We want to work hard, we want to continue to do what we can, but we're having a challenge because the minimum wage is too low, because we can't get enough hours and because we don't have equal pay for equal work." These are the things that working people are saying.

Certainly you're going to have the right-wing think-tanks oppose this, and some of the big corporations, but on the other hand, in the long run this is about ensuring that people who want to work get a living wage and continue to work. This is not about windmills and all these things the Tories want to talk about; this is about working people. They talk about windmills. We're talking about hard-working people. Many of them are adults. It's not just students—working people. They keep talking about windmills. We want to talk about working people in Bill 148.

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'll be sharing my time with the member from Nipissing.

I think I'm going to start off by suggesting that members on all sides of the aisle remember that inscription about "Hear the other side" that's inscribed in the walls here. Hearing the other side doesn't mean just listening to the other members in here; it's to listen and hear the other side of the debate and of the consequences of policy. I know that the member from Eglinton–Lawrence thinks that if you're a corporation and if you're a business and if you make money, you're an evil, terrible, greedy person and this government must rein them in, constrain them and prevent people from investing in our province, in our country, prevent them from creating employment and creating prosperity and wealth. I think it behooves the members on the other side to listen to the other side and hear the other side.

In 2009, we saw this Liberal government bring out a public policy called the Green Energy Act. They told everybody that this was about—it was all green and warm and fuzzy. It was going to save the world from climate change, and it was going to improve everybody's lives.

Fast-forward a few years, and, of course, electricity rates have gone up by over 300%. Fast-forward a few years, and you see that we have energy poverty in this province. We have tens of thousands and hundreds of

thousands of people who can't afford their electricity bills, all because of a public policy initiated by this government in advance of the 2011 election.

We now see the same playbook being used in advance of next year's general election.

Don't forget, in that Green Energy Act, what also was a consequence was not just high and unaffordable electricity rates, but a loss of over 300,000 jobs. That's what the Liberal government was prepared to accept to continue and to retain power.

Today, we have Bill 148 and the similarities, to me, are striking. They are willing to jeopardize hundreds of thousands of jobs. They are willing to jeopardize tens of thousands of businesses for their electoral gains next year.

In 2009, we saw the loss of the Ford plants, we saw the loss of the Hershey plant and Gibbard's plant—all kinds of major industrial players in this province. Those were seen, but unseen were all those individual people who lost their jobs. The same is going to happen with Bill 148. We're going to see an exodus of businesses. We're going to see a loss of employment opportunities for youth, for new Canadians, the people who don't have the language skills and the employment skills necessary. Those are the people that minimum wage is supposed to protect, but those are the ones who are going to have fewer job opportunities.

Speaker, you couple this bill, Bill 148, with the federal Liberal attack on businesses with the federal tax changes—and I have heard directly from many people that they are leaving this province. Indeed, I saw a Facebook post from a good acquaintance of mine, a doctor, an orthopedic surgeon in Perth, on the weekend that with the federal tax changes, he's out of here. He's leaving this province. He's leaving this country. That's what is going to happen with this attack by both the provincial Liberals and the federal Liberals on our small business sectors.

This is going to make the loss of our manufacturing sector pale in comparison to what this attack is going to do to our small and medium enterprises and also to the most vulnerable of workers, those workers who are new to this province, new to this country, those workers who don't have the best language skills, the youth and the new entry workers into the workplace. They are not going to have the opportunities.

Speaker, I want to put this fact out on the record as well: Ontario has just about the largest percentage of our workforce making minimum wage than any province in this country. Indeed, there is only one province in this country that has more people working at minimum wage as a percentage of their workforce than Ontario, and that's that economic powerhouse of PEI. PEI has 9.1% of their workforce working at minimum wage. We have 8.9% of our workforce at minimum wage.

What is this government doing? It is going to expand the minimum wage workforce. There will be more and more people making minimum wage in this province as a result of this government. With that, I can absolutely be sure that we will surpass PEI as far as having the most

minimum wage workers in this country. That's not a goal I think we ought to be advancing. It's not an objective or purpose that has much benefit.

1410

We ought to be trying to elevate everybody's prosperity, not just increase the size of the minimum wage workforce.

Let me just put that into some comparison. I know the other side will say, "Oh, blah, blah, blah, this is a right-wing think tank, and blah, blah, blah." Alberta has 1.8% of its workforce working at minimum wage—1.8%. We have 9%.

What are we doing wrong in this province? I think it's pretty clear, what's going wrong. We have a government who is more interested in their electoral fortunes than the good fortunes and the commonwealth of the people of this province. That's what has been wrong. It was wrong in 2009 with the Green Energy Act, when they killed our manufacturing sector. Now they're willing to kill employment opportunities for those new immigrants, those new Canadians, those youth and entry workers. They want to kill opportunities for the very people that the minimum wage was intended to protect.

They're trying to transform the minimum wage protecting those vulnerable people into a benchmark Liberal wage. That's what we're seeing happening with this government. Their playbook—I'm telling you, listening to the member from Eglinton—Lawrence and other members from the Liberal side, I think they got their talking points from Hugo Chavez somewhere along the line here, and not just from the Premier's office.

But I'll go back: Hear the other side. They ought not to be just hearing the Premier's office. They should be listening and talking to people like Dr. Roberts, who says, "I'm out of here. I don't want to live in a country where businesses, where professionals, where people who create employment are viewed as bad guys."

That's what this Liberal government is really putting forward, in conjunction with the federal Liberals. If you're a professional, if you employ people, if you have benefit to the communities, these fellas—

Miss Monique Taylor: Fellas?

Mr. Randy Hillier: These guys and gals, I guess I should say—the Liberal members think that you are a greedy, terrible person who must be constrained by their legislation.

Speaker, I want to share my time with the member from Nipissing.

I'm looking forward to other comments on the debate this afternoon. But be clear: Between the federal taxation policies and this labour legislation, there won't be much left in this province other than Liberal fundraisers, I guess, and their attempt to retain power at any cost.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good afternoon, Speaker.

I've got several letters from North Bay organizations and businesses. But first, I would like to launch in with this: I think it's important that we get to \$15 an hour. I

don't think that's even in the debate. I think it's the timing, Speaker. So when you see the letters I have from our businesses in North Bay, they agree with that philosophy that it's just too soon. It's happening too quickly.

Rahn Plastics, a long-time company, has been there as long as I can remember, in North Bay. Rahn Plastics, writing to me, "is in favour of many aspects of Bill 148; however, a 32% wage increase is not financially sustainable for all companies. It must be done in a way that won't devastate or break companies. The goal is to have workers employed, but this drastic increase will cause job losses for sure! This will not only affect minimum wage workers but it will offset a chain reaction for other more senior workers as well." They go on to say, "Should minimum wage be increased? Absolutely, but it needs to be done in a way that won't break businesses."

The tourism industry association are writing to express their industry's concerns, including the speed at which many legislative changes are proposed. They tell me that of these businesses in Ontario, approximately 846 businesses and 10,133 jobs are located within my riding of Nipissing. They are saying these members will be significantly impacted if businesses are not given sufficient time to implement changes proposed in Bill 148.

The North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce—I was proud to be the president back there in 1986—has grown, and continues to grow and be a voice of business. They tell us that there's no economic impact done by this government, so they've done one for us. It talks about: a \$23-billion hit to business over the next two years alone; 30,000 jobs at risk for youth under 25; 96,000 employees at risk are expected to be women. They tell us, of course—well, I'll repeat what the minister said when he said, "Just raise your prices." He said and the chamber says that this will increase everyday consumer goods and services by \$1,300 per household, on average, each and every year.

This is an email I received from Carolann Paquette:

"Good morning Vic,

"I just want to ask you if you can pass a message to" the Premier.

"Thank her for the hike in minimum wage ... now my boss had to cut back my full-time hours to account for the" upcoming "increase.

"Now I'm going to get less than I was before.

"Not a ... good decision.

"I have children ... now I'm worried even more how ... I'm going to make ends meet."

Carolann, we hope to get you some answers.

Speaker, last month, we saw the Ontario chamber and their partners come out with a report that says there will be 185,000 jobs at risk. There are all kinds of reports that I'm going to refer to now. Nobody is debating the job losses; all they're fighting over now is how many tens of thousands of people in Ontario are going to lose their jobs. The first who weighed in was the Financial Accountability Officer, our own legislative officer. He says and that group says it's 50,000 jobs, with job losses concentrated amongst teens and youth. He said, "There is

evidence to suggest that the job losses could be larger" than his estimate, as the increase is both "larger and more rapid than past experience, providing businesses with a greater incentive to reduce costs more aggressively."

The FAO concludes, "Since minimum wages target low-wage workers, but not necessarily low-income families, raising the minimum wage would be an inefficient policy tool for reducing overall poverty."

The Fraser Institute came out with their bulletin "Ontario Enters Uncharted Waters with a \$15 Minimum Wage." They suggest that a rapid increase will have harmful unintended consequences—we pass a threshold. They talk about North Bay, as a matter of fact, as one community that will be particularly hard hit.

TD Economics published their economic assessment which forecasts "a net reduction in jobs of around 80-90k positions by the end of the decade."

They conclude that the "relatively rapid speed of the implementation and"—this is new now—"its timing within the economic cycle are two factors that will likely accentuate the negative hit to Ontario employment."

With respect to the timing, they're saying it coincides with what they call "significantly slower economic growth." I'll get back to that in a second.

They say that we're "likely to endure a cyclical slowdown in both housing ... and household leverage, economic growth will likely slow sharply in the province."

They're suggesting, "These estimated job impacts could be mitigated by extending the implementation timeline."

Speaker, one after another after another has said it's the timeline. TD talks about the timing, as well. Why do they talk about the timing? And why do you think TD says that we're going to have significantly slower economic growth?

Well, it's interesting; I know that the labour minister announces frequently, including recently, that "The prosperity we're seeing in the Ontario economy now has to be shared by everybody..." That's it in a nutshell. That's the reasoning. That's their whole rationale.

1420

But the minister pushes this point. He stood in the Legislature—I've said this one before—and announced, "It's true that the Ontario economy is doing very well ... manufacturing exports are up." Except that is not accurate, Speaker. A recent headline, "July Trade Deteriorates," leads the whole story that shows you that Ontario exports fell 22% this summer. StatsCan just last week released their data showing manufacturing sales suffered their largest decline in eight years. But the minister doubled down with, "We're leading the G7 in economic growth," and the finance minister piled on with "Ontario is ... number one in North America when it comes to economic growth." Except neither of those statements are even close to being accurate. Ontario's growth is not number one. We're tied for 28th place in North America—there are 27 US states ahead of us.

So it's sad that StatsCan is being questioned by the Minister of Labour, Speaker. These are StatsCan figures.

It's Stats Canada who is telling us that we've tumbled. But you see, the problem here is that these facts from StatsCan don't quite align with the government's narrative and their talking points, so oops. They now realize that their premise of why this is being rushed in has no basis in fact.

If that wasn't enough, let me read you just some headlines that complete the picture. These are headlines only that I picked out in the month of September. "Exports Languish: International merchandise exports fell, ... while imports edged higher." We're shipping less, getting more—not built in the States—brought in. "Manufacturing sales slipped in a widespread decline across industries." This is universal across industries, Speaker; this isn't just one. "Retail sales cool" is another headline. "Ontario ranks 44th"—that's out of 60—"in labour market rankings." Here's another one that's very strong: "Once-powerful Ontario Now a Fiscal Laggard in Canada." And another one: "Canadian Incomes Jump, Ontario Residents Hit by Manufacturing Downturn." And the final one, "Ontario: Fiscal Leader to Fiscal Laggard."

Again, the minister's narrative doesn't line up with the facts, when they continue to—in fact, in the *Globe and Mail* today was the same quote about the fact that our economy is doing well and manufacturing exports are up. I couldn't believe that when I read it.

I have said this in the Legislature before—recently. I would have hoped that the government would pick up on those points, that you're going to have to change your talking points and your narrative. It does not any longer line up with the facts, Speaker. That is indeed why we end up with letters from people like TJ, who says, "I'm having another sleepless night again." It's "4:31 a.m. in the morning, hear our voice, small business owners, and if you plan to be fair, then be fair to everyone. Please come up with a plan that doesn't put the entire burden on small business...."

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to stand in the House. Today we're having a fulsome debate on Bill 148.

I think everyone in the House agrees that the minimum wage is too low in Ontario. I was at one of the committee hearings in North Bay, and we heard from both sides of the issue. I had a nice long talk with some constituents in my office. Bruno Lepage owns one of the famous poutine stands in Sturgeon Falls—best poutine, best fries in Ontario. He had the same concerns that the government—and the NDP has been pushing for \$15 for a long time; we've also been saying that, in sectors that can't buffer that shock, they are going to need some offsets. For years, the Liberal government has been saying, "These guys are off the wall. We don't need to do that." And now, when we're coming close to the election, they're trying to do this, not to benefit the people who need more money, the people who need an adequate standard of living; what they're trying to do is, they're doing this for their own purposes and they're catching

employers by surprise. And employers, many of them, rightfully so, are very worried because there doesn't seem to be any rhyme or reason to how this government is acting. What employers are demanding and what employers need—and what Bruno Lepage needs—is stability. He needs to know how he's going to cope with this.

It's the same as with the Liberal changes to income tax federally: It's not that changes are not perhaps warranted; it's how they do it. They throw it out like bombs for their own purpose.

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

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'm pleased again to just make a couple of quick comments on Bill 148 and to attempt to answer any opposition spokespeople. Some people say that it's not important to go to the minimum wage of \$14 an hour in 2018 and \$15 in 2019. I disagree. Business is concerned about additional costs, and that's fair game. My business in Ajax was started some 60 years ago. Obviously, I started it as a teenager. Many days, many weeks, particularly Fridays, I never knew if I was getting a paycheque—that's as a business owner—because the people who got paid first and always were the employees.

Our Premier, fortunately, is always looking for better ways to do it, and I know there will always be changes to help this out.

Two things you should look at: one, children, and two would be the economy. For the economy, I just have a quote from a UFCW rep: "One of the ways that I think that minimum wage will actually help is that people will earn more money. It generates an economic stimulus in your local economy."

Secondly, of course, is children. What is more primary in our life than children? This is by a doctor who is a medical officer of health: "We also welcome the proposed increases to minimum wage. Public health research shows very clearly that raising income is the best way to improve people's health. We anticipate a positive impact on both physical and mental health as a result of the increase to minimum wage and a particularly large impact on improving outcomes for children."

I don't know how you can say no to a child or no to improving the economy.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: As always, it's an honour to be able to stand in this place and speak on behalf of the constituents of Niagara West—Glanbrook. Today, I have the honour of being able to respond to the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington and the member for Nipissing's comments and debate on Bill 148.

This bill that we're speaking about today has a lot of different aspects that I wish to address, but because of the limited time, I do want to touch on something the member for Ajax—Pickering actually mentioned: young people. He feels that this bill will help young people, and I wanted to say, as perhaps one of the more youthful

members of the Legislature here today and one of the more youthful members who has a lot of peers who are concerned about the direction of this legislation—they're concerned that they're going to be losing some of their jobs, that they're going to be losing some of their part-time work while they're in university. That is a very real concern that many of them have.

In fact, I know people who have already been laid off in preparation for January 1. I know people who work at coffee shops who have been laid off because the coffee shop owners have said, "Look, we want to be able to keep you on but we're already going to have to make adjustments to acknowledge the speed with which this is being implemented."

I think the government is incredibly naive to think they can push major changes through like this. We're talking a 32% increase in input costs over 15 months. The socialist government of British Columbia says that by 2021 is too quick. They don't want to have a \$15 minimum wage by 2021. They're taking a step back and they're saying, "You know what? Let's think about this. Let's realize the impact. Let's realize that this takes some time to adjust to for businesses."

But no, this government feels they have to ram this down job creators' throats without giving them enough time to figure out how they're going to deal with this. It's going to hurt youth; it's going to hurt families. I think we need make sure we have a proper economic impact analysis that's done before this type of legislation is pushed through this House.

1430

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

Miss Monique Taylor: It has definitely been an interesting debate here in the Legislature today.

It really is always a pleasure to be able to stand and speak on behalf of the people of Hamilton Mountain.

You know, Speaker, the question comes down to, how did this all begin? How did we get so far behind? I believe the Conservatives started this years ago when they were in government, with the minimum wage being so low. Then the Liberal government has been there for 14 years and has penny-stepped the people on minimum wage for years. And now that they're under threat of an election, they heed the call of what the people of this province are calling for, and that has been the \$15 minimum wage. The fairness campaign has been going on for some time.

The government could have taken the time when it all began, way back in 2016, to actually put together a proper plan to help small business, but they didn't want to do that, because they wanted no part of the \$15 minimum wage. Now, all of a sudden, an election is coming, everybody in the province knows that the Liberals are at threat of losing government, and wow, we have a \$15 minimum wage dropped in front of this House to be pushed through quickly, without the proper amenities to support small business. That is what the debate is about in this House today.

It's unfortunate, but I really don't think that the Conservatives have a better plan to move the people forward in this province. I mean, they have a leader who was calling for right-to-work legislation, who voted against labour bills—attacks on unionized workers. He stood with Tim Hudak in the 100,000 job cuts. The Conservatives—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

The member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington can now reply.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you to all the members for joining in this afternoon's debate.

I'm going to wrap up by just saying that I believe the Liberal government is being insincere and disingenuous with this bill. They are not trying to improve the wherewithal and the commonwealth for individuals—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw his unparliamentary comment.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'll withdraw.

But this is about their electoral fortunes for next year. They do not care that there will be tens of thousands, tens and tens of thousands of people—new Canadians, new refugees, new immigrants to this country, our youth and entry workers—who will not have employment opportunities.

Just for the record, according to StatsCan, the latest evidence is that 88% of minimum wage earners in 2012 lived in households above the poverty line. Who is this going to help? Who is it really going to help?

Another study on the minimum wage, done by Campolieti, Gunderson and Lee in 2012, said "that minimum wages do not have a statistically significant effect on poverty...."

If they actually want to improve the wherewithal and the prosperity of people, this is not how you go about doing it, Speaker. You don't do it by taking away job opportunities, employment opportunities. The TD Bank, Mr. Ed Clark's famous institution that provides so much advice to this Liberal government, has stated that approximately 90,000 jobs will be lost because of this policy.

Why are you so callous? Why do you not care about those youth and those new Canadians who will not have employment opportunities in a Liberal Ontario?

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 148, the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act. I want to begin by recognizing the efforts of my colleague the MPP for Welland, who is the labour critic for our caucus, for the work that she has done on this file. She certainly brings a deep knowledge of labour issues from her experience at ONA and demonstrated a very strong grasp of the issues and a responsiveness to the concerns that were brought to the committee that heard public input on first reading of this bill.

I also want to express my profound thanks to the labour movement and all of those activists who partici-

pated in the \$15 and Fairness campaign, who can truly take credit for having pushed the government to where we are today, because certainly if the labour movement hadn't mobilized to the extent that they had and let the government know that any electoral prospects they held out for themselves relied on suddenly pushing forward with a \$15 minimum wage—without that effort, we would not be here today discussing this bill.

I want to encourage all of the members of this Legislature to read the one-hour speech by my colleague the MPP for Welland, in which she touches on many of the concerns that were brought to the committee. Also, she represented the NDP caucus in the amendments that we brought forward to improve the bill before it came back for today's second reading debate.

I have to say, Speaker, that it is indeed unfortunate that none of the amendments the NDP brought forward to this bill, which were solidly grounded in the input the committee had received, are reflected in this second reading legislation that we have before us today. But the good news is that we'll have another chance to try to fix this bill, to strengthen this bill, to truly address the issues and concerns that working people in this province have raised about this legislation.

Unfortunately, given my limited time today, I am going to focus my remarks very specifically just on the Employment Standards Act provisions of Bill 148. This does not in any way reflect any lack of concern with the Labour Relations Act provisions of the bill. However, as NDP critic for women's issues and also for advanced education and skills development, it is the ESA provisions of the bill that are most relevant to my critic responsibilities, so that's what I'm going to focus on.

I want to begin that look at those ESA amendments by referring to the debate that we left off with last Thursday during private members' public business. MPPs who participated in that debate will recall that there was unanimous support for a private member's bill, Bill 157, that was brought forward by my leader, NDP leader Andrea Horvath, to ensure paid leave for domestic violence and sexual violence.

During the committee hearings on first reading of Bill 148, there were over 200 submissions made to the committee. The vast majority of these submissions emphasized the need to provide designated paid leave for domestic violence/sexual violence. The Liberals had brought forward a proposal to have personal emergency leave, two days of which would be paid, and that leave could be used for a variety of factors including domestic violence and sexual violence. Clearly, Speaker, this was not good enough.

We heard repeatedly from presenter after presenter that this is going to endanger women; it's going to force women to have to choose to stay in an abusive relationship because they couldn't afford to take unpaid leave. If they had used their two paid days of personal emergency leave to deal with a burst pipe or the sickness of a child, then when they were in a crisis situation caused by an incident of domestic violence, they would have to decide:

Can they afford to take unpaid leave to deal with the results of that violence? Many of the presenters said no. This is forcing women to have to choose between their job and their safety, and it is unacceptable. There must be designated paid leave.

1440

I just want to read to you from what was said to the committee by a representative of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. She said:

"As teachers, we see the effects of domestic violence. We see it in our colleagues who are survivors; we see it in children who bring this pain and mental anguish with them to school where it impacts their work and academic achievement; we see it in parents who are survivors. We've seen colleagues go through tremendous suffering. As victims not of their own choosing, they experience a whirlwind of emotions: shock, grief, despair, guilt, anxiety, denial, anger, self-doubt, depression, insecurity, disbelief and on and on, often all at once. They are in crisis.

"The suffering does not end at home either, as it goes to work with them. Sometimes it is a harassing phone call or a threatening text. In one extreme case in Mississauga, an estranged husband followed his wife to school and shot her to death in the school parking lot."

Speaker, I had a similar experience in my own community of London when I was chair of the Thames Valley District School Board. We had a grade 6 teacher at one of our schools, Ashley Oaks Public School, who was murdered by her intimate partner. I can tell you, Speaker, it was devastating for many of us in the school board. It brought home how the implications and the impact of domestic violence have a very, very real and profound effect on co-workers and on the entire community.

Another presentation that was made to the committee cited a report that was done by the Conference Board of Canada. The Conference Board of Canada found in that report, which was called *Domestic Violence and the Role of the Employer*, that "71% of employers reported experiencing a situation where it was necessary to protect a victim of domestic abuse." They further noted, "While many workplaces have been proactive in this area, few employers offer training and education."

That, Speaker, is why so many deputants came to the committee and said that there needed to be designated paid leave for domestic violence and sexual violence, and there also needed to be training to accompany that leave. There needed to be training to sensitize employers to employees who come forward with a disclosure and need to access that leave, and there needs to be training for co-workers to make them aware of the warning signs that there may be a co-worker who is experiencing domestic violence and sexual violence.

Certainly, in the bill that we have before us today, the Liberals moved a tiny little step toward addressing the concerns. They created a new category of domestic or sexual violence leave that allows employees to take 10 days of leave or 15 weeks of leave. They further went on

to state that under the 10-days-of-leave provisions, if an employee takes any part of a day as leave, the leave will be deemed to be the entire day. Under the 15-weeks clause of the bill, if an employee takes any part of a week as leave, the leave will be deemed to be a full week of leave.

There's nothing in the government's amendments that we are debating today that talks about paid leave. That really is the critical piece.

There was a letter that went to the Premier on September 27 from OAITH, the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses, the Canadian Labour Congress, and the Ontario Federation of Labour. They emphasize that the government's amendments fall short of providing the support and job protection that are critical to survivors of domestic violence and sexual violence. They highlight the unintended results of not providing dedicated paid DVSV leave, and that would be survivors not being able to access the leave when they require it because they can't afford to take the time off work. Paid leave is also important because of the dynamics of power and control in abusive relationships. Research shows that over 90% of DVSV survivors experience financial control. If accessing unpaid leave results in a lower paycheque than the abuser is expecting, there may be serious consequences for the worker—again, an unintended result of not providing a paid leave. They urgently emphasize the need for the government to go where it should have gone in the first place and provide not only designated domestic violence and sexual violence leave, but paid leave.

That is why, last Thursday, we debated Bill 157, which would do exactly that. It would ensure that every survivor of domestic violence and sexual violence is able to access up to 10 days of paid leave to heal from the trauma and to deal with the abuse and the violence they had experienced.

That bill calls on the provincial treasury to cover the cost of that paid leave. This makes sense because we know, from studies that were done nationally, that domestic violence has an annual cost of \$7.4 billion across the Canadian economy—that is, costs to social services and to the criminal and civil justice systems; costs to employers in productivity decreases and distractedness; and costs for counselling and for the pain and suffering, of course, of the victim.

We also know that sexual violence has a similar impact on the economy. The cost of sexual violence is \$4.8 billion a year across this country. Again, this is in terms of the cost to victims—the medical services, the lost productivity, the pain and suffering; and also the costs to society—the cost of operating a criminal justice system and social services and employer losses.

We are shouldering an economic burden because of domestic violence and sexual violence. Allowing women who have experienced domestic violence and sexual violence to keep their employment while they are dealing with violence is one of the most important things that we can do to support survivors and enable people who have

experienced domestic violence or sexual violence to leave the abusive relationship and move on with their lives. So this would actually reduce the economic costs associated with these forms of violence.

Oh, my goodness, the time is flying.

The other aspect of the bill that I wanted to address was around equal pay for equal work. I want to commend the efforts of my colleague the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton on his bringing forward of an initiative to protect temporary workers: to ensure that temporary workers who are doing the exact same job as the person they are working beside receive the same level of compensation.

The problem is that the language that the government has insisted on using, which refers to employees who are doing “substantially the same kind of work,” opens up all kinds of loopholes—which are very problematic—for employers to be able to say, “Well, it's kind of the same, but it's not substantially the same. Therefore, we're going to continue to justify a lower rate of pay.”

This is an issue that was raised very effectively—although not effectively enough, because the Liberals refused to make any changes. This was an issue that was raised by the Ontario Equal Pay Coalition. They talked about the fact that there is current language in the Employment Standards Act that talks about equal pay for equal work. That language has been in place for years. However, that language has not effectively addressed the gender wage gap. It has really done nothing to reduce the gender wage gap, which has remained stalled at 30% for so many years.

1450

The Equal Pay Coalition talked about the need to change the language from “substantially the same kind of work” to “similar work,” which would really help ensure that temporary workers, that part-time workers, that contract workers were being paid as they should be paid for doing essentially the same work—similar work—to what is being performed by other workers in the workplace.

This was also an issue that was repeatedly raised with the committee by faculty associations. Again, on September 28, OCUFA, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, sent a letter to the Premier reiterating its view that the language “substantially the same” has to be strengthened, has to be tightened, has to be changed to “similar” work if there is truly going to be the protection that workers need, because it simply provides too much scope for employers to continue to justify not providing equal pay for workers in the workplace.

That's why my colleague the member for Welland brought forward this amendment during clause-by-clause on Bill 148. You can be sure that we'll be bringing forward this amendment again after second reading, because it is so important, and we heard from so many people about the need for strengthened language to deal with this issue.

In the few minutes I have remaining, I wanted to touch on one additional aspect of the bill, and that is around the

new exemption that has been made for students who are studying in a program approved by a private career college.

Currently, in the Employment Standards Act, students who are studying at university or at colleges and are doing a work placement as part of their program are exempt from the Employment Standards Act.

We know that the government of Ontario has announced that every student in this province will have at least one experiential learning opportunity by the time they complete secondary school, and another experiential learning opportunity while they are studying at post-secondary. There are going to be more and more and more of these work placements occurring throughout this province, and that's a good thing.

What's not a good thing is if students are exploited when they are performing work as part of their program, but they're performing work for an employer and they're completely outside any legal protections of the Employment Standards Act.

I had a bill, Bill 64, the Protecting Interns and Creating a Learning Economy Act, that proposed a legal definition of "work-integrated learning" so that students who were participating in field placements, internships, practicums, or whatever they are called at their post-secondary program, have some legal protection—something to fall back on if the employer is not giving them a break for lunch or a break in the afternoon, or their vacation pay—because there is absolutely nothing in the Employment Standards Act to provide any kind of protection for students who are studying.

Instead of addressing that absence of protection in the Employment Standards Act, what does the Liberal government do? They expand that absence of protection to include 70,000 more students in this province, who will now be exempt from any kind of protection under the Employment Standards Act.

Speaker, I want to call on this Liberal government to take the opportunity, while second reading debate on Bill 148 is taking place, to look at this absence, to look at these exemptions and to truly address the issues that were raised during committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Before I invite questions and comments, I wish to recognize and welcome a former member of the Legislature who is with us here today: former member for Etobicoke Centre in the 38th, 39th, and 40th parliaments, Donna Cansfield. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature. Great to see you, and great to have you back.

Questions and comments? The member for Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Etobicoke North, Speaker. It's Etobicoke Centre day, I agree, with the presence of our honourable colleague Donna Cansfield.

As Donna would tell you herself were she in this seat right now, I don't think we officially accept, believe, verify or validate that the Tory party really wants to increase the minimum wage. In 1995, Ontario's minimum wage was \$6.85. Do you know what it was in 1996? The

same. In 1997? The same. In 1998? The same. In 1999? The same. In 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003? The same.

I would also just like to put out to our honourable colleague the MPP from Nipissing, who publishes the extraordinary newsletter Fedeli Focus on Finance, that if he does actually want to raise the minimum wage, I'd ask him to give us his time frame. What year would he put it at, the projected January 1, 2019, \$15 that we are now proposing?

Speaker, as has been mentioned, whether it is for the general prosperity of Ontarians in terms of economic stimulus or helping people to cross the poverty barrier, so many different things need to happen. That's why our government has not only increased the minimum wage 10 times—that's, by the way, 10 times more than the Tories did in eight years—we're now proposing it going up on January 1, 2019. Don't be fooled by imitations.

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

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm happy to join the debate today on Bill 148. I listened to the member from London West, who I thought did a very good job outlining a number of points regarding this legislation that we haven't talked about a lot here on the floor of the Legislature, so I would like to commend her for that.

I've said, since this legislation was introduced, that the government needs to just be careful when it comes to the unintended consequences of this legislation. I've already heard, in my riding and across the province, that this could lead to job losses, that it could lead to workers' hours being cut back, so that at the end of the day they could actually take home less pay at the end of every week.

But the one thing that I wanted to focus on today is my concern about consumer prices going up in the province of Ontario. I've talked to a number of seniors in my riding who are on a fixed income, people on OW and people on ODSP who are going to be faced with higher consumer costs. Of course, for those three groups of people—seniors on a fixed income and people on OW and ODSP—their income or revenue isn't growing to keep up to what could be the rising cost of products in Ontario.

For example, in the small town where I live, I visit a coffee shop every morning. When they first heard about Bill 148, the owner of the coffee shop was in tears. She said, "Will people pay an extra 50 cents or dollar for a cup of coffee because of the extra costs?"

Interjection: Oh, come on.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: No, this is the reality. I'm not sure how many of you on that side of the House have actually met a payroll, but it is true: Businesses are going to have to deal with this extra cost, and I would warn the government that there could be unintended consequences.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to have the opportunity to respond to the very thoughtful and well-educated remarks from my colleague from London West.

I love listening to her. I learn so much and I wish that others would do the same.

This debate has really focused on minimum wage. I'm glad to have that conversation. I'm glad to have it locally, I'm glad to have it with the folks who are going to benefit from the additional wages, and I'm also glad to have that conversation with our small and medium-sized businesses. It's a conversation that we need to have.

But I'm going to respond to the comments from my colleague that focused on the Employment Standards Act portion, because it really isn't a conversation we've been having. As she mentioned, from the countless submissions that came to committee that we're not seeing reflected in this legislation—the amendments weren't made. They're going unheeded, or halfway-heeded. There are a lot of token pieces in this legislation rather than understanding what was said and what we heard at committee and actually factoring that into the legislation. Halfway measures are not going to cut it.

1500

One of the things that she said specifically was about equal pay for equal work. The Ontario Equal Pay Coalition has made it clear that there needs to be a change in term from “substantially the same” to “similar” work to include and encompass more. Something we need to see from this government is some kind of intention to make things substantially better. It's so much lip service from them, and it's so frustrating. When we're talking about work experience, that's good. Work exploitation is bad. Here we have a government that—70,000 more; I'm not sure how to word it; students or spaces at the career colleges—to expand that lack of protections. That's the wrong direction. No surprise.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Hon. David Zimmer: And Reconciliation. That's important: and Reconciliation.

I want to say something about the consultation process here because not only do people in this chamber have views, but it's important what Ontarians outside this chamber think.

After first reading, the committee travelled to 10 cities throughout Ontario. It travelled to Thunder Bay, North Bay, Ottawa, Kingston, Windsor, London, Niagara, Kitchener–Waterloo, Hamilton and Toronto. In the course of those consultations, we received much advice on things that should be adjusted or changed. Our amendments will address some of these concerns of small business while protecting workers. In particular, we've added protections for domestic and sexual violence. We've also paid attention to and support some of the NDP amendments to this legislation. So it's been a thorough process of reconciliation and consultation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the questions and comments. The member for London West can now reply.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'd like to thank the members for Etobicoke North, Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, my colleague from Oshawa, and the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation for their comments.

I touched briefly on the issues that had been raised by faculty members. I want to elaborate a bit about why those issues are so important. In our post-secondary system, we have for the first time in this province passed the point where the majority of the funding is no longer coming from the government; the majority of the funding for the university sector is coming from students. It's raised through tuition dollars. We're almost at that point in the college system. We know that students in Ontario are paying higher tuition than anywhere else in the country, and yet when they go into our post-secondary institutions, they are very likely to be taught by contract faculty, by precarious university instructors who have no job security, who are living basically on below-minimum-wage incomes, who are having to reapply for their jobs every four months—sometimes for 20 years. People came to the committee and talked about having to do this year after year after year. So 50% of undergraduate students in our university sector are being taught by precarious contract faculty who are not being compensated the same as their peers for doing the same work and whose salaries represent about 4% of university budgets.

That is unacceptable; that is not fair. I think parents have a right to question and students have a right to question where their tuition dollars are going if they're not going to compensate faculty for teaching their classes.

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

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'm very pleased to join the discussion this afternoon on Bill 148. I'm going to be sharing my time with the member for Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale.

I want to use my time this afternoon to talk about the day that the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs visited my riding of Kitchener Centre. It was July 18. As you know, the committee toured a number of communities this past summer to get feedback from businesses, from organizations and from individuals on Bill 148.

The very first person that we heard from that day was a businessman by the name of Helmi Ansari. He and his wife, Mehreen, own a company called Grosche International. They sell tea and coffee accessories. Their warehouse is in the city of Cambridge, and they have a retail store in Guelph.

We have heard the opposition Conservatives this afternoon predict a very negative impact if we go to a minimum wage of \$15 an hour. But when Helmi came before our committee, he had a very different story to tell. He started his business 10 years ago with his wife in the laundry room of their house. They now have grown to 10 employees.

Helmi pays a living wage. He told us that, and he was very proud to tell us that. Here's why his employees are started now at \$16.50 an hour at both the warehouse and in the retail store.

A few years ago, one of his employees came to him to resign. At the time, Helmi was paying the minimum

wage. Helmi asked that employee—his favourite employee, who worked very hard—why he was quitting. The employee said, “Because of money.” He was going to get a job at an office supply retailer, and they were going to pay him about \$13.50 an hour. Helmi said, “If you stay, I will pay you more money.” He was not looking forward to the prospects of having to find a new person and having to train them, as that, of course, costs time and money. That employee decided to stay because he was offered more money.

Helmi says he came to the realization that, as an employer, he wanted to do one of four things: He wanted to take care of people—that’s his customers—he wanted to take care of his staff, he wanted to be a good steward for the environment, and he wanted to be a good local and global citizen in the economy. Those are his core values.

We’ve heard today what politicians think of Bill 148. We’ve heard predictions by the opposition Conservatives on how it’s going to spell gloom and doom. But I think that we really ought to be listening to businessmen like Helmi Ansari.

These are his own words; I want to share what he said to us. He said, “In retail, we were told you have to wait two or three years until you break even. Well, you know what? We pay a living wage, which, in Guelph, is \$16.50 an hour, and we were at break-even and we were profitable in year one. We think one of the reasons we were profitable and successful is because we take care of our staff, and our staff takes care of our customers.... That is the key to business growth.”

He goes on to say, “From a responsibility perspective, being good social citizens in the local economy, we were paying \$12.50 an hour when the minimum wage was \$10” an hour. “We thought we were doing okay. We thought, ‘Hey, we’re paying more than minimum. We must be good to our staff.’”

“When I learned about what a living wage was, and when I learned about the fact that people who worked for me, who I thought I cared about, were actually living near the poverty line, I had to really take a step back, take a deep breath and say, ‘I’m not really being true to what I profess is my business vision, my business philosophy, of taking care of my staff.’”

He concluded with this: “So we became a living wage employer; we became a living wage champion. As a result, we found that our turnover, especially at these levels of low wages, has been incredibly low. We’ve had no churn at that level. Our staff actually goes out and talks about our business, and they’re proud of working for a business that has these values and that tries to stay true to them, especially in retail. The engagement has been phenomenal.”

So, to those who are raising false alarms, trying to incite fear, on the other side of the House: The lived experiences of businessmen like Helmi Ansari and his family truly tell a different story. His philosophy—and we believe in it—is to take care of your employees; it’s good for the economy and it’s good for the bottom line.

We have heard the opposition Conservatives say that they’re against this bill. That’s disappointing. We look forward to getting support from the third party.

I now defer to my colleague.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: The Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act is about many things, but I want to tell you what it’s not about. It’s not about workers versus employers. It’s not about labour versus chambers of commerce. Rather, it’s about fairness and balance and trying as best we can to provide equal opportunities for people.

1510

It’s known, and a number of economic commenters have stated, that Ontario is outperforming every other province and all the G7 nations in terms of economic growth and job creation. But it’s also clear that not everyone is sharing in that benefit. In fact, I think it’s appropriate to say that with a rising tide, we should be lifting all boats—not the yachts, but all boats. I think that’s important.

I spent a lot of time this summer in farmers’ markets, coffee shops, attending backyard barbecues etc., and there’s an overwhelming consensus that we’re moving in the right direction. In fact, some polling I’ve seen indicates that 91% of Ontarians aspirationally embrace the \$15-per-hour minimum wage, and 71% think it should be immediate. By the way, 68% of rural Ontarians think it should be immediate.

I’m a little sensitive to some of the criticism coming from the other side. Our job is to listen to people and to respond as best we can to meet the needs of the focus as we see it. The best political advice I ever got was to tell the folk what’s broken and how you’re going to fix it. Well, there’s lots broken and there’s lots that we can do to fix it, but we’ve got to take a balanced approach to do that. We’re trying as best we can with that.

Now, the argument that we’re moving too far, too fast is interesting coming from a party that did too little for too long. The \$6.90-an-hour minimum wage for nine years is really incredible. And when you talk, also, about doing an economic impact study—I don’t recall any economic impact study that was done when a previous government, overnight, cut OW and ODSP rates 23%, right? You don’t think that had some impact on people?

Interjection.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: On vulnerable folk, yes. I’d much rather be accused of being part of a government that is moving too far, too fast than a government—the previous government sat on its hands for over nine years.

I don’t know if you know this or not, but 53 economists endorsed our plan. They talked about lower job turnovers and more on-the-job training, and they talked about fairness and they talked about how people would invest money that they came into—not in RRSPs; they’re not going out and buying RRSPs. Moms and dads would be going out to buy socks and underwear and shoes for their kids.

This is a real stretch when I hear from some folk about how inappropriate it is to try to lift everybody up. There’s

an overwhelming consensus, I think, that we're moving in the right direction. You know, the reference to income levels and health I think is important and one that I understand.

We need to keep at this. We need to work together. I think the \$15-minimum-wage argument, by the way, has left undiscussed many of the other progressive things that we're trying to do in the bill, particularly around allowing our brothers and sisters to organize together and such.

With that, I want to say that I intend to support the bill. I think it's about fairness. I think it's about bending the world a little bit towards social justice. Do I think it's gone far enough? No, I don't. I still think we need to keep working at it.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: That was rather short, but I guess to the point is how the member across the way likes to do things.

You know, Speaker, we have been talking about whether minimum wage is justified at this time or whether it's not. The short time that that has been brought in, we have been listening to businesses and different agencies and whatever, to the pros and cons of it. I wonder, Speaker—I had a thought about this whole debate. What's better than minimum wage? A job that pays more.

I was at the Stratford home builders' association meeting in Stratford on Friday, and I had quite a conversation with one of the carpenters there. He owns his own business. He said, "This minimum wage debate has been going on for a while, but you know what the big issue here is? We don't have tradespeople to fill the jobs we have right now." Perhaps if this government and the education system had pointed more young folks to the trades, we might not be having this debate right now. They need carpenters, they need electricians—I'm talking about Perth–Wellington. I'm sure this is something that's going on around the province. They need electricians, they need plumbers, they need carpenters, all kinds of people in the trades in our area, and yet the young folks in high school are not being directed that way, as they should be.

It's all right to go to university or to somewhere of higher learning, but not all young folks want to do that. They'd rather work with their hands. Mechanics are in short supply.

If this government had had their focus on that instead of on policies that got rid of 300,000 jobs in manufacturing, like they did a couple of years ago, I'm sure that we might not be debating this right now.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to respond to the remarks from the member for Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale about Bill 148. I wanted to focus specifically on the \$15 minimum wage, which I know has been the most common aspect of this bill that people have remarked upon.

One of our concerns—and this was a concern that the NDP attempted to address in committee, and we will try again after second reading—is about the exclusions that are in place in the legislation for the \$15 minimum wage. The legislation continues to exempt liquor servers and students from receiving that \$15 minimum wage. It sets lower wage rates for those categories of workers.

Women constitute nearly 75% of all liquor servers in this province, so the fact that there is a lower minimum wage for liquor servers disproportionately impacts women. We heard the government try to justify this lower wage rate by saying, "Well, they get tips." But of course, research shows that 20% of liquor servers actually earn less than the general minimum wage, even when their tips are factored in. So to say that they get tips, so it's okay, is not a justification at all.

The other thing is about students. When students are performing exactly the same work as the person they are working beside, they should get paid the same. Their age should not be a factor in how much they earn. They are trying to put themselves through post-secondary. Many of them are not even living with their parents. They have a right to support themselves at a wage that's the same as everybody else's.

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

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I just have a minute to talk, but I'd like to say that as a former kindergarten teacher, I saw many parents struggling, when they got a call all of a sudden to come to one of the two or three jobs they had, to try to arrange it so that they could come get their child after school or the after-school daycare and get them off to someone whom they'd had to call at the last moment to look after their child so that they could go to work.

While some businesses are benefiting from Ontario's strong economy, we know that not everyone is. Quite frankly, the reality is that in Ontario, 30% of workers are making below \$15 an hour. My question to those who do not think this is right would be, could anyone bring up a family, or even have their own apartment, making that amount of money?

I know that Vancouver is the most expensive place to live. Toronto is number two. Barrie is number three, which would surprise a lot of people, but it is. I think that we are on the right track. I do not think that we should back down. This is a fairness issue, this is the right thing to do and we need to be proceeding in this direction and not slowing it down at all.

1520

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's always a privilege to rise here. We look at this legislation and, of course, the government just a short time ago was very happy to put in place the increase of minimum wage that we had just the other day, Friday, I believe.

But now, all of a sudden, it has become political. That's unfortunate, because I think the onus is on government to do the right thing. Studies are showing the num-

ber of people who will lose jobs—this legislation alone is forecast to raise the cost of living by more than \$1,500. There is a dollar out of that increase if you happen to be working full-time.

I think, if we point back to independent officers of the Legislature, they talked about this being a very inefficient way of dealing with poverty. Unfortunately, we have seen this over and over again where this government, either for one reason or another, won't do the right thing. This is a matter of doing the right thing.

We know there are changes that have to be done to labour. I know they criticize us for taking so long, but it has been 14 years since you have been in power, and sitting there lecturing us about not having done it back 14 years ago is a little rich. Because if you disagree and thought it had to be done, you had lots of time to do this, and you haven't. There need to be changes and I think we're wondering if it's like the hydro issue where they talked about how all of a sudden it became a problem—that the 300% was something people were happy to pay.

That's one of the reasons we are having people working longer hours, working multiple jobs. It's because the cost of living has become so high in this province. They have to look at themselves for that, because really, this government is responsible for those increases. The red tape, the cost of doing business, the loss of 300,000 manufacturing jobs—all done under this watch—the slowest growth in manufacturing in this country—back to this government who has been firmly in control.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the questions and comments. We return to the member for Kitchener Centre to respond.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I would like to thank the members from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale, Perth–Wellington, London West, Barrie and Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Again, here we are, a group of politicians. We're standing around, talking about how the minimum wage increase is going to impact people in this province. I want to give the final word in this discussion to Helmi Ansari. I mentioned him before. He's a Guelph businessman who appeared before the finance committee. He pays a living wage to his employees. Here are his words, and I want to end with this:

"I think people believe that when you pay a minimum wage, the staff can actually live on a minimum wage. I think clarifying that misunderstanding is the first part of that conversation, to help people understand what a living wage is as opposed to a minimum wage.

"The second part is, there's a lot of fear around this: 'When we start paying a living wage, we won't be able to survive, because our cost basis is going to go up.' Certainly, as a small business in a very competitive market environment, it is true that a rising cost basis initially does seem challenging, and it is challenging for business, especially those that are marginal....

"But when I look at phase 2, the next stage of this, when we do get to an economy where people are able to

buy things, I am really excited about this as a retailer, because a third of Ontarians are going to be able to afford the products that we're trying to sell—and maybe even more than a third, because of the cascading effect of the rising wages on the bottom end of the rung. I'm pretty excited as a retailer because I will see more consumers who are making this higher amount, and when they get their paycheque, they're going to be coming into my store and they're going to be able to buy my stuff. So, there's the bottom line.

Increasing the minimum wage is the right thing to do, it's the fair thing to do, and I will be supporting this bill.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I am thankful to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 148 and voice concerns of people in my riding. The government introduced Bill 148 on the last day of the spring session.

As someone who owned and ran a resort for 30 years, I was immediately concerned about how this bill would impact jobs in my riding. In June, I sent out a survey to some 2,000 businesses in Parry Sound–Muskoka. I received more than 200 responses, and I want to share with you those responses.

Asked how the government's planned increase in the minimum wage would impact their businesses, and invited to check all that apply:

- 17% said it would have no impact;
- not a single person said it would help their business;
- 18% said it would be a challenge but they would manage;
- 60% said they would raise prices;
- 45% said they would cut employee hours;
- 29% said they would lay off staff;
- 8% said they would close.

The proposal to require employees to be paid for three hours for shifts cancelled within 48 hours also received some strong responses. Almost 40% of businesses said they could not run their business this way, including restaurants, tourism operators, golf courses and construction companies. Many of these businesses indicated their operations are weather-dependent and they cannot schedule based on weather forecasts two days out.

Those businesses that have employees on call have concerns about the provision requiring three hours' pay for being on call. Of these businesses, 20% said they would raise prices, 31% said they would eliminate on-call services, and 42% said they were not sure how they would deal with this provision. The respondents most concerned about this provision are in the towing and snow removal businesses, obviously businesses where it is impossible to predict when services will be needed and what services are needed.

Perhaps the most disturbing statistic from the responses to my survey is that, when asked whether they would choose to start a business in Ontario now, 49% said no, 29% said they weren't sure, and only 21% said yes. Almost 80% weren't sure whether they would open a business in Ontario under the current conditions.

Over the past month or so, I have been visiting some of the businesses that responded to my survey. I've dropped in on businesses from South River at the north end of the riding to Port Severn on the southwest corner of the riding.

Last Friday, the Parry Sound chamber of commerce hosted a meeting where Karl Baldauf of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and I were invited to speak. I shared the local perspective and the results I have just relayed to you from my business survey; Mr. Baldauf's presentation highlighted some of the projected unintended consequences that would result from Bill 148.

He showed how the various projections for jobs put at risk in the first two years from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Financial Accountability Officer and the Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis were all very similar.

He emphasized the fact that most of those who were facing the highest risks were amongst Ontario's most vulnerable population, including those this legislation is claiming to help.

He also told us that, putting aside all other amendments, if the government were to slow down the rate at which the minimum wage changes are to be implemented, we could see a drastic reduction in the projected number of jobs at risk. In fact, he said that if the \$15 minimum wage were implemented over five years instead of over 15 months, 75% fewer jobs would be lost. Let me repeat that: If the government implemented the minimum wage changes over five years instead of 15 months, 75% fewer jobs would be lost.

This legislation was introduced and put through committee very quickly this summer, at a time when many businesses in Parry Sound–Muskoka are too busy to travel to present to a legislative committee. So I wanted to make sure the comments I received get on the record. I know some of them wrote to the committee, but I want every MPP here to hear how this is going to affect jobs in my riding.

One small resort operator told me they will consider closing for the winter months, laying off full-time and part-time staff. Another resort operator said they might close their food and beverage operations, again meaning fewer jobs. One of the larger resorts told me that they would hire fewer staff and guest services would suffer, but they couldn't raise prices enough to match this increase.

Tourism and hospitality are very labour-intensive businesses, Mr. Speaker. They employ a lot of people and, in particular, a lot of young people. They are very price-sensitive businesses, as well. If the prices go up, customers don't come back. Either they stay home or they go somewhere else.

1530

As one resort operator explained, "In our industry, our competition is not the resort next door; it is actually foreign operations on things such as cruise ships registered in ports of convenience to circumvent labour laws and in countries such as Cuba, where things like CPP and

EI do not exist. Resorts cannot simply raise prices or our customers will go elsewhere."

I visited Rick Breckbill at Severn Lodge in Port Severn. His family has run the lodge for generations. I have a long letter from him and I wanted to get part of it on the record.

"Dear Norm....

"We are supportive of a fair Ontario and are proud to be a strong, productive part of the rural Ontario economy which has supported generations of families and generated substantial tax revenues.

"The proposed legislation and short implementation period gives business no time to react or to compensate for these dramatic increases that amount to 15 years of minimum wage increases at once, based on the current inflation rate. The tourism and hospitality industry is a delicate balance of so many factors, including seasonality, weather, contracts, suppliers, and competitive global economic factors. The short time for implementation drastically affects all business planning that will more than likely halt any capital improvements and provide us with no clear understanding of the inevitable rising costs of doing business. The provisions in the Changing Workplaces Review would definitely challenge the viability of our business." He has three pages of the letter, but I just wanted to highlight that one part of it.

Don's Bakery in Bala is another iconic tourist attraction. Jana Foster wrote to the committee and told them, "The increase in minimum wage will severely impact us. We will raise prices and I'm not sure people will accept these changes and therefore this may be detrimental to our business and we may have to close our 70-year-old traditional business that many have come to love."

Don's Bakery will be facing this challenge at the same time as traffic is disrupted in downtown Bala by the construction of the Bala Falls project. I really hope they can survive this double-barrelled attack.

Someone else who wrote to the committee was Kathy Sheridan, owner of Reflections of Muskoka on the main street of Huntsville. "I have been in business in Huntsville for 30 years. Raising the minimum wage will make me consider closing my business and retiring. We have a hard enough battle with the big box stores moving in and online shopping."

Another store owner, this one in Parry Sound, said that she already pays \$15 per hour in order to attract better candidates for positions. "If that becomes the bottom of the pay scale, I can't compete. I cannot raise what I pay—increased wages and the corresponding employer costs will mean that I will have to scale back on staffing and work more myself, more than five days a week."

This was something I heard from a number of employers: that they would simply take on more of the work themselves and hire fewer people or offer staff fewer hours. Not only does this hurt the employees in the short term; it hurts business in the long term. As one sports store owner said, "We will have to cut employee hours, which means owners taking more time away from building the business to simply run it."

One convenience store owner who has two stores said that he would likely close one location and work more hours himself. He also commented that if the government is raising the minimum wage, they should also increase the commission rates on lottery tickets.

Businesses in smaller communities are especially concerned because this will not only hurt their business but their whole community. One gas station owner told me, "Small-town impact is big when you have to close early. We'll lose business; people will travel elsewhere and not come back."

A grocery store owner said, "We'll have to shorten store hours in the off season, forcing customers to shop out of town."

A café owner in a smaller community in my riding told me, "Because about 90% of my year-round clients are on a fixed income, I cannot raise my prices enough to compensate for this. I may have to close the doors. The government is not giving them a raise."

His comments were backed up by some individuals who have contacted my office. One senior from Huntsville wrote in to say, "We are seniors on a fixed income. What do we cut out next to afford the increases in the costs of goods that the wage increase will create?"

Another individual who was injured at work many years ago and lives off of workers' compensation payments is concerned that his income won't go up but that his costs will go up. What about those people on Ontario Works or ODSP? They will see their costs of living go up but won't see a similar increase. They are right. As I said before, 60% of businesses told me they would raise prices to adopt a higher minimum wage.

One restaurant owner in Huntsville said this: "Makes me wonder if I even want to be in business anymore. We have struggled for 38 years to make ends meet and keep our employees employed during the slow winter months even though the sales weren't there."

A large marina and boat retailer told me: "If I have to pay my unskilled employees \$15 per hour, my skilled workers who are currently making \$15 to \$16 an hour will want \$20; those making \$20 will want \$25, etc.... In addition my CPP and EI contributions will increase as they are based on a percentage. We currently pay 45% of every gross profit dollar to wages. This will escalate that to 48%. My competitors in the US and elsewhere in Canada have an average of 38% of gross profits going to labour costs."

On the scheduling issue: Many businesses were opposed to the provision requiring employees be paid three hours' wages for shifts cancelled within 48 hours, particularly weather-dependent businesses like golf courses, resorts, construction firms, restaurants with patios and tour operators.

How, for example, is a golf course supposed to pay its employees for three hours on a day when it rains? I met with a golf course company in Muskoka that has three 18-hole golf courses, and they pointed out that with the weather we had this spring—of course, it was raining just about all the time—they had a forecast on Thursday for a

sunny Saturday. All three courses were fully booked. Then, of course, Saturday rolled around and it rained, as it did most of this spring, and they ended up with six golfers in total for all three courses. Under the new rules, they would, with no revenue coming in, have to pay all of the staff scheduled to come in, despite having no business. The golf course business is a business that is quite marginal, and this company figured that the cost would be about \$2 million to them. I noticed that a Parry Sound golf course—talking about increasing prices—just announced that as a result of Bill 148, specifically cited, their rates are going up 7% next year.

On call: Another part of this bill that elicited some strong responses was the requirement to pay employees three hours' work for being on call. We live in Ontario; we have winter. Snowplow drivers are essentially on call for four or five months. I heard from landscaping firms that offer snowplowing services in the winter who said their prices will skyrocket just to pay the drivers for all the days it doesn't snow. In my riding, we could have people who won't be able to afford to contract a company to plow their driveway. What happens if they need to call an ambulance but their driveway hasn't been plowed? How are small municipalities with a population of 1,000 people or less—let me tell you, I have lots of those municipalities—going to afford to pay their snowplow drivers?

What about towing companies? I met with Doug Nelson, executive director of the Provincial Towing Association of Ontario, and he also wrote to the committee. He's based in Bracebridge, in Muskoka. He explained that the towing industry has already seen unprecedented increases in costs of doing business and that Ontario has seen a 25% reduction in the number of registered towing companies since 2014. The cost of having a light-duty tow operator on call will be \$75 per day; a heavy-duty tow operator \$125 per day. All in total, this bill could cost an average tow operator with 15 staff on call \$500,000 a year.

I want to quote from Doug Nelson's letter to the committee: "In rural Ontario and small cities things become even more complicated as many tow operators utilize drivers on call but seldom have more than a few after-hours calls per month. Our member in Windsor, for example, provides an average of 11 'after-hours' service calls per month. Using these figures and an average consumer price of \$100, the contractor would be in the red. Eleven calls times 100 means \$1,100 versus \$75 per day times 30 days equals \$2,250 in on-call labour costs, or a \$1,150 loss. On-call pay will more than double the payroll expenses. A cost of a simple boost or lockout would increase from \$75 to over \$200."

As a result, towing companies will have to double or even triple prices, or cancel after-hours services, or get out of the business entirely. If some towing companies get out of the business or stop offering 24/7 services, motorists will wait a lot longer when they need a tow truck. In the middle of winter, this could be dangerous. Someone could be waiting for hours in a disabled car

without heat. I ask this government, please consider the dangers this could pose and exempt emergency services like towing companies from this provision.

1540

All the comments I heard echoed the conclusions of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce that this legislation could cost 185,000 jobs across Ontario over the next two years. The Financial Accountability Officer agreed that this legislation will cost jobs. His estimate was 50,000 jobs or more, and mainly jobs held by young people.

In 2014, the Northern Policy Institute, an institution created by this government, released a report entitled *Minimum Wages: Good Politics, Bad Economics?* The executive summary starts as follows: "Increasing the minimum wage tends to be very popular with the general public and so is equally popular with politicians eager to secure the support of that public come election time. However, Morley Gunderson outlines here, yet again, that good politics does not necessarily translate into good economics." I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that this bill has more to do with an election next June 7 than anything else.

The gentleman who wrote this paper, Dr. Morley Gunderson, is a professor at the Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources in the department of economics at the University of Toronto. Dr. Gunderson warns that the unintended consequences of significant minimum wage increases could hurt the very people the policy was intended to help.

He's right. A restaurant owner in Parry Sound told me, "I will be reducing staff wherever possible to reduce costs. This will mostly be part-time people who work one or two shifts a week. Unfortunately, they would tend to be students and single mothers."

Dr. Gunderson concludes: "Consistent with evidence-based policy making and the negative effects outlined ... make the minimum wage increases modest, where 'modest' would be determined by the economic conditions of the time and especially the state of the youth labour market. As the expression goes: 'As long as the floor is not raised too much, the roof is not likely to fall in.'"

So this government isn't listening to business, either individual businesses or the chamber of commerce. They aren't listening to their own advisers, like the Northern Policy Institute or the Financial Accountability Officer. The government refused our suggestion of requiring an independent economic analysis before implementing these changes, so they aren't willing to listen to that.

Perhaps they will listen to Santa Claus, or rather, the owner of Santa's Village in Bracebridge. The committee received a letter from the owner, Mr. Dunkley. He wrote to the committee, and I want to read from this letter:

"Our main concern with the proposed legislation is the magnitude of the increase and the short time period over which it is" being "phased in. Anyone who has ever managed a small business will tell you that a 33% increase in labour costs over such a short period is an impossible challenge to overcome. This will lead to business closures and job losses, as it will leave employers

with no alternatives.... This will force some businesses to eat into capital that would otherwise be used to grow the business thereby creating additional jobs. In many cases it will ultimately force businesses to close."

Mr. Dunkley goes on: "I implore you to think of the family-owned restaurants, convenience stores and resorts in Ontario that will have no choice but to close. For those businesses lucky enough to have access to capital, automation to reduce employment levels may serve as a lifeline to sustainability, but this will mean fewer jobs in Ontario. To ensure the survival of our business and to protect the livelihoods and futures of as many of our employees as possible, we have already started plans to reduce paid positions next year using automation as a direct result of the government's action."

Finally, I want to quote one last business owner, a restaurateur in Parry Sound, who summed up the PC position on this bill perfectly: "I am not against a minimum-wage increase ... I am, however, objecting to the accelerated process of this increase that puts a tremendous burden on the small business community only for the purpose of re-election."

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I must apologize. I came in partway through the comments being made by my friend from Parry Sound–Muskoka, so I don't know if he read into the record any letters or correspondence from people in his riding who actually look forward to an increase in minimum wage.

He reiterated the concerns of some small business people who have seen the glass as half empty on this issue. I hope the government is listening, because, obviously, they should be listening to the concerns of small business and coming up with ways to develop new policy to offset the costs that small business will have to go through because of this.

Having said that, I would also hope that the people who work in the small businesses in Muskoka, who work in the tourist trade in Muskoka, would be favourable towards an increase in the minimum wage. That will allow them to spend more money in the small businesses that they work for, or the small businesses across the street from where they work. I do see it as an opportunity for the people working in the tourist trade to put more nutritious food on the table, to put better shoes on the feet of their children, to put warmer jackets on the backs of their children as we go into the colder months. This increase will help those who don't have a lot of money to spend, because they're not really compensated that well, working part-time hours in tourist areas.

The bill is flawed; it can be improved. I hope that the government is listening and will improve it when it gets to the committee.

I thank you for your time this afternoon.

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

Mr. Arthur Potts: It gives me great pleasure to have a chance to respond to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

I want to pick up on the comments of the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. The member, in his speech, was being very selective in the research that he was using. He talked about my great friend Morley Gunderson, who taught me when I was at the University of Toronto in the industrial relations program many, many years ago. In Mr. Gunderson's remarks, he talks about how it "could have" this effect—he doesn't say it will—whereas the economists that we're listening to are saying very clearly—I've got here John Schmitt, of the Center for Economic and Policy Research: "Across all of the empirical research that has investigated the issue, minimum-wage increases are consistently associated with statistically significant and economically meaningful increases in the wages of affected workers" and there will be "no discernible effect on the employment prospects of low-wage workers."

So let's be very clear: Let's use the body of the evidence and not just rely on the naysayers and the people who just don't want to see people have a living wage.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I'm very pleased to stand this week and follow up on the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka's speech. I do enjoy following the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka and commenting on his speeches, because he does always bring great contributions to debate.

Today he did a very important thing, where he mentioned how these impacts will be detrimental to many of the small businesses in his riding.

I want to bring up very briefly, in the time that I have, the case of Tigchelaar Berry Farms in my riding, who spoke before the committee earlier this year.

Earlier, the member for Eglinton–Lawrence, in his debate, mentioned that all this spending is going to be done locally. But the reality is, we live in the 21st century. We live in a free-trade world. We live in a world where people are buying things from Amazon. Amazon is now the third-largest retailer, if I'm not mistaken, in the world. That means that when people are buying, they're not always spending locally. People aren't merely spending in their local economy. They're buying American goods. They're buying goods from other parts of our country.

We're an interjurisdictional economy, and that means it's very, very difficult for members of the agricultural community in my riding, who are doing their best to produce made-in-Ontario goods at competitive prices—as it is, they're being pressed by hydro prices, they're being pressed by cap-and-trade, and now they're being pressed by federal tax changes. On top of that, they're being told that their input costs are going to be shooting through the roof.

For a bottle of Ontario jam, it's going to be \$9, when you can go to Ohio and buy them for \$6. It's very, very difficult for them to remain competitive in this sort of environment. I urge the members opposite to pay meaningful attention to the sorts of damage that this can do.

I was told, when I came to this House, not to get too cynical. But when I look at the faces in the government benches and see the way they laugh at the sort of damage this is going to cause small business owners, it's difficult not to be cynical, and I will stand by that.

1550

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm just happy to be standing because I'm not that tall.

I can appreciate the comments made by my colleagues, but when I listen to the PCs talk about minimum wage, I can't help but stand up here and go back to Mike Harris. From 1996 to 2003, inflation in the province of Ontario—because we had a bit of a booming economy. Our economy was running okay and—

Mr. Randy Hillier: You should go back to 1990 and Bob Rae.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Let me finish, please. I'm being heckled by the PCs, and that's unfair because my comments are exactly what transpired between 1996 and 2003. What happened is, as inflation went up, so should have the minimum wage. That way, the people who work for minimum wage would have had the same opportunity to go to a small business or go to the store and be able to buy some of their products.

But do you know what happened during that time? Do you know how many times they raised the minimum wage? Anybody knows?

Interjections.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'll ask my buddies who are heckling me: How many times did you raise the minimum wage? Put your hand up; at least they're being honest. They've put their hands up—zero.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): You have to make your comments through the Chair. Continue.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Over the course of that time, what happened is, workers, which I was part of—I'm a worker, that's all I am; I went to work every day—never had the opportunity to get a minimum wage increase: \$6.85 for eight years. And what has happened today is, young people that you're talking about are having to work two or three jobs to make ends meet. But on Friday when they get their paycheque, do you know where they're going? They're going to the food bank, and that's disgraceful in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's it for our questions and comments for this round. The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka can reply.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thanks to the members from Niagara Falls, Niagara West–Glanbrook, Beaches–East York and Windsor–Tecumseh.

I'll maybe start with the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. The fact of the matter is, what's definitely going to happen—it has been borne out by all the various reports—is that costs are going to go up for sure.

The problem is, in a riding like Parry Sound–Muskoka, first of all, we have below-provincial income levels. The demographic is such that we have many more

seniors. Seniors are being forced to go to the food bank right now. With increased costs, they aren't going to see any benefit from this; all they're going to see is the increased cost. They're on a fixed income. They've already been forced, with very high increases in all their costs, especially hydro rates the last number of years—more and more of them are going to the food bank. All this bill is going to do is it's going to force even more of them to go to the food bank. They won't see any benefit. Anybody who is on Ontario Works, ODSP or workers' comp and all those seniors, of which I have a huge percentage in my riding, will not see any benefit. It will hurt them.

In the resort business, which is so important in my area, going back to Rick Breckbill from Severn Lodge, he points out, "The resort industry in Ontario has been crippled in recent years dealing with several severe recessions, geometric increases in labour rates, significantly higher costs for food, hydro, fuel and other. And now, with the proposed 32% increase in minimum wage scheduled over the next 18 months, we will have no recourse but to change the nature of our business and reduce even further our labour force." He points out that "over 80% of our employees are students whose job at Severn Lodge is a summer job, not a career job. They have no training and no skills when they come to us. All they bring to their job is a desire for a great summer experience while earning a little bit of money to help pay for their schooling or spending money during their school year."

This is going to really affect all those many businesses in Parry Sound–Muskoka. What I was doing, on this time I had to speak, was speaking for my constituents who have written to me, so many of them, on this bill.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm so pleased to stand in my place to talk about Bill 148. I had the joy and privilege to be part of the delegation processes that happened over the summer and was hoping that that process would actually result in some substantive changes to the legislation.

I want to give a special shout-out to the member from Welland, Cindy Forster, who helped shepherd this piece of legislation through this House to the best of her abilities as a third party member. She raised so many issues, so many gaps, actually, with regard to this piece of legislation, and I think it's so important for us to acknowledge the work that members do in this House.

You'll know, of course, that the member from Welland has had such a very difficult year and can connect Bill 148 to her own experience with regard to dealing with health care workers not only in Welland but in Toronto as well. She's been very forthcoming and very honest about what that experience looked like around the privatization and the contracting out of health care services as it related to her husband Brian's health. I've said publicly in this House that if the member from Welland had not been able to navigate, as a member of provincial Parliament, the health care system and all of

its respective contracting-out services, she believes, and I believe as well, that her husband would not have survived. She literally saved her husband's life, helping to navigate and holding this health care system to account.

That relates to Bill 148 on a number of levels. We should remember that this government has had almost two decades—17 years, 18 years by the time we go into election 2018—to make workplaces better for the workers in the province, to improve working conditions and to improve the home/work-life balance, and all of those issues that affect the quality of public services, quite honestly. This government, by all accounts, when it's all said and done, will have had close to 16 years to do something on workplace safety, the quality of those worker experiences in the province of Ontario.

People came out to these sessions, and one particular delegation stands with me, Mr. Speaker. This was an individual who worked three part-time jobs here in the GTA. He had a wife who also worked two part-time jobs, and they had two children for whom they struggled to cobble together child care. It was a very emotional presentation to this committee. We heard from various interests throughout the summer, but when an individual takes time off from his three part-time, very precarious contract work situations to come and speak to the legislators of this House, he has my full attention. He spoke about the quality of his family life. He talked about the fact that both he and his wife had early onset diabetes because of stress, because of exhaustion, because they really had very little time to do any kind of self-care as workers in Ontario.

It was interesting, because he was educated. He alluded to the fact that clearly he was struggling as a younger middle-aged professional to access this world of work in a significant way; in other words, to find a full-time job. In order to make ends meet, he had to work these three part-time jobs. He said he had very little time to be part of the family he helped create, to spend time with his children, to participate in the school community. At the end of it, he said he really felt that his employers were making use of the loopholes that existed in the Employment Standards Act. He was very clear on that.

So he took a great risk, if you think about it. Think about the courage it takes to be a precarious worker in the province of Ontario and take a day off to come and tell us, as lawmakers, that the law you crafted, Bill 148, through the Employment Standards Act and its respective other schedules, was insufficient. It wasn't going to fix the problem. His voice, his experience, should be truly respected.

I remember there was a member from the PC caucus who said, "Well, listen, if we increase the minimum wage, you're probably going to lose one of those three part-time jobs." You know what this man said? You can double-check it; it's part of Hansard. He said, "I deserve to live my life with dignity and with integrity."

1600

That should be the deciding factor in how we craft this legislation. It was a very powerful moment for me, and I

know that it was emotional for him, because he is one of the tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of Ontarians who are literally at the breaking point of trying to cobble together—they're hard workers. They want to be part of this economy. They want to contribute to the province of Ontario. And they are from every jurisdiction.

The member from Welland spoke very eloquently about, in particular, the health care workers. I've had this experience in my own riding, where the CCAC has now been absorbed into the LHIN and somehow, magically, that's going to solve all the problems. We all know that will not happen. Through that process—and across the entire province—the LHIN has been desperately trying to contract out the personal support workers. Now, PSWs are predominantly a female-dominated field. You would be hard-pressed, actually, to find many men, but they are there. Personal support workers enter the health care sector because they truly care about people and they want to be part of the solution on health care.

Quite honestly, for a long time in the province of Ontario, personal support workers have been holding the frayed fabric of our health care system together, God love them, but they also have reached this tipping point—this tipping which has been created by this government, which started a long time ago in the privatization of health care services. Quite honestly, when you listen to them, they get split shifts, so three hours in the morning to deal with some very vulnerable seniors—primarily seniors, but sometimes those who have great disabilities and are not able to take care of themselves independently—and then they get the split shift at the end of the day. And then they don't even get the mileage in between those particular jobs.

They can say that the job is physically demanding and it's emotionally demanding, but the thing that bothers them the most is leaving that 72-year-old in that hot apartment—or cold apartment, what have you—and knowing that that senior is not going to see anybody else that day. That is called emotional labour. Does this piece of legislation address any of those working standards for these marginalized workers? Who would have ever thought that people working in the health care field would be regarded as marginalized workers? Yet they are. They are voiceless, except come election time when they are promised a dollar here and a dollar there—as if that would fix the system.

So here you have the LHINs contracting out. The member from Welland did a much better job than me in addressing it, but she said that you can't have a for-profit operator who has a contract with the LHIN, no longer the CCAC—and at the end of the day, they are scheduled based on the money that the third-party operator wants to make. They have a profit agenda. That profit agenda trumps, supersedes and then undermines the level of service that health care workers in the province of Ontario are able to provide.

Why is that? Why has this Liberal government ceded full control of our health care system, particularly with

home care, to third-party operators? I ask you that honestly, because it doesn't make any sense. The Auditor General herself identified—and this is from the 2016 Auditor General report—that up to 40% of the home care funding was going to administration, it was going to bureaucracy and it was going for profit. This is not a health care system that can afford one dollar, never mind 40% of the home care dollars, which she costed out to be \$2.1 billion, going to the profit margin.

Mr. Randy Hillier: No, going to administration.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Going to the profit margin. You can't say it's just administration and bureaucracy.

Mr. Randy Hillier: That's what she said.

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, she said profit as well.

That's the lens that the PCs see this through, that profit is not bad, but there are some jurisdictions where profit should not trump public service. In fact, New Democrats would argue that with education, health care, public safety and the environment, profit should not factor in.

I'm going to identify now one of the key pieces that I think the member from Welland saw in Bill 148—and I think, actually, there could be possibly some agreement with the PC Party on this—in that there was some reluctance on the part of this government to address the worker experience, the quality of that work, this concept of equal pay for equal work—which we've heard. We've heard from the other side of this House, "Equal pay for equal work." Yet you have professors in the college system and in the university system in the province of Ontario who are doing equal work. They are professors in the classroom and our post-secondary institutions. They are delivering quality education services. They are supremely qualified, but they cannot get a full-time job—or even a full-time part-time job—in any of our institutions.

I'm going to tell you why this matters. This matters because you have a contract faculty member who teaches at York in the morning, then travels to Wilfrid Laurier University for the afternoon and sometimes does an evening class at the end of the day. It does not allow for research potential, research opportunities, which are one of the founding principles of our university institutions: that you build knowledge through investing in research and that you transfer that knowledge and that investment into the community to make our communities better. That's like a loss leader now, right? Then you have these faculty members who, by the end of the day—the classes are large. They don't have class room and extra time to give to their students. They're dropped in as if this is a McDonald's and they're just going to get a product for the money that they've paid—the highest tuition fees in the country.

These part-time contract faculty in the college system are going to go on strike. They're going to go on strike because they, too, have reached the tipping point in the province of Ontario. If you look at the contracted-out services of our post-secondary institutions, including our colleges, I hope that the majority of people in this House

who believe in the power, in the potential of education to address basic issues of inequality would admit that our post-secondary institutions should not be part of the problem around precarious contract work. They should not be part of the problem. They should not be balancing their \$100-million budgets on the backs of the custodians and the people who do the groundskeeping, and now the faculty.

College contract faculty issued their notice last week. On October 15, they could be going on strike, because they have no benefits, they have no security of their timetable; they are paid per class, sometimes \$7,500, sometimes \$8,200. Sometimes they don't know if they're going to be teaching in the semester, based on enrolment. There's no security. Who would have thought?

It's one thing for us to be talking, as I'm going to right now, about the temporary workers who were exposed in the Toronto Star article called "Undercover in Temp Nation." These are individuals—primarily new immigrants, primarily women—who the Employment Standards Act leaves massive gaps for around accountability, around safety, around payment, around tax revenue, around compliance, regulatory compliance; I talked about this issue last week.

This is where we are in the province of Ontario. You have the most vulnerable workers, who apparently have no rights, who are paid in cash under the table by a temp agency, who don't feel empowered enough to even talk about their rights as workers amidst unsafe work. Then you have the other side of the spectrum, the most educated people in the province—PhDs, professors. Conestoga, York, Western, Ryerson, U of T, Queen's—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Windsor.

Ms. Catherine Fife:—Windsor—

Mr. Wayne Gates: Niagara.

Ms. Catherine Fife:—Niagara. You have across this entire spectrum a reluctance to open up what we should be debating today, which is equal pay for equal work in our post-secondary institutions.

Then you have the occupational health and safety issues, which are prevalent in what this reporter—and I want to publicly thank this reporter—her name is Sara Mojtehdzadeh; I'm pretty sure I messed that up—and also Brendan Kennedy. This is an exposé from the Toronto Star from September 8. It addresses the food processing issues in our food processing factories, which are in all of our ridings, quite honestly. This particular one is called Fiera Foods.

1610

This reporter went undercover. She received the least amount of safety protocol: five minutes of training to deal with heavy equipment. She was advised of some basic skills around, obviously, not wearing nails and having some safety boots, but in the end, there was no responsibility or oversight in this regard. She says:

"I get about five minutes of training in a factory packed with industrial equipment.

"I am paid in cash with no deductions or pay stubs. I pick up my wages from a payday lender, a 35-minute bus ride from the factory.

"Fiera has been slapped with 191 orders for health and safety violations over the past two decades, for everything from lack of proper guarding on machines to unsafely stored gas cylinders.

"At least a dozen of the women I meet on my assembly line at Fiera, a multimillion-dollar company, are hired through temp agencies." This is also the company that doesn't want to pay a livable wage.

"Temp agency workers are changing the face of labour in Ontario." This has happened under this Liberal government's watch. "In workplaces around the province, the use of temp agencies limits companies' liability for accidents on the job, reduces their responsibility for employees' rights, and cuts costs," for the employer.

"In August, charges were laid against Fiera Foods under the Occupational Health and Safety Act for the 2016 death of a temp agency worker named Amina Diaby. Her hijab was caught in a machine, strangling her." This is a company that had 191 workplace safety violations, and she paid with her life. "She was 23 years old. She was a refugee trying to save for nursing school. She had been on the job two weeks." She clearly did not have the safety training that she needed.

Now, what's going to happen in this regard? Well, I can tell you: not much. This is a company that received government funding, both provincial funding and federal funding, for creating jobs. This would be the third death that happened at Fiera Foods. What happens, really, is that there is no responsibility when there are temp workers at a factory for WSIB to address them. I'm going to read this:

"The company has received multiple rebates from the WSIB for their low-injury claims rate over the past decade. This year, the compensation board did not issue it a rebate because of" this one particular death. "But non-fatal injuries to temp agency employees—if they are even claimed—wouldn't impact Fiera's insurance premiums."

This is a company that did not do their due diligence for workers. It has received government funding for creating jobs. It has not addressed systemic issues. It has found the loopholes in the Liberal government's current Employment Standards Act, which are gaping, which Bill 148 does not address—nor does it address the call for equal pay for equal work in our post-secondary institutions.

I have to say that by not opening the Occupational Health and Safety Act, it is a missed opportunity to address the systemic issues, because whatever happens after the next election, someone in this House is going to have to address it. We cannot let our workers in the province of Ontario go to work, get injured, not be able to claim WSIB services or not come home. We can be better than that, Mr. Speaker. We need to be better than that and Bill 148 needs to be stronger.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Before I invite questions and comments, I wish to welcome to the Legislature a former member who is visiting with us today, the former member for Halton Centre in the 36th

Parliament, Terence Young, in the west public gallery. Welcome.

Questions and comments?

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to respond to the member opposite. I do share many of her concerns as well. As she was recounting the stories of those workplace injuries and the work-arounds that companies go through sometimes to try and avoid responsibility—it's really quite incredible. I think that this bill does address a lot of these issues; in particular, with the situation that she's talking about.

We all expect, when we go to work or our kids go to work or our husbands or wives go to work, our family go to work, that they come home safe. So it's unacceptable what's happening there—totally unacceptable—and it's not good business either. Giving people a secure living, a secure workplace, is actually good economics. We've had a lot of debate about the minimum wage and I don't want to add on too much, but, you know, I hear the back-and-forth about that it's going to send more people to food banks or it's going to drive up prices.

The reality is that it's just reasonable and balanced that we can allow people, give people the opportunity, to do the kinds of things for themselves and their families that all of us take for granted. We have to remember that. When I look at a single mom of four kids, in my riding—and there are lots of them—working two and three jobs at minimum wage, and they still can't do all the things for their families that we all expect and take for granted. Not the big stuff; not the special stuff. Like a new pair of shoes for somebody, or a simple gift, or new clothing. So I think that when we are having this debate, we have to keep those vulnerable people in mind.

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

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: First of all, I would like to thank the member from Kitchener–Waterloo. Each time she stands up and speaks for the working poor, vulnerable people, I can feel that she really cares about people who are in strong need. Also, each time I listened to the members from the PC caucus, no one ever said they are opposing the \$15 minimum wage increase. Our concern is: too soon, too much. Now—

Interjections.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Okay. Let me continue.

I have only been here one year. So many small business owners came to see me and express their concerns: “MPP Cho,” or, “Raymond, I run a small restaurant. My dishwasher gets minimum wage—at the present time, \$11.40, and then soon it's going to be \$14 or \$15. Now, the cook, they get \$15. Do you think they will stay if a dishwasher gets \$15 and I pay them the same \$15? Either I have to close my business or I have to let go”—and he says, “We have about 50 employees”—“five people. If these five people lose their jobs, do you think that they will live with dignity? What about public assistance?”

I met another small business—she's not the owner, but a company representative. She said, “MPP Cho, econom-

ic development and labour had public consultation meetings. I went there. They didn't even give me hardly any chance to speak up.”

They were, “Oh, we did all of the consultation.” They are working so hard for the Liberal members to hang on to power, to get their jobs. It's not the small people.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I want to thank my friend and colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo for the passion that she brought to the debate this afternoon. She reminded us of the committee that travelled the province this summer, listening to delegations on this issue. She told us again of the gentleman who came and made a presentation and told the members of him working three jobs, his wife working two jobs—five jobs between them—at minimum wage, and when someone from the PC caucus said, “You're probably going to lose one of those jobs if the minimum wage goes up,” his response was, “I deserve to live my life with dignity and integrity.”

1620

That pretty well sums it up. We have people working part-time jobs, precarious jobs, jobs that can't be counted on, with no benefits, making minimum wage, working all hours of the day and night, sometimes on split shifts, as we heard: You come in for two or three hours in the morning, you go home, and you work for two or three hours in the evening. You also have children to raise, and after they go to bed, you go out to another part-time job. That's not dignity. That's not putting nutritious food on the table. That's not putting warm clothing on your children when they need it. That's not looking after your health care needs or their health care needs.

So when I hear people saying we might lose a few jobs if we raise the minimum wage, what about raising the standard of living in Ontario? What about giving people their dignity back? What about improving the quality of life for the working people in this province, the people who build this province and make our life enjoyable? They do it; they have to. We have to give them a better life as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Research and Innovation.

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's a pleasure to rise in this House and speak to Bill 148 on the Changing Workplaces Review.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, our economy is moving very fast. Actually, we are leading the G7 countries in terms of economic growth, and our businesses are growing very well as well, so it's time that every Ontarian benefits from the advantages we have created in our province of Ontario. It is fair.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, we have introduced free tuition for students coming from low-income families making less than \$50,000. That's 210,000 students in the province of Ontario this year, and they will continue to benefit from this benefit.

And we have introduced, starting on January 1, free medication for every single person in this province below

the age of 25. Also, we have come up with the fair electricity plan and the Fair Housing Plan. These are some of the measures we have introduced in the province of Ontario in order to help Ontarians.

Given all of these facts, it is now the time for Ontario to raise the minimum wage in order not only to help Ontarians and the working people of Ontario, but also to grow our economy. Based on the independent economists' study, in their view, increasing the minimum wage will actually help our economy to grow. In the meantime, it will help people to live in a better environment.

This bill not only increases the minimum wage to \$15 in two phases—\$14 starting January 1, 2018, and \$15 starting January 1, 2019—but it has various other elements as well which will in fact help Ontarians, particularly working-class Ontarians. I am fully supportive of this bill, and I urge all my colleagues in this House to also support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Kitchener–Waterloo can now reply.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I just want to quickly say that my focus is on the gaps in Bill 148. That's what I tried to draw attention to in this House. We of course support the minimum wage. We do support five paid sick or emergency leave days. Of course, and we brought it to the attention of this House last Thursday under Andrea Horwath's private member's bill, Bill 157, we support 10 days of paid leave, which would be provincially funded, for victims of intimate partner or domestic violence.

We brought these amendments to committee, and quite honestly, that was not received well by the government. They chose not to take action on that. They did support the private member's bill last week, so hopefully there's progress. But on the issue of workplace safety, this is the chance; this is the opportunity.

I just want to go back to this exposé on Fiera Foods, because the University of Waterloo professor, Professor MacEachen, says that the compensation system around WSIB in the province of Ontario "doesn't really reflect the safety in the workplace.... It doesn't hold (companies) responsible properly." Our labour critic, the member from Welland, brought this to our attention.

But going back to this journalist, when she went undercover, she said, "Even though I am at the factory full-time, I am legally an employee of Magnus Services." But Magnus Services "is owned by Aleksandr Ostrovsky, who lives in a sleek mansion in Richmond Hill." Not even he is directly responsible for the workplace's pay; it's Cashmania. There's a place called Cashmania which this company contracts out, so there's no direct line of accountability or oversight.

Essentially, you could create the best laws in the land—which currently do not exist in the province of Ontario—and nobody is held responsible. Not only did she not even get a report of record, there was no accountability whatsoever for her term of employment and therefore no accountability for safety. Bill 148 needs to be stronger.

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

Hon. Laura Albanese: I'm pleased to rise to speak in support of Bill 148. I will be sharing my time with the Minister of Community and Social Services, the member from Davenport and the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

The passage of this bill is of utmost importance for the millions of Ontarians who are finding it difficult—I would say very challenging—to support their families on a minimum wage that doesn't go far enough.

The reality is that in our province, even though we have an economy that is flourishing, 30% of our workers are making below \$15 an hour. That means that 30% of the people in our province are making below \$30,000 a year, and even less if they are not working full-time. We need to really address the concerns of those who worry about falling behind even though they're working so hard trying to get ahead.

I have the privilege to serve a constituency that is made up of many newcomers, many immigrants, and even low-income workers who find themselves in this situation and who would benefit greatly from this bill.

I think of young families that just have precarious work and can't get ahead. I think of single mothers and think of the time that they're not spending with their children. We know that that is really important, especially when you have a young family and children are involved.

Aside from the increase to the minimum wage to \$15 an hour in 2019, the bill also includes significant changes to our labour laws. I would like to highlight some of those.

Equal pay for equal work provisions for temporary health agency employees: This legislation would ensure that temporary health agency employees are paid equally to permanent employees of the clients when performing the same job. I think this would be significant to protect assignment employees from repercussions for inquiring about their wage rate or the wage rate of an employee of their client.

There are also provisions and changes for scheduling; for example, employees who regularly work for more than three hours a day but when they report to work are given less than three hours, must be paid three hours at their regular rate of pay. Employees would now be able to refuse to accept shifts without repercussions if their employers ask them to work with less than four days' notice. If a shift is cancelled within 48 hours of its start, employees must be paid three hours at their regular rate of pay.

When employees who are on call are not called in to work, they must be paid three hours at their regular rate of pay. There are many people who will wait by the phone only to be told that they're not working. That's very difficult for many people who, again, are caught themselves in this cycle of precarious work.

1630

Another thing I would like to mention is, for example, that the proposed bill would also make changes to physician notes for absences. The proposed changes

would prohibit employers from requesting a sick note from an employee taking personal emergency leave, and this would come into force on January 1, 2018.

There will also be a number of changes, for example, to the paid emergency leave, which currently applies only in workplaces with 50 or more employees. Under the proposed amendments, this threshold would be eliminated and would also ensure that all employees are entitled to 10 emergency leave days per year, including two paid emergency leave days. This change would also come into force in January 2018.

So there are a number of changes that I would like to highlight. My time is limited, but I will turn it over to my esteemed colleague the Minister of Community and Social Services, who will probably highlight some more.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: I'm just delighted to rise and speak very strongly in favour of this very progressive piece of legislation, the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act.

I think we know—at least we certainly should be very aware—that Ontario's economy is growing. We are, in fact, in a place where our unemployment rate is very low, but we also know that not everyone in Ontario is sharing in this good news of such a strong economy. People are now engaged in precarious work, part-time work, and they're not feeling the benefits of the growth that we're seeing. So we need to address the concerns of those people who are perhaps falling behind, even while they are working so hard to try to get ahead. It's certainly something I'm very aware of in my ministry. Of course, I believe it is government's role to ensure that there is fairness, and that people do have the opportunity to thrive and achieve their full potential and take advantage of the opportunities that do exist.

Because, of course, we did balance our budget this year, which was excellent news—I'm sure you are pleased with that, Mr. Speaker—we now have the opportunity to provide some of these opportunities for people. My colleagues have mentioned free tuition for post-secondary, expanded child care, free prescription drugs for anyone under 25. Of course, our basic income pilot, which is also a very important project, is yet another one of our ideas to ensure that people have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

One of the provisions of this bill that is particularly appealing to me as a physician is the two paid sick days. It is certainly a problem when people who are struggling feel they have to go to work when they're sick, possibly infecting others in the workplace, so this is a very progressive measure. The fact is that we're allowing leaves for family crises, things like our particular leave for domestic violence and sexual violence, where this is an issue that people are able to take the time away from the workplace. These are all incredibly important provisions.

On the health and safety side, we're hiring up to 173 more employment standards officers, and allowing some proactive inspection of workplaces, obviously to prevent problems related to health and safety.

I think it was really groundbreaking that we took this bill out for consultation after first reading. Our government is listening. A number of amendments have been made so far, and we continue to listen to business and to those affected by this legislation, and we're getting a lot of positive feedback.

I was particularly pleased to see that one of my former colleagues, the medical officer of health for Peterborough, Dr. Rosana Salvaterra, has stated, "Public health research shows very clearly that raising income is the best way to improve people's health. We anticipate a positive impact on both physical and mental health as a result of the increase to minimum wage, and a particularly large impact on improving outcomes for children." So there's a public health expert who has endorsed this bill.

Another one from an individual who is a representative of the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition, Rabbi Shalom Schachter: "If more money is put into the hands of low-income workers, they will purchase goods and services. This will create more jobs. So, we do not believe that these changes will have a negative impact. We believe that the economic studies that show in other jurisdictions that has not been the problem—in terms of people who are finding difficulty securing employment, again by putting more money into the economy, this is going to create more demand and more need for hiring."

I think the Minister of Labour has told us that he has some 53 economists who have written to him endorsing this approach. So I urge everyone in this House to vote in favour of this bill when the time comes, as it is extremely progressive and it's definitely the right way for Ontario to go.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Davenport.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I'm very happy to rise in the House this afternoon to speak on an important issue not just in my community of Davenport, but one that has resonated across the province. This bill before the House is one that does a lot to help Ontario workers and build our province up.

I want to remind members in the House here today and those watching that the Progressive Conservative Party had frozen the minimum wage, between 1996 and 2003, at \$6.85. Yesterday, October 1, the minimum wage went up. It is now at \$11.60 an hour, as of yesterday. Under this government, the minimum wage has increased by 70%.

I've been hearing concerns from my constituents on many of the issues that are in Bill 148 since I was elected in 2014. Since then, I've been speaking in caucus about many of the issues and many of the changes that the government is bringing forward in Bill 148. In my riding of Davenport, I've been taking meetings to speak with constituents about their experiences and what fair work means to them. I've met with organizations such as \$15 and Fairness and the social justice group that meets at the Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre in my riding of Davenport. I've been speaking in caucus about how we need to fight for sustainable

scheduling practices, equal pay for equal work, and a fair and livable minimum wage of \$15 per hour.

With the cost of housing having risen dramatically, especially in my riding of Davenport, and the cost of transit in Toronto continuing to rise, people who are making minimum wage in my community are struggling to get by and get ahead. Our plan to consistently increase the minimum wage by the rate of inflation has been better than the plan of the Conservatives and the NDP to play political games with the wages of our most vulnerable workers. But some fixed costs have been far outstripping inflation and leaving people in Davenport scrambling. That's why, for the past three years, I've written letters to the Minister of Labour and asked questions in the Legislature about what we are doing and how we can do more to ensure that all Ontarians can share in our economic prosperity.

That's why I was so glad when our government listened to people across the province and introduced legislation last session to create more opportunity and security for workers, the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act.

I was also glad to have been part of the committee that travelled across the province to listen to approximately 190 presentations from members of the public, businesses, labour organizations and advocacy groups about our plan.

One of the things we learned over the summer is that the changes we are making, like raising the minimum wage, aren't impossible for businesses across Ontario. Over the summer, we have heard from businesses, both large and small, across this province that have found ways to pay their employees a fair and livable wage.

1640

When we were on the road, we heard about the Social Planning Council of Sudbury, which is paying \$16 an hour. We heard about Muskoka Brewery in Bracebridge, which is paying a living wage—and I'm going to remind the member opposite that in Muskoka, the living wage is \$15.84. So how much longer does he want his constituents to struggle?

The success stories of paying people a living wage—the fact of the matter is that if business owners value their workers' time, they seem to be able to make their businesses viable.

Mr. Speaker, I know I have to leave some time for the honourable minister to speak, but I do want to just say that raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour is essential to ensuring that people in my riding of Davenport and across our province are not just scraping by, but have the opportunity to get ahead, to build careers, and to start and support families.

I encourage everyone in this chamber, everyone in this House, to vote for this very progressive bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

Hon. David Zimmer: Thank you, Speaker, for recognizing me so that I can speak for a few minutes on this.

There has been a lot of debate this afternoon, so what I want to do is just go over the highlights of this bill, so that the viewers can keep in mind the facts in this bill.

First, we're going to a minimum wage of \$15.

Number 2, there are a lot of provisions having to do with the notice for scheduling. In particular, there's going to be a three-hour minimum pay when a shift gets cut short or cancelled unexpectedly. That is only fair. There are people who are anticipating to start work at a particular time, and then at the last minute they're told not to come in. That sometimes creates chaos in their life, if they have child care or they have other events planned. Importantly, of course, they're deprived of that income that they had planned on to meet their weekly and monthly expenses.

However, there will be some exceptions to take into account the obvious pressures on business to accommodate that schedule, so there are built-in exceptions for weather-dependent work, for emergencies and for public safety. I think one of the members opposite in the official opposition made a big point about this. So those exceptions are built in.

There's also provision for two paid sick days.

There's provision for three weeks of vacation after five years of employment. I cannot think why an employer would not want to reward a five-year employee with the benefit of three weeks' vacation. Obviously, if the employee has been there for five years, that employee is doing something right and is making a valuable contribution to the business.

There are also various provisions that will support the concept of equal pay for equal work, regardless of whether it's full-time, part-time, seasonal or temporary. Often, the contribution that part-time and temporary workers make is just as vital, just as important, as what full-time workers make, and so they should receive pay equal to the pay of full-time workers.

There are also various leave provisions, so that one can take proper time to take care of themselves and their family. Those leave provisions revolve around child death leave, crime-related child disappearance leave, and pregnancy leave.

These kinds of leave are designed to remove the anxiety from the employee, which will probably—with this leave to deal with these onerous family responsibilities—in the long run, make them a better employee and enable them to make a greater contribution to the work of the business.

In a similar vein, there is separate domestic violence and sexual violence leave. Again, this is an eye to the psychological health of the employee and their families. I can't imagine a good employer not wanting to have a healthy employee, both physically and emotionally. These provisions are designed to enhance that.

Speaking of enforcement or keeping an eye on this new regime, there will be about 173 new employment standards officers. This will allow officers to proactively inspect, on an annual basis, about 10% of the workplaces.

There will be increased fines for employers who break the rules. However, there will be much greater access to

information when organizing and implementing these work standards. What we want to do is to ensure that the organizational process is not frustrated by an inability to reach agreements with employees.

I want to say something about what the experts have been saying about this, because we've heard a lot of criticism. In fact, there's a letter of support from 53 economists across Canada: a fellow of the Royal Society, two former presidents of the Canadian Economics Association—incidentally, which was consulted widely by former federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty. Seven Nobel Prize-winning economists support the concept of minimum wage. So we know that this is a good piece of legislation.

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

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I was paying attention to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, the Minister of Community and Social Services, the minister of indigenous affairs, and the member from Davenport.

I know that, as government members, you have to highlight all of the positive points of Bill 148. The real problem is that this government is trying to hang onto power and rushed this bill without doing a proper economic impact analysis.

As a new member and an MPP in the PC caucus, I attended AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. I paid attention to all of the mayors and so many councillors from rural areas. One hundred per cent—they are not farm owners, but they say that if this goes through, it's going to hurt the farmers. And it's not just the farmers; it's going to hurt their local community. One hundred per cent, they are against the minimum wage increasing at such a rapid speed.

I was in London, England, and I was shocked to see—I went to the bank, and there was no bank teller. It was all machines, with two bank staff guiding the customers on how to use the machines.

If this thing goes through, I can guarantee—for example, McDonald's already uses that; they use this machine to order hamburgers, juice or whatever—that it's going to increase. It's going to hurt the summertime student jobs. It's going to hurt the women who—this bill tries to help some people; they will get hurt the most. What about the immigrants? They will get hurt.

We shouldn't rush this bill. We have to listen to people, to everybody.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's always a pleasure to rise and talk about Bill 148.

I want to address the Liberal Party across the road. I want to be clear to them that it was the NDP, 18 months ago, that proposed a \$15 minimum wage. If we would have followed the Liberals on tying it to inflation, before it got to \$15 an hour in the province of Ontario, it would have been 2032. That used to be a song, but it was 2025. Do you remember that? I want to be clear on that: 2032.

Then I want to talk about the wages. I heard a lot from my colleagues over here who talked about how business

will die. We've listened to the businesses, and we've listened to farmers. What's wrong with working with them and finding a way to do offsets to alleviate the rapid rise in the costs to small business and farmers? We've had lots to talk about. There's room for progressive offsets that build us up together. Quality of life for our residents: We need to keep talking about that.

You don't talk a lot about it in Bill 148, but women in the province of Ontario today—I have three daughters and four granddaughters—make 73% of what males make in the province of Ontario. That's absolutely a disgrace and that's got to be addressed, without a doubt.

1650

Then you take a look at why you have to raise the minimum wage. Do you know in the province of Ontario—I want my colleagues to listen to this, because this is an important stat for all of us to know—20% of the kids, our kids and our grandkids, live in poverty; 20% of those same kids go to bed at night hungry; 20% of those kids are going to school in the morning for a breakfast club. That's why you've got to make sure the quality of life is there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Elgin–Middlesex–London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thanks very much, Speaker. I'm stepping up ahead; someone missed their rotation there.

I'm glad to add a few points. Just from my riding, what has come back to me has been an enormous response from the small business community with how it's going to affect their operations. I have one business where it is going to be costing close to \$600,000 in their bottom line with this increase; another one, \$130,000.

I have a lot of farms in my area, and a lot of the farmers are concerned with the comment the labour minister made of, "Just raise prices." Well, a lot of them can't raise prices, particularly the asparagus farmers. I have one couple who have come to me and they had just purchased the farm from mum and dad and started out on their own. They're now saying that as this goes through, they will no longer be growing asparagus and will actually be going out to look for work in our community. Of course, this government, over their 14 years, has cost over 6,000 jobs in my riding alone with their policies.

I met with the Port Bruce business association. Port Bruce is a little port in the eastern part of my riding which has a lot of summer opportunities because of the beach and that. They'll be cutting back on their employment because of the minimum wage. They will not be hiring as many youth. They've all reported that that will be the case.

I also met with the Western University student association and I was quite shocked at the fact that they are not in support of this minimum wage increase. They have mentioned that other university associations have also come out.

I am listening to constituents in my riding. I thought this Legislature got it right when, two years ago, they took the politics out of minimum wage and had increases

that businesses could plan for, but when you have low approval ratings like this—the Premier has record-setting approval ratings—they will use fear in order to scare people and come up with populist ideas and come out with an NDP policy to go forward with too fast. It's too fast.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: As if we didn't have enough bad news to deal with today, the news out of America is that rock icon Tom Petty has passed away. It's unfortunate. And to pay tribute to Tom, I guess I could say on this bill, the Liberals won't back down.

There are just too many people in Ontario living on minimum wage, working two and three jobs, working split shifts. Some days, Speaker, I believe there are people you will find who work two or three hours in the morning and two or three hours in the afternoon, but sometimes they do that four or five days a week. They might have five part-time jobs, and that's to put food on the table and to feed their young people, pay their rent, pay their hydro, living in free fall, if you will; free falling in our great society because they just can't do any better with the cards they've been dealt.

I heard one of the Liberals just speak about the Harris years, 1996 to 2003, and the minimum wage stuck at \$6.85 per hour. If that wasn't a free fall, I don't know what was. Many people in our society have been in that free fall ever since those years, struggling to get out, struggling to put food on the table. We had an opportunity—a year and a half ago, we came out with an NDP policy that we would go to \$15 minimum wage. They're talking about it in Alberta. The Liberals were free falling in the polls. They came up with it, rushed it through. It's a bill that needs improving, but let's get behind it and make it a better bill for all of us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Hon. Laura Albanese: I would like to thank the members that have offered their comments: the members from Scarborough–Rouge River, Niagara Falls, Elgin–Middlesex–London and Windsor–Tecumseh.

The member from Scarborough–Rouge River said that we need to listen to the people, to everyone. I believe that's exactly what we are doing, Mr. Speaker. We know that there is a long list of studies and literature on this topic. There is an economic analysis from independent bodies that supports and endorses what we are doing, and a letter of support from 53 economists from across Canada.

More importantly, we know what the reality is: Over 30% of the people in Ontario are working for minimum wage and are finding it very difficult to support their families, so we need to address this inequality now—this is in answer to the speed.

Finding solutions for small businesses in certain sectors: The Premier has committed to look at that. It's not within this bill, but she has committed to do that, and our government is looking at that.

I do also have to say, though, in regard to what the member from Niagara Falls said, that in 2013 we launched the Minimum Wage Advisory Panel, and the third party did not participate. It chose not to participate in that process. In 2014, we launched the Changing Workplaces Review, and again the third party chose not to participate in that discussion. So they didn't sign on to raising the minimum wage in 2014, and they didn't call for an increase to \$15 until halfway through our Changing Workplaces Review.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You said you'd never do it.

Hon. Laura Albanese: Well, in the last election, the third party's platform had no mention—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been more than six and one-half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader or designate specifies otherwise.

I again recognize the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Hon. Laura Albanese: No further debate, Mr. Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

CUTTING UNNECESSARY RED TAPE ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 VISANT À RÉDUIRE LES FORMALITÉS ADMINISTRATIVES INUTILES

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 28, 2017, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 154, An Act to cut unnecessary red tape by enacting one new Act and making various amendments and repeals / *Projet de loi 154, Loi visant à réduire les formalités administratives inutiles, à édicter diverses lois et à modifier et abroger d'autres lois.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): When this House last debated second reading of Bill 154, the member for London–Fanshawe had the floor. I understand she concluded her remarks—she's present in the House at the moment—so we can now do questions and comments in response to the presentation by the member for London–Fanshawe. Questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I know it's been a few days, but I just want to clarify and maybe, for the record, make a few comments.

Our government is committed to building Ontario up and delivering one of our top priorities, to grow the economy and create jobs. From what we've seen and what we hear, we have created an enormous amount of jobs since the recession.

I know, as a former small-business owner, that government did tend to get in the way from time to time. I

think we have been making some progress to try to make life easier when it comes to a regulatory regime. Most people would say, “Well, just do away with the regulations.” Speaker, I think we owe it to the rest of the residents of this province to make sure we have an appropriate, safe environment, whether it’s at work, walking in our streets, driving or riding our bikes or whatever the case might be.

1700

We’ve committed that, yearly, we do a review and realign some regulatory regimes, and that’s just what we’re doing. We’re also doing this in a sensible approach: that, over time, we reduce the amount of red tape, so that the business community is not unduly burdened. I think we have to do that in a measured way.

I look forward to further debate on this legislation, and I think, from people I’ve spoken to, that this is an appropriate approach, as I said, in a timely and measured way.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I think it’s a novel initiative for this government to get rid of red tape. They’ve been responsible for such an increase. But even by their own numbers, they’re talking about how this bill will accommodate or allow somewhere between \$6.3 million and \$8.9 million of cost savings. This is a \$14-billion problem. The legislation here barely scratches the surface.

Since getting elected here in 2011, I’ve had the opportunity to tour a number of plants, a number of businesses. Every time, red tape comes up. It’s ridiculous—everything from the Cemeteries Act to the TSSA regulations that are forcing companies to not be competitive.

Delays: We met with a manufacturer of auto parts from Mississauga that was trying to expand in this province. They spent two years trying to expand. It was a large number of good manufacturing jobs. But they eventually left and went to Mexico because they couldn’t get a building permit to start work—everything from needing more expropriation of land to make the highway out front, just to regulations for a clean industry.

It just goes to show. The comment that hit hardest was that when they arrived in Mexico, they were met by the president on what they needed. He said, “We couldn’t get anything here from the ministry.”

That is a large number of jobs. They talk about manufacturing jobs, especially the auto industry—great jobs and something that they wanted to make sure they returned to the community, as far as creating these jobs, because the company started here. Through their best efforts, they had to give up. That should not be the way of things.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Earlier today in my office, I met with three representatives of the Ontario Association of Architects: Kristi Doyle, the executive director; David Rich, the vice-president; and Settimo Vilardi, the chair of

the Windsor Region Society of Architects. We were talking about the red tape surrounding site plan approval in Ontario. The architects pointed out to me that the red tape involved in site plans is costing tens of millions of dollars a year, and they’ve been trying to get the government’s attention in doing something about it. So far, they’re not making a lot of headway.

They want the process streamlined. They want to work with municipalities, but they really believe it’s up to the government to set pure guidelines that everybody can follow and they can save all this money, all this delay in major projects going ahead. I certainly agree with them. If it’s a problem, we should be dealing somehow with it.

It’s the same as—you know, I’ve talked about it before—the problem down my area, where I’m trying to get a private member’s bill passed on the Canadian Club heritage brand centre to allow them to sell Canadian Club whisky. Because it’s bottled under contract—they used to make it themselves; now it’s bottled under contract—they’re not allowed to sell it in this beautiful building.

In fact, the architects had a little competition. MPPs were asked to submit beautiful buildings in their area up for a showcase today, and the Canadian Club heritage brand centre was chosen as one of the most beautiful buildings that they had at their noon reception.

I think there’s a lot to be said about cutting red tape. I think if we put our minds together, we can do it. But let’s not wrap ourselves so tightly that it cuts off oxygen to the brain and leaves us unable to do anything.

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

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Speaking, of course, about cutting red tape, well, in the immortal words of Tom Petty, who wrote Love is a Long Road, so is, of course, reframing business red tape. He also has a song called Breakdown. We are ready to break down the red tape and business barriers.

I am pleased to share with the House that of course there are a number of different organizations, chambers of commerce, businesses and corporations that endorse this move. For example, OpenText’s president and CEO says, “We are an Ontario-grown global company and we chose to invest here because of the highly educated workforce, our strong university partnerships in R&D, as well as the province’s robust and innovative start-up communities.”

You will know as well, Speaker, that there are five guiding principles with reference to the overall plan of reducing the regulatory costs and red tape. A number of them are quite interesting. Number one on the list here is the cost offsetting that’s embodied within it. So essentially, for every dollar of new administrative costs imposed on businesses due to new regulations, the government will be required to offset this cost by \$1.25. Of course, that’s a progressive move towards business enhancement in this province.

The other thing I think has been mentioned in this chamber and which is quite important is, as you will know, that whether it’s “red tape, regulation, oversight,

necessary red tape, unnecessary red tape, pleasant red tape or frustrating red tape,” at the end of the day, government, as stewards of the environment, of financial transactions and of business, does have a role to play in maintaining not only justice but an even playing field and, of course, we want to avoid tragedies like Walkerton which occurred on the PCs’ watch.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. We return to the member for London–Fanshawe to reply.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It’s my pleasure to wrap up my debate on this Bill 154, the cutting red tape act—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Unnecessary.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Cutting Unnecessary Red Tape Act, of course.

I want to thank the members from Northumberland–Quinte West, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, Windsor–Tecumseh and Etobicoke North.

I think we all can come to an agreement that we need to make sure that we are not bogging down businesses with unnecessary regulations that make it harder for them to operate. But we also want to ensure that when we’re going through this red tape and we’re cutting out the things that are barriers to that, we are not forgetting the other regulations that tie into it. It might be a whole process to look at the red tape and then how those things evolve with another regulation tied into that. We want to make sure we get it right, because we don’t want to mess that up and then have businesses have more red tape because we didn’t do our due diligence.

I think everyone agrees that regulations do make sense. We need legislation and regulation in this province so that we all know where we stand, that we know what the guidelines are to run a business and what the expectations are of the Employment Standards Act, all those things. But we do want to make it a workable environment. We want to make sure that we create an economic environment so that small businesses can flourish, create those jobs and grow our economy and can grow in our communities.

Speaker, when this bill is debated here in this House, we know that it’s touching on many schedules, but when it goes to committee I think that’s when the real red tape will be unravelled. We’ll be cutting it and making sure that as we’re cutting it, we’re not leaving gaps in between, so that we can make sure that legislation works for everybody in the small business world.

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

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I’m very happy to have the opportunity this afternoon to add my voice and make an oratorical contribution to debate on Bill 154, the burden reduction legislation or the bill to cut unnecessary red tape.

I had a chance here in the chamber this afternoon to listen to some of the comments that are being made by members of both opposition parties and, of course, by colleagues on this side of the House from within government. Actually, Speaker, from the debate that we

have had here this afternoon, I think there is a clear sense that at a philosophical level there is support for moving forward—if I can say that, with respect to this—conceptually with this kind of legislation. I am heartened to hear members from both parties talk a little bit about the need to make sure that we move forward in a comprehensive and also prudent and intelligent way.

1710

It’s also entirely fitting to be engaging in this debate immediately following the debate that we had this afternoon with respect to some of the changes we are proposing to make happen within our workplaces to make sure the people of the province of Ontario are being paid a living wage, and the increase to the minimum wage specifically.

I mention both that debate and the debate we have here this afternoon on dealing with unnecessary red tape and cutting unnecessary red tape because I think those represent both halves of exactly why we’ve had such tremendous success, both economic success here in the province of Ontario over the last number of years and also, I would argue, quality-of-life success. I think here on this side, we understand—our Premier certainly understands, as does every member of our government—that we need to create an economy that is not only prosperous, but an economy that is working for everybody.

I think, again, it’s really quite appropriate to see that we’re having both of these discussions here this afternoon. I know that there are a number of elements that exist within Bill 154, some of which have been touched on. I know there’s a ton of collaboration that’s happening amongst a number of ministries with respect to making sure we look at some of the burdens that exist that might have been brought forward for the best of intentions at one point in time or another, but in looking at them and analyzing them now, we realize that they might incidentally or unfortunately add to a burden that’s no longer helping unshackle, I’d say, in many respects, the kind of innovation we need in the province to make sure our economy continues to grow.

I mentioned a second ago that over the last number of years we’ve had tremendous economic success here in the province of Ontario. That’s not by accident. It is because, both in this legislation, in Bill 154, and in previous successful attempts at reducing the burden of unnecessary red tape, we have seen that our business community has come to the fore with innovation, with creativity, and has really taken advantage of the opportunity to partner with government to make sure we are creating jobs, to make sure we are leading the country with respect to economic growth.

It’s the notion that our economy has been firing on all cylinders for the last number of years. I mentioned the jobs that have been created. We’re talking about hundreds of thousands of jobs that have been created since the depths of the recession in 2008, the overwhelming majority being in full-time positions and positions that pay well, helping support tens of thousands of families and helping those families realize their dream for a better

life for themselves and their kids and grandkids. That's, yes, in part because of the tremendous resilience of the people of Ontario, but it's also because we pursued, as a government, policies, objectives and mechanisms like Bill 154 that help Ontarians realize their full potential, help our business leaders realize their full potential.

At the same time, as I mentioned a second ago, because of the other debate we had here this afternoon, we're making sure that the economy is both prosperous and that this prosperity is shared equitably across the province. Whether we're talking, again, about paying individuals a minimum wage that will rise, as proposed, up to \$15 an hour or we're talking about other initiatives—as examples, OHIP+ and free tuition for currently just over 200,000 students across the province of Ontario—these are all pieces of the same larger economic and quality-of-life puzzle that we have put together. You see the results of it in every corner of the province with respect to the job creation, with respect to the prosperity. In my own area of responsibility within transportation, of course, we are investing unprecedented amounts to make sure that we have the transit and transportation networks that are helping connect individuals.

I mentioned earlier in debate that we have a number of ministries that are working on this together. For example, Bill 154 specifically works with the Ministry of the Attorney General, the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. That's another, I think, hallmark of the Ontario Liberal government, a government that has now been in power, as we mentioned earlier today, since October 2003. This is, in fact, the fourteenth anniversary for a number of individuals who are still proud to serve on this side of the House.

We see throughout that 14-year period of time how we have managed to collaborate, how many ministries have managed to collaborate so that, both in this legislation as proposed and previous iterations of similar legislation, we've managed to reduce that burden that is placed by unnecessary red tape—again, to unshackle the creativity of the people and the businesses here in this province and to make sure that we're moving forward in the right direction.

Speaker, another example of some of the stuff that we have done in this regard over time is the Red Tape Challenge. I know that has been discussed on a number of occasions. We introduced the Red Tape Challenge, which would be an innovative way for the government to connect with businesses and employees at all levels. We launched the Red Tape Challenge in March 2016. We have already engaged with four sectors, with three more to go. This is an innovative, online consultation platform that provides direct stakeholder feedback from seven industry sectors: auto parts manufacturing, food processing, financial services, mining, chemical manufacturing, forestry and tourism.

The Red Tape Challenge began with the automotive parts manufacturing sector last year. I'm mentioning this

because I think the results so far are quite significant. This effort resulted in 63 burden-reduction opportunities; 41 of these will be addressed within the next three years. And you see similar examples in some of the other sectors that I referenced a second ago—for example, in the financial services and food processing sector consultations. Again, a ton of opportunities have come forward that no doubt will be acted upon.

Our colleague on this side of the House, the Minister of Economic Development and Growth, someone who is such an incredibly strong champion for the province of Ontario, not only brought forward not only this initiative, but in all of his time serving in this capacity, and previously, in other capacities at the cabinet table, he is a true champion for the people of Ontario and for the businesses here in Ontario. He is someone who understands how important it is to make sure that we are constantly luring the right kind of investment for the right places in Ontario. Because of his efforts, and because of the efforts of a number of people who have worked hard with respect to Bill 154, we see the fruits of those efforts.

We need to be proud of the fact that we live in a province where our economic growth is ranked first or second here in this country; that we see so many jobs that are being created; and that we see so much prosperity that is not only being created but is being shared in the fairest way possible because of how we're approaching this.

I had the chance to hear this afternoon in the chamber from those who have already spoken on this. I think that we see that there isn't really a compelling reason for anybody to say, from a public policy perspective, that they disagree with this concept, the concept of reducing the burden of unnecessary red tape, which I think is actually quite encouraging.

I look forward to the debate that is going to occur not only this afternoon but over the course of the rest of the debate on Bill 154.

We also have a number of individuals who have come forward to talk about their support for this initiative. I think that's also encouraging, to know that we have support from a wide variety of stakeholders and from partners who recognize that we have to continue to move forward in this direction. It also helps us to understand, from a validation perspective, that we are moving forward in the right way.

Just as an example, we see the president and CEO of OpenText: "We are an Ontario-grown global company. And we chose to invest here because of the highly educated workforce, our strong university partnerships in R&D, as well as the province's robust and innovative start-up communities." I point out that one example, but we have others talking about the economy and talking about the formula, the inspired formula, that our Premier, our Minister of Economic Development and Growth and our team on this side of the House have compiled, have pieced together, over the last number of years.

I'm going to say this again, even though I've already mentioned it a couple of times in debate so far here

today: This is a formula that is working, and it's working for people in every corner of the province. It doesn't mean that our work is done. That's why we're coming forward with this legislation; it's why we're talking about building a fairer society. Whether we're talking about the economy or of the quality of life for the people that we're proud to represent, we continue to get it done, and get it done right.

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's a pleasure listening to the Minister of Transportation talking about red tape because, as the minister is aware, I've sent him many letters and correspondence about red tape from his ministry, which we don't see addressed in this bill.

Yes, we are all in favour of the concept of reducing red tape. What I'd like to see this government do is stop creating more and more red tape, more of it than what they take away.

Let me just give you a couple of examples. The minister is aware—I've sent him letters—of the atrocious, terrible service from Larry's drive centre in Smiths Falls—horrendous, terrible service. We get complaints all the time, but they just continue to get contracts with, I would say, no oversight on that service provider.

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I had the example this summer of the Willows brothers, two young fellows in Balderson who had their A-Z licences set up for June 27 this summer, and the Serco-operated drive centre in Smiths Falls had them all booked, had them reserved. They went in, but Serco couldn't provide the driver's examination that day. They got bumped to a couple of weeks later. Of course, that new regulation came into effect July 1 which required the Willows brothers each to pay \$10,000 and take a new training program approved by the Ministry of Transportation before they could get their driver's exam—\$20,000, for those two young fellows, of red tape. Unnecessary or otherwise, it's an added cost, and those two young fellows are really finding the burdens of this government directly on their shoulders.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: To follow the Minister of Transportation on this issue of cutting unnecessary red tape, I'd like to say that not all red tape is bad; there is some red tape that's good, and that's to deal with health and safety regulations.

The minister talked about the Red Tape Challenge, and when I read the news release when the Red Tape Challenge came out, it said it was modelled on one that was introduced a couple of years ago in the United Kingdom. He's right. They made a major mistake in the United Kingdom: They cut red tape across the board, including health and safety regulations. In fact, we had Conservative cabinet ministers in the United Kingdom bragging about how much red tape they cut in health and safety regulations, bragging about how they cut fire safety inspections from six hours to 45 minutes.

Of course, we know what happened on June 14, 2017—this year: that terrible, horrific fire at the Grenfell Tower, a 24-storey housing complex. Eighty people died and 70 were injured. Some people say it's an older building. Well, it was built in the 1970s in England—that's not old. England's got a lot of older buildings. It was the cladding on that building that was put on a few years ago, cladding that was known across Europe to be a safety risk and a fire hazard. Other countries had banned it, yet because of the cut in health and safety regulations in the United Kingdom, we had that horrific fire.

They allowed the housing industry there to self-police themselves. They got rid of health and safety inspectors and said to the housing people, "Yes, I know you're going to put profit ahead of health and safety, but just do it so that you police yourselves and we'll be okay."

Well, that's not okay. Cutting health and safety regulations in Ontario will never be okay, and it won't be okay this time either.

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

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to respond to the Minister of Transportation, and I want to say something about what the member from Windsor—Tecumseh just said. There's a difference between deregulation and cutting red tape. I think we have to make that distinction. I know where he's coming from. When that line gets blurred and you start to lose things that protect people, both as consumers or in health and safety—the value in those regulations is protecting people.

I think the most important thing about this bill is the lens with which we look at new regulations. Is the effect of what we're doing and the cost of that reporting or the cost of that commensurate with the result we're getting? That's a really important part of the bill. The whole process of taking a look at the regulations and things that we set as a—we build a framework of legislation and then we use these regulations as tools to fill in that framework. We need to constantly be able to look at those, both for business and health and safety, because sometimes we're not protecting people enough. Sometimes the regulations aren't clear enough. I think this is an interim process that we always go through, and I appreciate very much now that we're looking at it before we actually start to create the regulations so we can perhaps reduce the number of unnecessary ones that we sometimes end up with.

To the member from Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington—I got it this time—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Lanark, but close enough.

Mr. John Fraser: Lanark. Sorry, folks in Lanark. Great maple syrup.

I can understand what he's saying. Sometimes there are things where there's a line that's drawn. You look at it and you say, "Is that right? Is it fair?"

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

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I was paying attention to the Minister of Transportation and the member for Ottawa South.

I would like to share a real episode from about 20 years ago. I went to my home country—I was born in Inchon, Korea. The Inchon municipal staff gave me a briefing. He showed me a big new city called Songdo; it used to be a beach and rural area. He said that the majority of the city was built with foreign investment. I asked the staff, “How did you do that?” “Because we cut all the unnecessary red tape drastically.” They invited all of the investment. Not only that; they had all kinds of economic incentive. Until the new foreign businesses build up their businesses, they have a grace period, so you don’t have to pay so much tax. They’re very flexible, very accommodating.

We live in a very competitive world today, but when I came here I was shocked to see that we have 380,000 rules and regulations—my God. We work so hard to create more rules and regulations that now we’re coming with Bill 154. I think it’s the right bill, but the problem is, it’s too slow. When bills like Bill 148—when we go slowly, to be more prudent and careful, we rush things. When we have a bill, we need to go faster. We go slowly and very lukewarm. It has to be more decisive, more constructive, and we have to create a business-friendly environment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. We return to the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I’m very happy to have had a chance to listen to the members from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, Windsor–Tecumseh, Ottawa South and Scarborough–Rouge River provide their questions and comments on debate with respect to Bill 154 here this afternoon.

A couple of things I would point out: First of all, in particular to my colleague from Ottawa South, I want to thank him for his very eloquent and, I would say, enlightened perspective, with respect to what we are trying to accomplish and hopefully will accomplish with Bill 154.

I also was quite encouraged to hear the member from Windsor–Tecumseh and his comments.

I think the member from Ottawa South struck the right balance in saying that we recognize that there is certainly a very understandable and laudable objective with respect to reducing the burden of unnecessary red tape, but you don’t want to go so far past that point at which you’re endangering those that you’re proud to represent or in any way, shape or form, too significantly diluting what the original purpose was for having some of the protections in place.

I think, Speaker, when you look at past practice here in Ontario over the last few years—certainly since 2003—I think you would see that we have struck the right balance. So I found it interesting and quite encouraging to hear that back-and-forth from both of those two members.

What I would say to the members from Scarborough–Rouge River and Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington is that, while I get the perspective that you’re

providing with respect to the debate, it’s really important that when you’re contemplating legislation like Bill 154, as the saying goes, to not let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

There was nothing in debate that I added here this afternoon that suggested that we believe that our work is completely done. Certainly, I will say, as was pointed out, that within the Ministry of Transportation there is always room for improvement, whether we’re talking about reducing burdens of unnecessary red tape or we’re talking about pursuing additional measures to support road safety, and those are just two examples.

I think supporting Bill 154 is important—it strikes the right balance—but I recognize that we will continue to work hard on this and all other similar challenges.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: It’s a privilege to rise here to discuss Bill 154, which the government is calling the red tape reduction act. Certainly, if you take it at face value, this bill is way overdue. We see businesses in our province failing under the stifling red tape that’s there. Red tape and regulations are there for a purpose, but they shouldn’t be there unless there’s a reason for them.

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When it comes to Ontario and competitiveness, we should hold ourselves to the highest possible standard. We have the largest workforce, made up of skilled and educated men and women who want to work, raise a family and build a secure retirement. Red tape has consequences. Some 380,000 regulations in Ontario: Just think of that number. It’s huge.

I go back to just after the last election in 2014. A huge amendment to the building code came out, something like over 25,000 amendments to the building code—and that’s just the amendments. Just think of the impact that has. Certainly, in my riding, I hear about that every day. Luckily for the government, they blamed the local inspectors. But I try to tell the people they’re only enforcing the law, and the law comes from the province. It comes from Toronto here, so that’s really where your comments and complaints should be directed.

Every dollar spent on fees is a dollar not spent on hiring workers, training young Ontarians or providing them with health and pension benefits. Every hour a worker spends on needless paperwork is a lost productive hour for that business. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business gives Ontario a B grade on its annual Red Tape Report Card. We aspire to be the economic engine of Canada once again in this province, and a B just doesn’t cut it.

I’ve been in touch with many stakeholders throughout my years who have brought forward many concerns that they have on unnecessary red tape. Members who were here following the 2011 election will remember my efforts to reform the Technical Standards and Safety Authority. Businesses subject to their licensing regime live in apprehension of additional requirements that an inspector may add and arbitrarily impose on them above and beyond what is required by the agency’s own

standards. When inspectors change, a business may find itself regulated out of business almost overnight.

Inspectors who create tools in accordance with internationally accepted and used standards can't get their equipment installed in Ontario because of the TSSA's field approval procedure. When a field approval costs more than the equipment itself, what's the point of installing it?

I have a couple of manufacturers in my riding. One produces products that are used all over the world. After an installation, he said that he was at \$50,000 trying to get the equipment okayed to move ahead. He said, "There's no standards. You're working towards a target that's constantly moving." He said he finally pulled the thing out. He won't do any more work in Ontario.

I had another contractor talk to me. He said, "You'll put in a piece of equipment for \$5,000 or \$6,000, and the inspection costs are \$15,000." The problem we have there is the fact that the TSSA doesn't accept the compressed gas standard, which is used internationally all over the world. You can install the equipment anywhere in the US and in the rest of the nine provinces; you can't install it in Ontario, because there's a regulation on the books about having to be CSA approved. There's some merit to that, except the CSA doesn't take authority over compressed gas. It relies on the international standard. That's just one of the issues here.

He said that the problem is, you give them the cost of the equipment and you say, "You're going to have to contact the TSSA to inspect it. Then we don't get the contract." You drive by and you see Quebec licence plates in the yard. They're there selling equipment because they don't have to call the TSSA. It just gets done without inspection. That's the type of thing we see going on. That's not healthy.

The government's initiatives on red tape were often rich in ambition, but lacking in substance. I read some of this bill—and we talked about bills that get named by this government. The bill is supposedly directed toward reduction in red tape.

Here's one from the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change: "Where the director refuses to issue or cancels a permit or imposes or alters a term or condition in a permit that has been issued, the permittee now has seven days to make submissions for reconsideration, rather than 15." So now they've made it more difficult for a company to actually appeal something. It says, "The director now has seven days to reconsider the decision after receiving the submissions, rather than three." I'm not sure how that could be considered a reduction in anybody's mind.

Another one, under the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services: "The schedule expands the minister's regulation-making powers. They include the making of regulations in respect of the content, form, format and filing of various documents."

It allows "the director or the registrar, as applicable, to require different filing obligations for any of the prescribed supporting documents...."

"A minister may require a business that interacts with the minister to provide the minister with the business' business information (name, contact ... etc.), if there is an inter-ministerial agreement relating to that kind of interaction."

So we see in this case that more information is required. That's not in any way reducing regulation.

I see that I don't have a lot of time, so I'll get to something that was in Ontario Home Builder—a major industry in our province. I'll just read some of the parts talking about building and the cost of housing:

"Since we all have to live somewhere, it's no surprise that the topic generates lots of discussion. Government likes to talk about it too. But they take it a step further and they're fond of discussing affordable housing. In fact, it seems that every time any level of government makes an announcement, they insist the decision will ensure all Ontarians will have more affordable housing.

"With all the government chatter about the subject, you'd think that they were busy reducing taxes, fees, charges or red tape to support lower housing costs. But housing prices just keep going up, and all levels of government keep piling on new taxes and red tape.

"All the government talk of affordability never really amounts to the homebuyer saving money. In fact, it is the homebuyer who continues to absorb these costs in the price of a new home. So while government sees our industry as an endless source of revenue, in reality, the people of the province pay the price."

That just goes to show how it's impacting our housing industry. We see that every day.

Another simple example is in the change to the building code: You can no longer put up a reasonably small tent without getting it stamped and inspected by an engineer. You're taking a cheap solution that was \$400 or \$500 and putting it over \$1,000. I hear that problem every day. There's no question, you need some regulations, but this is not something that typically—these people are experts who put these tents up. One of the consulting engineers who gets called to inspect them was sitting in Cornwall waiting for a tent to be put up for a few hours of volunteer—they were raising money for a local charity. He said, "It's embarrassing for me to go onsite. I see people who have been putting up tents for decades. I'm sitting there and I have to inspect them and sign something off and then leave. I've got to charge to cover my insurance. When is enough enough?"

This government looks at the citizens of Ontario like a candy dish—"How can I get more money from them?"—instead of actually making it so that our businesses are more and more economical.

In the farming industry—I was at home on the weekend, and they're taking soybeans off. The soybean price comes from Chicago. We have no impact on that at all. But we look at the regulations that are being brought down on the farming community—and I heard the minister say, "Well, they can just alter the prices." They can't alter the prices. The prices are fixed daily based on what they are in Chicago. So we see farmers who have to

deal with this, have to deal with the high cost of power, have to deal with the regulations—all that this government has put on.

So we truly would like to see, when they come out with a bill, instead of giving one message that maybe is contrary to what we see in the bill, that they actually follow through and cut the cost of doing business so we have more good-paying jobs—jobs that aren't leaving this country and going elsewhere.

It's unfortunate; I know my time is up. There are always lots of speakers. I look forward to the comments.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry for his perspective on this reducing red tape piece of legislation.

I think there is a general consensus from the broader community that things happen very slowly here, and I don't think that's an extreme statement to say. The member did focus on the intricacies of timing, which I think all of us will hear. I myself hear, for instance, from the trucking industry.

These are business owners, and they feel that from jurisdiction to jurisdiction there are inconsistencies. They're looking for clarity around how the regulatory burdens or the regulations are applied. When I had my briefing with the ministry staff—and I want to thank them for the briefing. They're all very good people. Some of them have some very long titles because they live this; they breathe it. My heart goes out to them for that because it can't be an easy place to always be. Here they did a review of this legislation, and at the end of the day, they hope that it will save \$6 million to \$8 million. They don't really know. This process is new, or newish.

I guess that's the theme. I mean, the member raised some questions. We have some outstanding questions as it relates to this legislation, as well. For instance, in the trucking industry, when one company is overly pulled over and they're looked at constantly, they say to me, "It's too subjective. Where is the consistency in the application of the regulation? If I'm a good employer and if I follow the safety protocol, how can I ensure that I won't be further burdened by the regulations?" These are questions that need to be worked out as this legislation moves through the House.

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

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It's always a pleasure to stand and speak on this particular piece of legislation, reducing unnecessary red tape.

I think it goes without saying that this House knows that our government is committed to developing modern, evidence-based regulations and to fostering an innovative and supportive business environment. But we also need to understand that we need to do this while protecting the public interest by maintaining environmental and health standards and enhancing worker safety. Earlier this afternoon, I heard about the importance of ensuring that

we are protecting the public interest and ensuring that we do have those appropriate health standards in place.

I'm very proud of this particular bill that is before us. We've worked with stakeholders, businesses, industry and other ministries to bring forward these legislative amendments that will help Ontario businesses large and small grow. We see that Ontario keeps thriving as a province, and we want to make sure that it continues to be competitive.

This bill will ensure that we bring regulations into line with national and international standards so that it is easier for Ontario companies to sell to the world. We want this to happen. And we want to ensure that, going forward, whenever new regulations are proposed, they make it easy and straightforward for small businesses to comply with them.

As I've said in this House before, Mr. Speaker, I represent the riding of Davenport, a riding that really isn't home to very large businesses but rather these small businesses that sometimes struggle to get through their day-to-day because they're complying with regulations. We want to make sure that what we're doing here with this piece of legislation is making life easier for them and making sure that they can actually do what it is that their business does versus trying to comply with government regulations, all keeping in mind health and safety.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I listened with interest to the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. He brought up the agricultural industry. I have a story here about a chap in my riding who does environmental farm plans.

Farms should have and do have environmental farm plans, but they need them especially if they're going to build new buildings. In the process, the ministry website says it will take 50 business days for them to approve the environmental farm plan. In reality, the turnaround time is about 120 days. You can imagine the frustration that the farmers and the builders face, because the building season is short in Ontario and they have to get these things planned; they have to get them started. Now the ministry is taking 120 days to approve these environmental farm plans.

I also would like to mention the trucking industry. I was a part-time driver for 30-some years. When you go from Manitoba to Ontario, you got a different set of rules on things. But I do know that a factory in Listowel called me. They needed a piece of equipment from Alberta, and it was oversized. They got their permit to travel from there in a day. Then they got to Ontario, and to get that permit, it took them almost a week, so that truck sat there—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: No.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Yes. That truck sat there. He couldn't move for these days, plus the plant was without that piece of equipment. We've got to get stuff like that fixed up. It has always been an issue coming from the west into Ontario, or the other way, with permits.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I agree 100%: There are regulations that don't make sense that we should correct. I'm glad the labour minister is here, because I said this to him a couple of weeks ago on this very bill. My colleague raised it earlier in her 20 minutes: We have to make sure that regulations protect workers.

What we saw with the bakery right here in Toronto, where a 23-year-old young lady, Mr. Speaker—we saw a young lady get killed on the job. She had no training and had been on the job a couple of weeks. These types of situations—you say, "How do they happen in the province of Ontario?" I'm going to say to the labour minister: Do you know what this company got? They got money from the federal government, they got money from the provincial government—not to spend on training to make sure workers are safe. That workplace had three deaths in the province of Ontario. So what we don't want to see is a weakening of regulations that are going to put workers at risk.

The other one that I want to talk to—you only get a couple of minutes here to talk—is the environment. Forty years ago, nobody was talking about the environment, right? We weren't worrying about regulations for the environment. When you take a look at what is going on today—I'm from Niagara. The environment is going to play a key role in agriculture down there, whether it be the wine, whether it be the peaches. As our temperature goes up, it puts our food at risk.

You only have to look to Texas. Look what happened in Texas when the water rose. People lost their lives—Puerto Rico, the Florida Keys. We want to make sure that the minister doesn't use this opportunity to weaken environmental standards in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry can now reply for two minutes.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'd like to thank the members from Kitchener–Waterloo, Davenport, Perth–Wellington, and Niagara Falls for their comments.

When we look at regulation and how it impacts—I don't think I have time for both stories.

We had a subdivision-builder in Cornwall last year trying to get approval to connect to the water system. They came to us because it had been three months. The plan had been engineered by his engineers. He had paid for those. He had paid for the city engineers to peer-review, and they all agreed with it.

It was getting into June. That was his project, and he was going to have to lay off his workforce if he couldn't proceed with it. He called the ministry. Their comment was, "It has only been three months. What do you expect? What are you calling here for? We haven't even given the file a number yet." That's the type of stuff you run into.

Very quickly: When I worked my former job with Bell Canada, there was a time when the mechanics were wondering about all the inspections the trucks were

getting. They were getting pulled over and checked and checked. They were trying to check if there was a problem. Were they finding anything? Every time, there was nothing really found.

I was talking to somebody that worked for the Ministry of Transportation. He was saying that the supervisor came out and said, "Okay, we need to up the numbers." But he said, "No more Bell trucks," because the reason they were pulling them over was because they were quick, they could do them and get their numbers up, tick it off, and there would be no paperwork. They assumed there would be no paperwork because there were no problems with them.

1750

This is what we see happening under this government: You have an industry picked on just because they have a good safety record. You're wondering why you're being pulled over, and it's the fact that—"Well, we can do it and check you off, and there's another stop and another inspection that I didn't find anything."

We've got to get away from this and look at how we can help industry instead of how we can damage their ability to be profitable and to create good employment.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I rise in the House today to discuss Bill 154, the Cutting Unnecessary Red Tape Act, 2017. This bill allows us to reduce the regulatory burden on business and other organizations. It also seeks to make cost savings for the government. There are many complex parts to the legislation, which amends over 100 different acts and proposes the creation of a new act, the Reducing Regulatory Costs for Business Act, 2017.

Mr. Speaker, the way I see it, this legislation is the equivalent of our province going to the dentist to have its cavities filled. The bill is about making updates to legislation that is outdated or unnecessary. By tackling each of these issues, we can address everything effectively. There is no point in going to the dentist to fill one cavity if we have a lot of cavities.

However, there are elements of this bill which concern me. Considering our province is such a bad Liberal dentist, there are parts of this bill that look fine right now but that could come back to cause us major problems.

Mr. John Vanthof: This province needs a root canal.

Mr. Paul Miller: We would hate for the dentist to pull some very important front teeth with this legislation. To tackle all aspects of this bill at this time would be impossible. There is so much to review. Instead, today I thought I would focus on some of the most eye-catching amendments, Mr. Speaker: the largest cavities to fill and the most important front teeth that we do not want to be pulled.

The first part of this bill that stood out for me was the amendment to the Farming and Food Production Protection Act. This amendment could make it so that more than one vice-chair of the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board would be appointed. The reason for appointing another vice-chair of this board is very practical, in

my opinion. This will make it so that wait times for hearings can be reduced during periods when there are more farmers having their cases heard. This is clearly a good change that makes the board more efficient. With this amendment, we will fill our first cavity.

Some more beneficial amendments within Bill 154 are—

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller:—changes made to the Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, the Ontario Corporations Act, and the Charities Accounting Act. Together, these changes alter how charities operate in our province.

One of these changes is an amendment that would permit registered charities and non-profits to implement modernization reforms. These reforms would be included in the Corporations Act. They would allow Ontario not-for-profit corporations to electronically send notice of membership meetings. They would also be able to hold members' meetings using electronic devices to communicate. My initial reaction to this was: How have we not permitted non-profits to do this already? This amendment could not come soon enough. It could increase flexibility and encourage member participation in meetings.

Changes to the Charities Accounting Act also include the additions of three new sections: 10.2, 10.3 and 10.4. This allows the charities to make social investments through trust properties. This type of investment would be made with the purpose of gaining financial return in cases where spending resources might not achieve as positive an outcome. Basically, a charity could put its returns into an investment that promises accumulated gains. This would allow the charity to accomplish more ambitious goals.

The purpose behind these amendments would be giving the charities more flexibility and power to help reach their objectives. Such changes will go a long way to helping charitable organizations in Ontario become more efficient and more effective.

And with this amendment, a second cavity has been filled.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Keep drilling down, Paul. Keep drilling down.

Mr. Paul Miller: Another beneficial part of Bill 154 is the changes made to the Courts of Justice Act. Under section 87.2, subsections (11) and (12) will be modified. There's also the addition of section 87.3. This means that the process for complaints and disciplines of Small Claims Court administrative judges will be altered. Someone making a complaint against a judge at this level will no longer make the complaint to the Ontario Judicial Council and a provincial judge. Instead, those making a complaint will follow the process used for complaints and disciplines issued against a provincial judge. This amendment will instead require that complaints be made to the Chief Justice of the Superior Court. This modification will expedite this process, making these complaints quicker to deal with.

This change will fill another cavity.

Mr. John Vanthof: Three cavities.

Mr. Paul Miller: Another benefit to Bill 154 is that schedule 9 of this bill expands and gives clarity to the definition of a "franchisor" in the Arthur Wishart Act.

The new definition was expanded to franchisors who choose not to exercise their rights over franchisees. I have been given to understand that this addition is simply made to expand and clarify the definition of "franchisor." This will ensure that many more businesses are considered franchises, even if they do not put strict guidelines on their franchisees. It is good that we have clarity where we didn't have it before.

With this amendment, we will fill one more cavity.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Nice bridge, Paul.

Mr. Paul Miller: The reality is that Bill 154 fixes a lot more than just the problems I've mentioned. More than 100 small changes make this bill worth advancing to second reading.

However, we need to be skeptical about some changes in this legislation. We have got to make sure that our Liberal dentist doesn't end up pulling out some of our important front teeth. The amendments in this legislation do appear to be clerical changes; there are some elements that I was skeptical of that could become problematic in the future.

The first front tooth at risk of getting pulled can be found in the creation of a new act entitled Reducing Regulatory Costs for Business Act, 2017.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: That's putting a crown on it.

Mr. Paul Miller: This is discussed in schedule 4 of the bill. The act would require that an offset to businesses be required in the case that the government enacts any regulation that causes an administrative cost for business dealings.

As it stands, this practice already applies to administrative costs such as hourly wages that a company pays its employees, along with basic costs for such things as paper. For every dollar spent, our province currently finds a way to cover the dollar expenditure. This amendment will not affect much. It will solidify this practice in law and will increase the rate for every dollar returned to \$1.25. In the grand scheme of things, that is not a significant difference.

However, we need to be skeptical about what this bill can turn into. Seeing that it lacks clarity, there is the potential that legislative manipulation could come down the line and put the province on the hook for a lot more than administrative costs. If we create an expectation that every business cost incurred from provincial law will be the responsibility of the province to cover, we have a big problem on our hands.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: That would freeze us up.

Mr. Paul Miller: The government of our province needs to be able to make good legislative decisions that may fly in the face of a company's profits. If legislation is manipulated to the point where the province is on the hook for a lot more than just administration costs, it may deter the provincial government from enacting good legislation.

Another front tooth—

Mr. John Vanthof: It's a long-term toothache.

Mr. Paul Miller: I've got a lot of comments from my own people today.

Another front tooth that we have to be careful doesn't get pulled under Bill 154 is the amendments made to the Arthur Wishart Act in schedule 9.

As we are all aware, there are many franchises that do business in Ontario, which can be worth billions of dollars. Franchises also wield a lot of power in Ontario's economy. This legislation is such that there are particular manipulations that are not yet of concern but easily could be.

Schedule 9 amends section 5 of the act so that the obligations to provide a prospective franchisee with a disclosure document or a statement of material change do not apply to certain specific agreements that do not grant the franchise, subject to specific exceptions.

However, this could be a problem later on down the line for these potential entrepreneurs. If a precedent is set that less and less information from franchisors be accessible to entrepreneurs contemplating the purchase of a franchise outlet, they may not be incentivized to invest. This information is important for making decisions as to whether to purchase a franchise outlet. Without this information, entrepreneurs will likely be deterred from investing.

As it stands, the legislation does not make any significant modifications to the amount of information provided

to entrepreneurs considering the purchase of a franchise. However, it is important that these modifications not be tampered with, as it could very likely amplify the unbalanced relationship between franchisors and franchisees or potential franchisees in the province.

We have to be careful about this. Hopefully, the Liberals can be convinced not to get their noses into this legislation.

To conclude, Bill 154's legislation will fill over a hundred cavities in our provincial laws. However, it seems that if we are not careful, our Liberal dentist could take advantage of us by pulling important front teeth when they shouldn't be pulling anything. That being said, the Liberals should be very careful about pulling important front teeth. They have tried to do this in the past with many pieces of legislation. That is why Ontario will likely be in the market for a new, more considerate New Democratic dentist coming in 2018.

As it stands, Bill 154 is a good bill; however, we should be skeptical about any changes made to this bill down the line.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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