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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 15 April 2014

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des débats
(Hansard)**

Mardi 15 avril 2014

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 15 April 2014

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 15 avril 2014

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MAKING HEALTHIER CHOICES ACT,
2014

LOI DE 2014 POUR DES CHOIX
PLUS SAINS

Mr. Milloy, on behalf of Ms. Matthews, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 162, An Act to require certain food service premises to display nutritional information / *Projet de loi 162, Loi assujettissant certains lieux de restauration à l'obligation d'afficher des renseignements nutritionnels.*

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

Hon. John Milloy: It's a pleasure to put just a few thoughts on the record about this bill. At the outset, I'd like to point out that I will be sharing my time with the Minister of Health, as well as her parliamentary assistant, the member from Oak Ridges–Markham.

I think all of us recognize, and we've heard many times over, that unfortunately for far too long—not just in Ontario, but I think throughout the western world—instead of having a health care system, we have an illness system, one that is focused far too much on people who have obviously acquired a disease or in some way have fallen ill. We're not putting enough emphasis on keeping people healthy in the first place and making sure that people are engaging in the type of activity that allows them to create the healthy choices they need to maintain their health and to have, obviously, a better lifestyle, but also in a sense to remove some of the pressure from the health care system.

That really is the philosophy behind Bill 162, the Making Healthier Choices Act. We know that healthy kids grow up to be healthy adults, and a healthy start is better for our kids and is better for our health care system.

We've heard loud and clear from parents that they want support to help keep their kids healthy. In order for our parents and children to make healthy choices, they need to be informed about the food they are eating. That's why what this legislation would do is make it easier for families to make informed and healthy food choices and give them the right information in the right place at the right time.

Having set a little bit of the context to it, I'd now like to, as they say in the United States, yield the floor to my colleague the Minister of Health. As I say, we're also sharing our time with her parliamentary assistant to provide more details on this very important and forward-looking piece of legislation about truly creating a health care system.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the government House leader. I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant. I am very pleased to rise today to speak further to Bill 162, our government's proposed Making Healthier Choices Act that I introduced on February 24.

It's important for Ontario families to know that we have a plan to make our kids the healthiest they can be and that we are implementing strategies to make that happen. That's why we introduced this legislation which will, if passed, require restaurant chains, convenience stores, grocery stores and other food service establishments with 20 or more locations to post calories for food and beverage items, including alcohol, on their menus.

The sad reality is that the incidence of overweight and obesity are on the rise in this province: 28% of Ontario children and youth are currently overweight or obese, and that figure rises to 40% for aboriginal children. The effects of childhood obesity can have negative consequences well into adulthood, and I speak from personal experience on that. We know that 75% of obese children grow up to become obese adults, and obesity in adulthood brings with it an increased risk of a range of chronic diseases, including heart disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer and osteoarthritis. These illnesses take a serious toll on individuals and their families, and they also place a financial burden on our health care system. Here in Ontario, obesity results in an estimated \$1.6 billion in direct health care expenditures alone every year for hospital care, drugs and physician services. You can add to that an additional \$2.9 billion in indirect costs, such as lost earnings due to illness and premature death. It's clear to me that doing nothing now will only cost the system more later. This proposed legislation will help Ontario families make more informed and healthy food choices, which is a key to improving the overall health of our kids.

People lead busy lives today. They don't cook and eat at home as much as previous generations did. Today, 60% of Canadians eat out once or more a week and more than 60% of young people eat in a fast food restaurant once or more a week. When eating away from home, por-

tion sizes are bigger and people tend to consume more calories and fat and fewer fruits and vegetables. According to a 2011 Ipsos Reid survey, 95% of Ontario residents support requiring fast-food restaurants to post nutrition information on their menus. The need to act is clear, and the public is behind us. Ontarians support this legislation.

In addition to having public support, I was convinced from the outset that improving the health of our kids would not be possible without strong industry partnerships. So we consulted widely with key sectors including food and beverage manufacturing, agriculture, restaurant, food service, food retail, health care and most of all parents, to get their input on how to move forward. These consultations were completed in November 2013. I do want to thank all of these partners for the very thoughtful advice they provided, much of which is reflected in the legislation.

We also have strong support for legislating the posting of calories on menus from health experts in the US and Canada, including the Ontario Medical Association and Cancer Care Ontario. Here's what Dr. Scott Wooder, the president of the Ontario Medical Association, had to say: "Ontario's doctors wholeheartedly support the government's plan to introduce menu labelling in large chain restaurants ... Obesity is strongly associated with an increase in chronic disease."

Our proposed legislation requires the posting of calorie information for standard food and beverage items. This includes alcohol because, for adults, the calories found in alcohol should be counted as part of their daily caloric intake, and we want everyone to be able to make healthier choices.

The proposed legislation requires food service premises to display a contextual statement that explains the recommended daily intake of calories. This information will help people understand how calories fit into the context of a healthy diet. As well, the proposed legislation would authorize public health inspectors to inspect food service premises and enforce these requirements.

If the legislation passes, Ontario will be the first province in Canada to legislate posting calories on menus.

I want families to have easily accessible and transparent nutrition information when they buy prepared foods, because I know that when they have this information they're more likely to make the wiser, healthier choice. As for industry, I want to say thank you to businesses like McDonald's, who have welcomed this change. Businesses are used to adapting to the desires of their customers, and I'm confident that menus will change to reflect their customers' wishes when more nutritional information is available. We also intend to provide the food industry with adequate time and the necessary tools to support implementation of the new regulations.

0910

This proposed legislation is a key component of Ontario's Healthy Kids Strategy, which responds to the Healthy Kids Panel's recommendations for reducing childhood obesity. We developed this cross-government

strategy to promote children's health with a focus on, first, a healthy start, supporting healthy preconception, a healthy pregnancy and early years to build a foundation for a healthy childhood and beyond; we built it on healthy food, an essential component to achieve healthy weights and healthy childhood development; and, finally, healthy and active communities, because building healthy environments for children is the responsibility of the whole community.

This proposed legislation is the latest in a series of actions we've already taken to implement the recommendations of the Healthy Kids Panel's report. We know that posting calories on menus on its own wouldn't be enough. That's why last September we announced new investments of \$2.5 million to enhance breastfeeding supports to make sure that every new mum who wants and needs help with breastfeeding can get it.

In October of last year, we announced an investment of \$3 million to expand Ontario's Student Nutrition Program, creating more than 200 new breakfast and morning meal programs for about 33,000 more kids in higher-needs communities. More recently, as part of our five-year plan to enhance and expand this program, we committed an additional investment of \$32 million over the next three years. That will give 56,000 more children and youth the nutritional boost they need to be healthy and succeed at school.

Last December, our government and the 2015 Pan Am/Parapan Am Games organizing committee launched the Pan Am/Parapan Am Kids Program to build excitement for the games and inspire young people to lead healthy and active lives. Pan Am/Parapan Am Kids will provide opportunities for kids to participate in a variety of games-related sports and para-sports activities, increase cultural understanding of Pan American countries and encourage community celebrations leading up to the 2015 games. Activities will begin at selected after-school programs during the holidays and ramp up in schools in the spring of 2014, building excitement all the way to the summer of 2015.

In January, the Premier and I announced the Healthy Kids Community Challenge that involves communities across Ontario partnering with organizations from all sectors of the community to work together to promote healthy eating, activity and sleeping among our kids. This is a fantastic opportunity for communities to build innovative, unique and community-driven programs together to make Ontario's children the healthiest they can be. The challenge will get families, schools, local businesses, and health, recreation and other organizations working together to create a strong network of supports that will improve the health of our young people because we want to create an environment that motivates kids to be active and healthy. We want our children to get the best start in life and put them on a path to lifelong health so they can reach higher and achieve their aspirations.

At least 30 communities will be chosen to participate in the challenge. Selected communities will be eligible for up to \$1.5 million over four years in funding to de-

velop community-based programs that encourage and promote physical activity, improve childhood nutrition and appropriate sleep. My ministry received dozens of terrific proposals from communities across Ontario. I hope to say more about the successful communities very soon.

Just last month, my colleague David Zimmer, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, announced that we're expanding three highly successful programs that foster healthy eating and physical activity to make it easier for aboriginal children and youth to adopt healthy lifestyles. We're doubling funding for the healthy eating and active living strategy delivered by the province's aboriginal health access centres. We're doubling funding for the Urban Aboriginal Healthy Living Program delivered by the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres and doubling funding for the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program to expand to more communities with a high aboriginal population.

With this added funding, we're implementing another recommendation of the Healthy Kids Panel, which recognized the unique challenges faced by young people living in northern and aboriginal communities.

I know that all members in this House want to give our kids and grandkids the best possible start in life so they can grow up to become healthy, productive adults who will continue to build this great province.

Passing this proposed legislation would give us all the opportunity to carry on with the important task of keeping our kids healthy. Together, we can help parents across the province make the right choices to keep themselves and their families healthy.

I'm confident that this legislation is on the right track and hope that members of all three parties will support its passage at second reading so it can be examined more closely at committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Oak Ridges–Markham.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm pleased to expand on the remarks made by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care regarding our government's proposed Making Healthier Choices Act.

Since 2007, the federal government has required food labelling for prepackaged foods only. Current federal legislation does not require posting calories on prepared foods served at restaurants and other food service premises. Our proposed act would fill that legislative gap.

To support Ontarians in making healthier choices, the proposed act would, first of all, require food service premises with 20 or more locations in Ontario to post calories on menus and menu boards. The legislation would only apply to food service premises with 20 or more locations in Ontario that are selling or serving standard food and beverage items, including alcohol. It would not apply to small operators with a handful of locations that may be financially challenged in meeting the requirements of the legislation. The proposed legislation would require only calories to be posted, which is the single best proxy for meeting our commitment to reduce overweight and obesity in children.

Secondly, it would require food service premises to post a contextual statement regarding daily calorie requirements. This statement could include the fact that, for example, the average adult requires 2,000 calories a day; children, of course, need less. We know that calorie information in isolation does not provide the public with sufficient information to make healthy choices. That's why displaying a contextual statement explaining the daily intake requirements for the nutrient in question will increase people's understanding and use of the information.

Thirdly, the proposed legislation would provide regulation-making authority to: exempt or require additional operators and settings to adhere to the legislation; create exemptions to the calorie-posting requirement for food items; and require the posting of additional nutrients at a later time. Exemptions would be defined in regulation, in consultation with industry, and may include daily or seasonal specials or items on the menu for a limited time, for example.

Another provision would prohibit municipalities from creating bylaws to require additional nutrition information to be posted on menus and menu boards. Several boards of health across Ontario have approved resolutions to implement the posting of calories on menus in their regions. I'm sure this has been done with the best of intentions, but we want to demonstrate provincial leadership and avoid a patchwork of different municipal requirements, which would be onerous for businesses to meet.

A further provision would provide for an offence for failure of food service premise owners and operators to adhere to the legislation. This means that there would be fines for individuals and corporations who fail to meet the requirements of the legislation. Of course, we will authorize inspectors to inspect and enforce these requirements.

The proposed bill will permit the minister to appoint inspectors to support compliance with the bill. The intent is for local public health units to be responsible for inspection and enforcement activities that could be done during routine inspections of food service premises.

As the minister said earlier, the government consulted widely with key stakeholders, including parents, to develop this legislation. The ministry also consulted with the public through an online survey, which confirmed public support for moving forward with this legislation.

Speaker, we are confident that with this legislation we will raise public awareness about the calorie content of foods eaten outside the home; make it easier for people to make healthier choices when eating out; and encourage the industry to reformulate high-calorie menu items.

I think we can all get behind what this proposed legislation intends to achieve, and I ask all members to support its passage through second reading so that we can take a closer look at it in committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

0920

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm glad to provide a few moments of comments on this bill.

I do want to express a concern. On March 4, 2014, the National Initiative for Eating Disorders, as a delegation, met with me in my office. I was very concerned; they have some concerns about this bill. Obviously, people with eating disorders, if they're going into a restaurant and see the calorie count in front of them—that's a concern.

I met with a woman named Wendy Preskow, who is the founder of the National Initiative for Eating Disorders. It's a huge organization. There are about 600,000 Canadian men and women, who are impacted, with eating disorders. They have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness: an astounding 20%.

So I listened very intently to the group that was there—how they feel that there needs to be some better awareness. I know this bill was one bill they had expressed concern about because of the way that menus would be labelled. This is a big issue for them to try to deal with. I just hope the government realizes that there are some groups that feel there should be some recognition that eating disorders are a huge issue and that we need to have the Ministry of Health better engaged with some of these groups.

I took very seriously the comments that Wendy made to me that day about some of the struggles she's had as a parent. The group that met with me really was concerned about the implementation of this bill and how it would affect people with eating disorders, and I promised them that I would bring their concerns and put them on the record today. I appreciate the opportunity to do so.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to comment on some of the statements that have been made with regard to Bill 162, the Making Healthier Choices Act. Certainly, and first and foremost, I would just like to say that the member from Nickel Belt, of course, has introduced legislation that is very similar to this four times prior, so I think it's good that it's here on the floor today.

I agree with the member from Kitchener Centre that, currently, the focus is on dealing with illness in the province of Ontario. I think that there is a genuine call from the citizens of this province to have a more holistic, interventionist and preventionist perspective on health care. I think that would serve all of us well, including the taxpayer.

I would agree with the member from Oak Ridges–Markham that there are certain legislative gaps that the federal government has left on this portfolio which need addressing. I think that this is a timely piece of legislation.

I do think, though, that when we look at the broad spectrum of health care in the province of Ontario, we need to approach it from various places. Even from a planning perspective—I don't know if the Minister of Health noticed last week that the jurisdiction of Peel has the highest rates of diabetes, and they've connected that to planning, to the way the regional government has planned, because there's sprawl and there's a lack of exercise.

Certainly I hope that, within the confines of this House and outside, we look holistically at the way we plan our communities, at the way we address education and nutrition conversations through the health curriculum, for instance; that, perhaps, maybe the government may listen to some of our genuine calls to reform the Ontario Municipal Board so that municipalities are not overruled by that chapter; and that we plan for healthier communities where people are active. This is certainly a key piece: watching calories and connecting that conversation to smart decisions around healthy eating.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Fraser: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the opening speeches on Bill 162, and I'd like to thank the member from Leeds–Grenville for his comments.

This bill is about a healthy relationship with food, and those concerns are rightly expressed. We have concerns with obesity. I think one of the ways we've tried to address this as a government and as a legislative body is through the Healthy Kids Panel and the Healthy Kids Community Challenge. The reality is we have to make sure that our young people have the right relationship with food and understand what they're putting in their bodies, and understand what is healthy. This bill is one measure to do that.

Other measures, again, the Healthy Kids Panel: Understanding what the healthy choices are when you're young is very important. It's very easy to slide into a dietary situation where you're just eating junk. I'm a prime example of that. It's easy to slide into that. I think that if we inform the public, if we give our community the opportunity to understand what they're buying, what's in the food that they get—that's the kind of information that they need to promote health. I encourage all members of the House to support this bill.

Again, to the member from Leeds–Grenville, I understand what he's saying, and I appreciate that he raised that concern. I think there's a way that we can all work this out together.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to make a two-minute comment on Bill 162. I did hear a comment from the Minister of Health saying that if children are obese, the odds of them being obese adults go up significantly. She's dead on in that. I'm not so sure about some of the other stuff in the bill.

Recently, a fellow gave me a calendar, and it was photos from the 1930s and 1940s in a local factory in the Pembroke area. Incidentally they were all men, but that was part of the culture at the time as well. But every one of the persons working in that factory was thin, because they all worked hard physically for a living, and they all ate less.

Obesity is the biggest problem we've got in our society right now as far as health is concerned going forward, in my opinion. I'm not an expert, but sometimes the experts don't really have it right either.

But here's the issue: Every one of our approaches to obesity has been very weak, very soft. Nobody wants to call a spade a spade. They want to find some namby-pamby way of thinking we're going to fix obesity. We figure if we put calorie counts on menus, that's just going to be the panacea. That's not going to work.

We've got to change the way people think. Parents have to be proactive, really proactive, in their children's health from day one—from day one. And we have to be double what we used to be, because the diversions and all of the things available to children to take them away from physical activity are much, much greater than they were when I was a kid and far greater than they were when my father would have been a child. We have to be very proactive about this, and we can't beat around the bush. If we're going to take care of obesity, it's got to start early, and it's got to be something we're absolutely committed to as parents and a society.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The minister has a two-minute response.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I want to say thanks to the members from Leeds–Grenville, Kitchener–Waterloo, Oak Ridges–Markham, Ottawa South, Kitchener Centre and Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

I want to really focus my comments on enthusiastic comments made by the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. He says, and I think he's right, that the biggest challenges we have in health care are those conditions which we create. They are diseases of wealth as much as they are diseases of infection that we used to fight in the health care system.

I completely support his argument that parents must be proactive in the health of their children. If he hasn't already read the Healthy Kids Panel report, I'll make sure he has a copy, because it speaks to many different things that need to happen in our society and in our families so that we actually stem the increase and begin to decrease the rates of childhood obesity in this province.

This legislation is one piece. It is not a panacea. This alone will not solve the problem, but it is one piece that gets us on track to giving parents the information they need to make healthier choices in the context of a society where eating out is the norm. Our families are busy. Parents need the information they need to make healthier choices.

Just yesterday I was in Ottawa, and happy to announce breastfeeding supports there as well as an expansion of a community health centre—big focus on the importance of getting kids off to a healthy start, and that includes supporting breastfeeding. It's all part of a strategy that, taken collectively, will begin to change the trajectory of the health of our kids. That's why I really think it's important that all of us join together to move this forward as quickly as we can.

0930

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I seek unanimous consent to defer our one-hour lead.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Dufferin–Caledon seeks unanimous consent to step down on their one-hour lead. Agreed? Agreed.

The member for Dufferin–Caledon.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's an honour to rise this morning to discuss Bill 162, the Making Healthier Choices Act, on behalf of the residents of Dufferin–Caledon.

Bill 162 is basically the follow-up to the government's announcement at a McDonald's restaurant late last year that was going to bring forward legislation to require restaurants to list calories on their menus and reduce advertising to children.

This is standard form for this Premier and her government: Make a press conference announcing a new initiative, introduce a bill thereafter that is short on details and leaves much to regulation, and then schedule the next press conference for the next initiative. In this case, I do find it interesting that Bill 162 was actually introduced on February 24. We are now mid-April and this is, today, in the chamber, the first time we're discussing this piece of legislation.

It's actually one of the reasons I'm glad I have the opportunity to speak to Bill 162 this morning, because I think this bill is the perfect example of something I've been talking about here lately in the chamber. What I'm referring to is the fact that sometimes, when you have too many priorities, you have no priorities.

What I mean by this is that we've seen many, many government bills come through this chamber in the last year under Premier Wynne. Indeed, many even have received royal assent. Yet still, we see no clear jobs plan from this government. Still, we see absolutely no plan or regard for the drastic overspending that has occurred under the Liberal government. To be honest, based on what we've seen so far from this Premier and finance minister, I would question whether they even think that an \$11-billion-plus annual budget deficit is even a problem.

But even if we put aside the two most important pressing issues before Ontario currently that the government has no plan on—the job crisis and the out-of-control deficit spending—we still see little or no focus on any major issues. We see bills like Bill 162 announced and subsequently introduced months later, and yet we always seem to see only half measures. This lack of focus is not lost on Ontarians.

Earlier this month, the Orangeville Lions Club hosted their annual spring home show in Dufferin county. It's a great event, and this year didn't disappoint. It's one of the busiest shows I can remember, actually. As always, the Lions did a fantastic job of organizing. I go to the show every year, and with this year being so busy, it was an even better opportunity than usual to hear what people in Dufferin–Caledon are saying about the Liberal government and their priorities. I can tell you, Speaker, I didn't hear a single question or issue raised about Bill 162, the Making Healthier Choices Act. I didn't hear anything about Bill 55 either, the Stronger Protection for Ontario

Consumers Act. I didn't hear anything about Bill 30, the Liberal government's tanning bed bill, or about Bill 138, the Ending Coal for Cleaner Air Act. Now, without a doubt, these are all very catchy titles, but they do not speak to the issues that Ontario residents are concerned about.

So while bills like these and the one before us here today, which seeks to require restaurants and fast-food chains to display calorie counts on their menus, may be admirable goals or worthy of discussion, I would argue that these bills are not representative of Ontarians' priorities, because I didn't hear about any of these government bills. What I did hear about was the \$1.1 billion this government spent to save a handful of its MPPs' seats. What I did hear about, actually, is what remains the number one issue from Dufferin-Caledon residents and that's the skyrocketing price of electricity under this government. Will Bill 162, the Making Healthier Choices Act, impact individuals with their concerns? No.

I hear from families about how they're worried about how they're going to be able to afford that extra family night out or new soccer equipment for their son or daughter because they are worried that their gas bills have gone up by 40%. Dufferin-Caledon families are worried about these rising costs of living because they may not have seen their paycheque rise substantially these past few years, and they've seen, every year, more fees, more charges, higher taxes.

So, Speaker, when we—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Renfrew, your member is speaking and you're holding court over there. It's so loud, I'm having trouble hearing her. So be nice, if you can. The minister might want to hear what she has to say. Thank you.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thanks, Speaker.

So when we discuss legislation like Bill 162, we have to ask ourselves: At what point does the government acting a little bit on many issues become counterproductive? I think, rather than act a little bit on a lot of issues, the government should focus on doing a lot on one issue, and that's creating jobs here in Ontario. I know that would be priority number one under a Tim Hudak PC government. Again, when you have too many priorities, you have no priorities.

As I mentioned, however, Bill 162 in and of itself is not entirely without merit. This bill is being showcased by the Liberal government as an effort to curb obesity, particularly childhood obesity. No doubt about it, this is a very serious issue and one that every parent needs to be aware of.

The problem isn't with the government highlighting an issue like child obesity. The problem is, will Bill 162 actually help? What difference, if any, will Bill 162 actually make? There are a number of problems with this legislation, not the least of which being that it leaves much to be determined by regulation.

First off, however, I want to briefly overview what the bill actually does and does not do. As I have mentioned,

were Bill 162 to become law, owners and operators of "regulated food service premises" would be required to display the number of calories in each standard food item. They would also be required to include a contextual statement that is supposed to inform patrons about their daily caloric requirements—for example, "The average adult is recommended to consume X number of calories per day," that sort of thing.

Bill 162 would also authorize public health inspectors to monitor and enforce these labelling requirements and issue fines to those who aren't complying with the new rules. The fines would be \$500 for the first offence, \$1,000 for subsequent offences for individuals, and \$5,000 for the first and \$10,000 for subsequent offences for corporations. Here's the catch, though: How this information would have to be displayed and what, if anything, would be exempt is left to regulation.

I will acknowledge that the government has committed to consultation with stakeholders as those regulations are being crafted, but nonetheless, this is a continuing thread with this government, where they leave significant portions of legislation to regulation.

How the information is displayed is arguably as important as whether it is required to be displayed at all. Yet as we debate this bill here this morning, we have no idea how this information will be displayed, as the government is basically telling us, "We'll figure that out later."

These labelling and display requirements would affect "regulated food service premises," which are defined as places that sell meals for immediate consumption with 20-plus locations that operate under the same name. So this includes the fast-food operators in grocery stores, as well as other locations that are brought under the act by regulation. There is that regulation approach again.

So that's the basis of the bill, and here are some of the key issues with it. First of all, Bill 162 would extend to alcoholic beverages. So owners and operators would have to display calories and the contextual statement, I presume, on alcoholic beverages as well as food. Tell me, Speaker, how on earth does this impact childhood obesity? I don't understand how anyone could possibly argue that displaying calorie counts beside alcoholic drinks would have an impact on childhood obesity.

Continuing on the question of whether Bill 162 will affect the childhood obesity issue, I want to touch on the government's failed attempt to introduce healthy lunches in our schools, yet another previous announcement and initiative. This, too, was a lauded and notable program, but, due to lack of Liberal follow-through, seems to have failed miserably.

I will highlight an article that Karen Howlett from the Globe and Mail wrote in December, where it talks about "Ontario Schools' Healthy Menus Have Students Seeking Fast Food Elsewhere, Auditor Says." This says it all. The article begins with:

0940

"It was a noble policy aimed at combatting childhood obesity.

“French fries, burgers and chicken nuggets were all banished from school cafeterias across Ontario, and replaced with healthier fare....

“But the Ontario government’s much-vaunted Healthy Schools Strategy—part of former Premier Dalton McGuinty’s platform in the 2007 election campaign—has been a dismal failure, says the provincial auditor in her 2013 annual report.

“Students have abandoned the school cafeteria,” said the Ontario Auditor General in her report.

“High-school principals told us that many students head to fast-food places instead,” Ms. Lysyk said.

“At schools in three boards visited by auditors, the report says, cafeteria sales plunged by 25% to 45% after the province introduced healthier food choices in 2010. Vending machine sales dropped even further—by as much as 85%.

“The idea behind the policy was to ban junk food high in fat, salt or sugar from school cafeteria menus. But at one unidentified school where the auditors sampled the cafeteria fare, many menu items did not meet the nutritional criteria.... A bowl of soup, for example, contained twice the amount of fat allowed under the Healthy Schools Strategy.

“The government introduced the policy to tackle a dramatic increase in the number of overweight children. Nearly one in three students is overweight, says the auditor’s report. And almost 12% are considered obese—nearly twice as many as in the late 1970s.

“But the auditor says in her report that neither the Ministry of Education nor the school boards have monitored the food and drinks sold in cafeterias to ensure that they comply with the government’s nutrition standards.

“As well, the auditor says, there is no formal monitoring to ensure that students in grades 1 to 8 get 20 minutes of daily physical activity as prescribed under the Healthy Schools Strategy.”

As a parent, I can speak to that issue because, as you know, we’ve had many, many no bus days; 15 was my last count in Dufferin–Caledon. Some schools have taken it upon themselves to remove the 20-minutes of DPA as they call it, daily physical activity, to make up the time. So even though the 20 minutes of daily physical activity is prescribed by the Legislature, by the government, school boards are removing that and not even ensuring that the kids get the 20 minutes.

We understand that we need to deal with childhood obesity. My question is: Does Bill 162 touch on it? I had an excellent meeting with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture last week, and they are raising this issue. Their suggestion—which I actually told them seemed like a low bar—was that upon graduation, students should be able to prepare six meals from scratch. When I think of my own family situation, when I think of my own children, I can’t imagine that at 17 I would have a son or a daughter who could only prepare six meals. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture believes that that’s where we have to start. I think that that is a laudable goal. If you want to make a difference in childhood obesity, in gener-

al obesity, then people have to understand how meals are prepared, what’s in them and what the impact of it is.

Very briefly, I read an article that talked about how to deal with obesity, how to deal with a society that seems to be getting bigger and not healthier. The article stated that your health is based 80% on what you do, and 20% is based on what you put in your mouth. Is Bill 162 actually going to deal with childhood obesity and ensure that our kids are healthier adults? I don’t think it is. I don’t think the goal that you are trying to achieve is going to happen as a result of Bill 162.

I gather the government’s response is to force these restaurants to display the calorie counts, but will it actually make a difference? I’m not sure it will. Do our children really not know that the double cheeseburger from the fast-food restaurant is high in calories? Or do they know, and they don’t care? I don’t believe Bill 162, the Making Healthier Choices Act, will help with the issue of childhood obesity.

I will not be supporting this bill in its current form because I think that the issue of childhood obesity is an important issue that deserves a thoughtful and well-thought-out approach. Bill 162 isn’t that approach, and that’s why I can’t support this legislation.

I’ve given a few examples. I’m blessed to have an Olympic athlete in my extended family. There was one article I was reading about one of the rowers. For breakfast, he consumes 10,000 calories. It’s not what you put in; it’s what you do after you eat.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Input and output.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Yes. Junk in, junk out: I get that. We have to make sure that, as parents, as a society, we give options. Simply putting an apple on someone’s chair or in the cafeteria does not mean that they’re going to eat it, and it does not mean they’re going to choose that over a granola bar that happens to be high in calories, or something worse.

I think that, collectively, society can do a better job of explaining the cause and effect of eating; making poor choices; eating, for lack of a better word, stuff that isn’t going to make our bodies healthier—but Bill 162 is not that solution.

The reality is, you can go and ask at any McDonald’s restaurant, any of the fast-food chains—right now, they do provide a list of what the calorie choices are. Speaking as a mother of a teenager and a soon-to-be teenager, I can tell you with a great deal of certainty, that is not how they choose what they are going to order off that fast-food menu. What does make a difference is what their parents are eating and what is provided to them on a regular basis for their meals at home. To suggest that Bill 162 is going to be the solution for childhood obesity, and ultimately a healthier society—I think we’re misleading ourselves.

I think that there are better ways that we can focus. I’ll go back to the 20 minutes of DPA, daily physical activity. The Minister of Education is in the chamber. I would suggest to her that she needs to reinforce with school boards and principals the value, the importance of those 20 minutes. We legislated that as MPPs, so now we have

to make sure that it's actually being followed through and that the kids are getting that 20 minutes. That regular activity and that consistency of having the daily physical activity is going to go much further than limiting or posting calorie counts at a fast-food joint.

I would also suggest that there are ways we can do it that involve the parents and the caregivers, to ensure that we are doing a proper job of educating and informing our children.

We all know that when we smoke, there are health repercussions. Are we telling our kids that when they have French fries five days a week, there are health repercussions? I don't know. If we're not, we need to. Is that a government role? I don't believe it is. I think that, ultimately, there has to be some participation and some understanding. And to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture's point, if there is a large segment of society that doesn't understand how to prepare a proper meal without high-in-fat, processed, salty items, then let's deal with that and let's educate and inform people. But Bill 162 is not going to accomplish that goal.

I would just finish with, if we have some priorities, if we have some concerns that we want to raise, let's focus on those. Bill 162 is not the solution.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm happy to contribute to the debate today for Bill 162, An Act to require certain food service premises to display nutritional information.

Speaker, the title of the bill is pretty clear. They would like service industries that provide us with food to make sure that people can make educated choices when they're picking items off the menu to eat at mealtime.

Oftentimes, and what we heard the member from Dufferin-Caledon talking about, it's lifestyle choices. We all have a part to play in our own health and our lifestyle choices, in what we eat and how we choose to have extracurricular activity in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

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Part of that, though, is that we have a busy lifestyle. Ontarians, Canadians—parents usually are both working. They're running the kids off to soccer. There are all kinds of activities going on after work, and a lot of them run in and grab a quick meal on the run. I think it's important that they can have that option to know what the calorie count is on one choice as opposed to the other.

I can tell you that there are many restaurants now that have decided that instead of just offering the fries, they have a side dish of salad. I'm very impressed with a lot of teenagers I see. When I go into a fast-food restaurant at times as well to pick up a quick meal, they're ordering the salad. I think it is making an impact that we educate our generation, our youth today, our adults today to make sure that we can make healthier choices. It is possible. I think posting information when people are ordering can help people make healthier choices.

The bill, I'm sure, needs to be strengthened. I know our health critic here, France Gélinas, will be speaking to it. I look forward to hearing France's speech later today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I listened attentively to the member from Dufferin-Caledon. She always has very interesting things to say. But I'm disappointed in her speech today because this is a small but important step that would help young people especially deal with this epidemic of diabetes we have across this province that's a huge cost to our health care system.

To say that we should be doing all these grandiose things—when we come forward with one meaningful step, “No, we don't agree with it.” So if you don't take that first step to help kids especially—because they're being bombarded around the clock by these ads for fast food: “Eat pizza.” “Eat hamburgers.” “Drink Coke.” It's non-stop on the Internet, on the radio and on television. At least we can give them a bit of help to deal with this bombardment.

These mega-multi-billion dollar international corporations that sell fat, sugar and fructose around the clock—our kids deserve a little bit of protection. All we're saying is let the kids know and let adults know.

There's the member from Durham there supporting the big fast-food industry; I know. But we've got to give the kids a bit of information. The kids are smart. They'll see. Why should you take that super-hyper Big Mac for 3,000 calories when you may be able to get a chicken sandwich—still not that great—for maybe 1,000? Just give the kids some information. The member from Durham disagrees with this. He says that Coke and McDonald's are great for kids. They're not.

They have to give some information. That's all this bill asks for, some simple information about how much fat is in that fast food that's killing a lot of people prematurely. We've got to take this step.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's amazing; we've been talking a lot about McDonald's. I'm thinking that they're getting all kinds of advertising just this morning on this particular discussion.

Unfortunately, when we take a look at this particular bill, there is no silver bullet, as one might say, to correct everything. I have concerns about childhood obesity, as everyone in this particular Legislature has. But you know what? You talk about making sure that all the food manufacturers and so on list—and people are getting in the habit now. They go to the grocery store, especially parents, and they'll look at how many calories, how many carbohydrates, what's the sodium, the salt content and so on. I think that's a good idea.

But again, when we talk about childhood obesity and we take a look at children, I really think, as has been mentioned by my colleague from Dufferin-Caledon, that you take a look at education. It should start in the house. You talk about calories. You talk about educating our kids. You take a look at the calorie intake. You take a look at the carbohydrate intake. Cut back on the sugars. Cut back on the salts. Cut back on the breads—all that

stuff that seems to kind of puff us up. I used to say, if you're hungry, you have a hole, you fill it, and so on. But I think we really need to take a good, hard look at that.

Maybe one of the things we need to look at, from an educational point of view, is maybe making it mandatory for kids in high school—for example, instead of taking one credit in high school for health and phys. ed., you make it mandatory for four: one for every year. Then it's a constant reminder for these children, and, of course, not only from the health side, educational, but also on the physical side, they get active. So I think it's very important that we take a look at this.

Let's not create more red tape. Unfortunately, I can't support Bill 162.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was quite interesting to listen to the MPP talk about the lack of focus and the half measures. In some ways, I will tend to agree with what she said, that a lot of what is being put forward is being put forward with really no clear intention of bringing it to the finish line.

On my side of the House, I'm truly committed to making sure that this, the calorie labelling, makes it to the finish line. It is something that I have been working on for a very long time.

Unfortunately, it is true that the minister brought this idea forward last fall and introduced it for first reading in February of this year, and two and a half months later, the Conservatives haven't even done their lead, and I'm about to start mine. When you have over 180 bills on the docket that need to be dealt with and then you see those ideas being floated forward but not being called for first and second reading—I have a bill very, very similar to this, Bill 149, that has passed second reading. If what we're really interested in is making it to the finish line, making sure that the next time you go to McDonald's, you will see "Big Mac: \$2.99, 540 calories," then there is a way to get to the finish line way faster. My bill has passed second reading. It is sitting in committee, and we could have debate on it and a public hearing this week, clause-by-clause next week, and it would be done. But no. We are bringing the minister's bill, very similar to mine, for second reading for the first time.

The member is right: Are they really committed to this?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Dufferin–Caledon has two minutes.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thank you for the comments from London–Fanshawe, Eglinton–Lawrence, Chatham–Kent–Essex and Nickel Belt.

I particularly liked the "lifestyle choice" line from the London–Fanshawe member. I'm a parent, so I view things in a bit of a different area. It is about lifestyle choice. It is about risk versus reward. It is about explaining to our children, to our nieces, to our nephews, to anybody who will listen, basically, what happens when you consume these items.

Can you have the occasional bottle of pop? Absolutely. But you don't need to have it for breakfast, lunch and

dinner. I think that's ultimately the responsibility that we have to explain to people. It's not about, "This is bad; this is good." There are quality products that, if you ate them regularly, would not be healthy for you. I'll talk about potatoes. Potatoes happen to be a product that is grown in abundance in Dufferin–Caledon. I would never suggest to anyone that they should be eating potatoes for breakfast, lunch and dinner, but it is a healthy product. So we have to be able to make choices, to understand what those choices are and to educate our people.

Lifestyle choice, what you put in, how active you are: all play a role in, ultimately, how healthy and active society is. It helps us in our education and learning. It helps us in our health care in controlling costs. So there is an opportunity here, but I can't see Bill 162 solving it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

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M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to do my one-hour lead on Bill 162, the Making Healthier Choices Act. I realize that I will have to do this lead in two steps, but I will use my first 15 minutes wisely and get as much on the record as I can. The reason I do this is because I seriously don't know how committed the government is to bringing this to the finish line, and I'm really worried that two and a half months after the government introduced this bill for the first time we are just doing our leads now.

This is the first time we have had an opportunity to talk about this bill; yet, it was announced with a big press conference by the minister last fall at a McDonald's. I attended, and a lot of people were in support. She finally introduced the bill on February 24 of this year, and we're finally starting to talk about it. My 15 minutes may be it, Mr. Speaker, so listen carefully. This may be the last time you hear about this bill. Hopefully I'm wrong.

So I think it's no surprise to anyone who has been following what's going on at Queen's Park that this is an issue that the NDP has been pushing for a long, long time, and I want to take you a little bit through the chronology of the bill. The first version of my bill was called the Healthy Decisions for Healthy Eating Act, and I introduced it for first reading in March 2009—so more than five years ago, Mr. Speaker. The bill was then Bill 156.

It went to second reading on April 9, 2009, and it passed second reading. I remember you were there with me, Speaker, when this particular event happened, and I will always remember that there hadn't been much time between the introduction for first reading and bringing it for second reading, as a private member's bill, and the restaurant industry had come out in full force. The number of lobbyists on the lobbying registry had jumped in a way that we had rarely seen, and they were all here at Queen's Park with one goal: to make sure that this bill didn't pass.

I was sitting in the third row with you at the time, Speaker, making my points, trying to bring this bill forward, and the gallery on the east side was packed. They

were all restaurant lobbyists, all wearing their little T-shirts that said, “The Keg,” “Montana’s,” “Harvey’s”—all of the big chain industries. They were all there and they were all staring me down to the point where, if a stare could have made me drop dead—I think this is what they had wished. But I survived, and not only did I survive the stare, but the bill went through.

Applause.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yes, the bill went through. I have to be honest, it was an open vote—not something we see very often lately, but at the time it was an open vote. Some of the Liberals voted for and some voted against, and it passed by three votes—not a ringing endorsement or anything, but this is a democracy, and it passed by three votes, so it passed. It went to second reading. I was quite proud of my colleagues and the people who had helped make this bill pass second reading. And then it sat there.

At the time, we had a majority Liberal government. They were the ones who would decide by themselves which bills were to be called for committee work, and my bill stayed at the bottom of the pile until the House prorogued, and then that was the end of that effort.

So that was back in 2009. Since then, I have reintroduced the bill and the work continued to be done. I have met with the restaurant industry, with the beverage industry and with the manufacturers a number of times to try to take into account their reality. At the same time, an ever-growing number of health agencies came behind me and supported the idea.

After the House prorogued, which meant that after all of those efforts the bill had died, I reintroduced it in June 2010. It was called, again, Healthy Decisions for Healthy Eating, and the bill number was then 90. Bill 90 was very simple. It required the disclosure of calories on restaurant menus, and the restaurants were defined as the big ones. They have to have at least five sites in Ontario and at least an income of \$5 million. Basically, all we’re asking them to do is—the big chains already have that information. They already have brochures and websites and posters that tell you that information, but the way we have it now is that this information is on a poster on the way to the bathroom, or in a brochure under the counter that nobody can find, or on a website that you look at after you’re sitting down with your meal, after you have already ordered. All we’re asking them to do is to take that information from the way they’re giving it to us now and put it on the menu board.

The reason that the chain has to be big enough is that, in order for this to work, the portions in the recipes have to be very standardized. If you go to a McDonald’s or a Keg or a Harvey’s, the portion size in the recipes are always the same; therefore, when you put the number of calories, you know what you’re talking about. The mom-and-pop restaurants, who basically cook with—if carrots are in season, they do carrots; if tomatoes are in season, they cook with this. They have no idea how many calories are in the food that they’re putting on their menu, and that’s fine. We’re not asking them to do this calorie count, which requires a little bit of time, effort, energy

and knowledge. We wouldn’t expect the little mom-and-pop restaurants to have that information, but we do expect the big chains, including all of the grocery stores that are selling more and more meals to bring home, to have that information, and that’s what we were asking them to do.

We’ve gone through Bill 156 once. It passed second reading. Then, prorogue: It means that the giant eraser, the magic eraser from Mr. Clean, was applied to it—gone. Reintroduced as Bill 90 in 2010, and then again the House prorogued. That time, it was—I never had a chance to bring it for second reading before the 2011 election. So that bill died.

Not to be outdone, after the 2011 election came 2012, when I reintroduced the Healthy Decisions for Healthy Eating Act. It was now labelled Bill 86. By the time I reintroduced it in 2012, I would say that most of the people who know nutrition—and I’m not part of that select group—had really convinced me that the body of evidence was there to not only put the number of calories on the menu board but to add a flag for high and very high sodium. I will explain the health effects of this a little bit later.

By the time 2012 came around, I reintroduced the same bill, Healthy Decisions for Healthy Eating. It was now called Bill 86, and not only do we mandate the number of calories beside every item on the menu, but we also mandate a flag. I’m sure, when you go to restaurants, sometimes when you open the menu you will see a little pepper that tells you, “This thing is spicy,” or you will see a sign for vegan or vegetarian etc. The flag is the sign to let you know that this item has either high or very high sodium content. So that’s Bill 86.

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In October 2012, I was getting ready for second reading, and we all remember that that week, just before my second member ballot was to come on that Thursday, the House prorogued. That was when then-Premier McGuinty decided to leave us and prorogue the House in the process. I have said before that I took that a little bit personally, because my private member’s bill was coming. But apparently he had other reasons for leaving and proroguing.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I don’t think it was all about you.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was not all about me, I know. I agree; I agree. Nevertheless, my bill died once again.

But I’m a patient person. I’m very perseverant. When I see something, I don’t let go. So in 2013, I reintroduced the Healthy Decisions for Healthy Eating Act as well as Healthy Decisions Made Easy, where I put together a few health promotion ideas, one of the ones being menu labelling as well as a flag for high sodium. I’m happy to say that on February 20 of this year, I had the chance to debate this bill for second reading. I’m really proud of all of my colleagues in this House. All of the MPPs decided to support my bill, Bill 149, Healthy Decisions Made Easy, and it passed second reading on February 20 of this year.

It has then been sitting on the docket of a standing committee of the Legislature, and could so easily be

moved forward. We are presently debating a bill which has a brother very, very similar to it that has already made it to second reading. I don't understand why we don't just go to Bill 149, call it at committee and be done with something that is so, so small but, at the same time, could be so significant.

I agree with everything that has been said. Will posting calories on menus and menu boards reverse the obesity crisis? Of course not; of course not. It's not going to do this. But it's going to give people information that they want.

I've been working on this for over five years. There have been more polls done by restaurant associations, by public health units, by everybody else on this. Did you know, Speaker, that 95% of Ontarians want to see calories on their menu boards? Ninety-five per cent of Ontarians want to have that information. Isn't that reason enough to give it to them? Is it going to change the world and reverse the obesity epidemic? No, but it's going to give them information to make healthier choices for themselves and for their family. Very, very seldom can we see an issue that unites all Ontarians to the point where 95% of us vote in the same direction and say, "Yes, we want this."

Sure, it leaves 5% who don't, but frankly, Speaker, you could offer paradise and some people wouldn't want it. Am I hoping to get 100%? No. We're never going to get 100%, but 95% in our kind of work is pretty hard to get.

This is where this bill pulls at. Ontarians have told us they understand that they need more than just calorie information, and they understand that they need more than just a sodium flag, but they see it as a good step, a step in the right direction, a step that will help them make healthy decisions. And the science behind it supports them.

People who travel will know that if you go south of the border, if you go into the States, McDonald's has taken it upon themselves to put menu labelling in all of their restaurant chains. I used to remember the number of tens of thousands of McDonald's in the States—I forgot what the number is—but all of them, within a period of one week, had their menus and menu boards changed to add the calories on them.

We have the state of New York and the city of New York that have had a similar bill, where they have mandated restaurants to put the calories right on the menus and menu boards. Did it change the world? No. But when you look at a public health issue as important as obesity—in the public health world, they will tell you that the biggest threat to human health after cigarettes in our province and in our country is obesity. Now, in states, in provinces and in places where you put menu labelling, where you put the number of calories directly on the menu or the menu board, people use that to make healthy choices. People use that to make choices that, on average, will go from a low of 75 calories less per order to a high of about 150 calories less per order.

You may look at this and say, "Well, what's 100 calories more or less?" But when you apply it to the millions of people who eat in restaurants each and every single

day, on a public health scale it's a game-changer. You are on a path to making healthier changes because you will consume less calories, and if you don't change anything else—I mean I agree with the member for—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The time has expired. It's now 10:15. We'll continue with the debate next time.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): This House is recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1016 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Michael Mantha: I just want to give credit where credit is due. Sometimes when we come here to do our jobs, people provide us with assistance and make us look good. I'll introduce my constituency assistant Cindy Restoule. She's all the way up here from Elliot Lake.

Ms. Soo Wong: I am shortly joined by students in grade 7 from Kennedy Public School and Terry Fox Public School, along with their teachers Mrs. Mohamed and Ms. Chan, and the vice-principal, Debbie Tierney. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Bill Walker: It is my pleasure to welcome page captain Calvin Devries and his cousin A.J. Jonker—who is a former page from the spring session 2013—and his aunt Cathy Jonker, who will be in the gallery this morning. Welcome. Calvin, thanks for all that you've done while you've been here.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I would like to introduce Marty Sarkisian and Andy Petrowski. Andy is a regional councillor from Niagara. Marty is a citizen from the Niagara region and a GM retiree.

M. Grant Crack: Il me fait un très grand plaisir de souhaiter la bienvenue à M. Jean-Yves Léonard, le président de Valoris, et au directeur exécutif de Valoris, M. Raymond Lemay, who are here today. We met with Minister McMeekin and had a great meeting. I wish them a great day at question period and Queen's Park. Merci beaucoup.

Mr. John Vanthof: I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate our page captain for today, Callista Laffrenier, and to welcome once again her mother, Karen, in the public gallery.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: The page Isabella O'Brien, who is from my riding, has enticed some friends, Claire Hunter and Jessica Bohm, to be with us today. Who knows, maybe they'll be here as pages too. We would like to welcome them to the assembly this morning.

ORAL QUESTIONS

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, when you came in with your transition team after becoming Liberal leader, you sat down with David

Livingston and the outgoing staff. In that first meeting, I imagine that you told Mr. Livingston to protect all documents around the gas plant scandal.

Can you answer a simple yes or no question: Did you direct David Livingston to preserve all documents, including emails, related to the gas plant scandal?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times, I did not direct David Livingston. He was the chief of staff to the former Premier. He was never my staff. I never directed him in any way whatsoever.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm absolutely perplexed, Premier. You were the leader of the Liberal Party, you were the incoming Premier, and you gave no direction to preserve documents related to the gas plant scandal?

This is the difference between that Premier and how I would handle it. I would want the information; I would want it on the table; I would want all of the answers.

This tells me that you were either in on it or you looked the other way. I don't know what other conclusion we could reach, Premier. So are you telling me today that you made no effort whatsoever to get to the bottom of the gas plant scandal? You did not give, as one of your first directions, to preserve all documents so that taxpayers can get answers on where all that money went and who benefited?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There are two parts to that question. I did not direct David Livingston. I did not direct the staff of the former Premier. I never did. They were the staff of another Premier. I did not direct them.

What I did do when I came into this office, and I said that I was going to do it during my leadership: I opened up—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I also heard something that I've said in the past I don't like to hear. If I hear it again, I'll try to pinpoint who said it.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I did exactly what I said I was going to do, which was to make sure that all the documents that were being asked for were turned over, that they were made public, that the committee had the scope to be able to ask the necessary questions about the whole issue around the relocation of the gas plants. That's what I committed to, and that's what I did when I came into this office.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, you looked the other way. The first question I would have asked as Premier is, get all the facts on the table. Don't let any documents be destroyed. I can't believe you looked the other way. That makes you complicit in this scandal. You either knew and allowed it to happen or you looked the other way, both of which disqualify you from being trusted to run

the province of Ontario. I'm still absolutely incredulous you didn't ask that basic question. It sounds like your first goal was plausible deniability.

Let me give another example. I know this man, a hero of yours, Paul Martin: much to be admired about his record as finance minister in Canada. Many of his campaign team are now part of your team. At least he did the right thing when there were allegations of criminal behaviour. He called a judicial inquiry. It's called the Gomery inquiry. I would call a judicial inquiry.

My question is this: I would. Paul Martin did. Why didn't you?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just be clear with the Leader of the Opposition. My office preserved documents. In fact, we turned over 30,000 pages of documentation to the committee. We know that the scope of the committee was changed, that the questions that were being asked were being answered, because I made it clear when I came into this office that that was going to be our *modus operandi*. That is what we committed to. That is what I have done. I did not direct the staff of the former Premier.

We changed the rules around preserving documents. We made sure that all staff in my government had training so that they would understand the rules around preserving documents. I upheld that commitment that I made as I came into the leadership.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier. Premier, you've threatened a lawsuit on me, on my colleague from Nepean–Carleton. You have tried to shut down debate. I'll tell you this directly: We won't cease. We won't desist. We will pursue this and get facts for the taxpayers in the province of Ontario.

I only wish, Premier, that you would put as much energy as you are into suing the opposition to actually get answers for taxpayers, to hold Liberals to account: instead of looking the other way, instead of giving promotions, to actually hold those Liberals to account. I can't believe you didn't ask the basic questions. I can't believe you won't call a judicial inquiry. Why are you pointing at us? Why don't you point at your own team and hold them to account?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, during the transition from the former Premier's tenure until mine, I asked the Auditor General to examine the costs of the relocation of the gas plants. My staff worked with the staff of the Leader of the Opposition to make sure we set up the committee. That commitment that I made to open up the process was upheld. That's exactly what we did.

As for my willingness to engage in debate, I am willing any time to engage in debate while we are talking about facts. I have said that, and I have engaged in debate

in this House day after day. I have appeared before committee twice. I have said exactly what my role was and what I knew to be the truth, Mr. Speaker. I will have that debate any time. But when it comes to false allegations, I will not debate false allegations.

Interjections.

1040

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs will come to order. And I know what I'm doing.

Supplementary question, please.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Speaker, I think the language from the aboriginal affairs minister says what their plan is. He just said, "Get your chequebook out, Tim."

This is all about trying to intimidate the opposition. You're trying to shut us down from asking legitimate questions. You have ordered us to cease and desist asking the tough questions. My team and I will not cease—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm hearing noises on both sides, actually, when he's trying to put the question. Come to order.

Please finish.

Mr. Tim Hudak: You've asked us to cease and desist. We're not going to cease; we're not going to desist. We're going to pursue the facts as far as they lead. This looks like a Premier who is more interested in putting things under the carpet than getting in the facts.

I'll ask you a very simple question: Premier, why don't you put the same energy into finding and holding the Liberals accountable who may have committed these crimes? Why don't you put that level of energy that you put into the lawsuit into actually getting taxpayers in the province of Ontario—this is all about your—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities will come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I would just say to the Leader of the Opposition that all my energy goes into making sure that we make the right decisions for the people of Ontario. That's what my energy goes into, Mr. Speaker. Part of that, when I came into this leadership, into this role, was to make sure that we had the questions answered that were being asked about the relocation of the gas plants. That's why I asked the AG to do an investigation. That's why we opened up the committee. That's why we changed the rules around the siting of energy infrastructure and we changed the rules around preservation of documents.

Far from wanting to shut down debate, I opened up the debate. I wanted the debate opened up. That is the kind of debate that I think the people of Ontario deserve.

What the people of Ontario do not deserve is that we not deal with the facts. I believe that dealing with the facts is what must happen if we're going to have a healthy political debate in Ontario.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, Premier, with all due respect, threatening lawsuits is not about democratic debate; it's about shutting them down. That's what your plan is.

Secondly, if you truly were interested in getting the facts, you would have made sure that documents were not destroyed. These are OPP anti-rackets division criminal allegations that took place in the Premier's office. You were in charge at the time.

I know you're an intelligent woman. I know you're dedicated to your job. But respect our intelligence too. We simply don't believe that Peter Faist could have gone in and destroyed documents on up to 24 computers, called himself Wendy Wai, used a password, and you never knew. None of those 24 staffers called it to your attention, your chief of staff? I don't think there is a single person in the province of Ontario who believes that alibi. It's simply not credible.

Premier, let me ask you this: Will you finally do the right thing? If you really want the facts, call a judicial inquiry, just like your hero Paul Martin did—

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let's hear what OPP Commissioner Chris Lewis said. He said, "I am told by our investigators that the OPP is receiving good co-operation from senior government officials in this matter." There was full co-operation. That's February 27, 2014.

The Auditor General, in October 2013, said, "I did have the opportunity to meet with the Premier ... it was good to hear that they are taking the report seriously and they are taking some actions and changing the way things are going to be done in the future so that a situation like this doesn't evolve." That was October 8, 2013.

Dr. Ann Cavoukian, the Information and Privacy Commissioner: The Premier "has been fully co-operative with me and my office.... In fairness to Premier Wynne, she said, 'you have my full co-operation, whatever you want from us.'"

Mr. Speaker, we have done everything in our power to make sure that all of the information was available. We will continue to do that, but I am going to insist every time that we debate factual information.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. The Premier claims that she didn't learn about the widespread deletion of emails and wiping of computers until the OPP anti-rackets warrant was unsealed. When did her staff learn about the allegations?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I am going to say exactly what I have said to the Leader of the Opposition and previously in this House: When I was in the leadership race, I knew that there needed to be a change in

terms of the way documentation was provided. I believed that there needed to be an opening-up of the process.

We did that. We opened up the scope of the process of the committee. We provided tens of thousands of documents to the committee. I have appeared before the committee twice, and we continue to co-operate in every way possible. That is what I said I would do, and that is what I have done.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier suggests that she knew nothing about allegations that computers were being wiped by senior Liberals, even though the OPP says that three of her current staff were among those who had their computers accessed and wiped.

Her Minister of Government Services says that he didn't want to know anything about an investigation. He never once discussed it with his chief of staff, even though the OPP said that her computer was one of the ones wiped.

Is the Premier also asserting that no one on her staff was keeping tabs on a file that could see senior Liberals facing jail time?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I will repeat: I knew, coming into this office, that there was a lot of work that we were going to need to do in order to make sure that the process around the relocation of the gas plants was opened up, and that there were questions that were being asked that had not been answered. So I knew perfectly well that we were going to have to change the way that we were working with the opposition—and with the public, quite frankly—to make sure that all the information that was asked for was provided. I made that commitment. I knew, from the moment that I began the leadership race, long before I was in the Premier's office, that we were going to have to make changes and we were going to have to open up the process.

That's what we did. That's why we're having this discussion. We have co-operated with the committee and the ongoing investigation, and we will continue to do that.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier claims she was in the dark. The House leader and Minister of Government Services claims he was in the dark. We're now being told that staff at every level not only didn't know what the OPP was investigating; they didn't know what their own internal investigations had found, and the Premier supposedly hasn't spoken to people she works with every single day about whether their computers were wiped.

The people stuck paying the bill for the gas plant scandal, the people whom the Premier is supposed to be accountable to, might find this just a little bit hard to believe. What does the Premier have to say to them?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What I have to say is that there is an independent police investigation ongoing. It's entirely independent, and that's as it should be. The OPP investigators have been working with the federal crown attorney. I know the leader of the third party knows that,

and that's in order to make sure that it is an independent inquiry. I will not interfere with that.

We are co-operating with both the requests from the committee and the investigation. That's what I said we would do, and that is what we're doing.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier. The Minister of Government Services has produced a report, apparently, on their investigation into the 24 computers wiped in the Premier's office. Will the Premier release that report today?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Government Services.

Hon. John Milloy: I believe that what the honourable member is referring to is a notice that is given in the document that was released by the courts some two weeks ago, where it talks about the OPP working with a branch of the Ministry of Government Services to help undertake their investigation.

As I've said in this House, as is appropriate for a minister, I was not aware of the details of what went on. I told my deputy minister that I didn't want to know about the details of any police investigation. I am still of the view that a police investigation should stay with the Ontario Provincial Police. I will in no way interfere with that investigation.

I would remind the member that when the OPP appeared in front of the committee, they talked about how political interference could actually jeopardize this investigation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier insists that this government is committed to transparency and openness. Why won't she make a government report, one that the people of Ontario paid for, available to the public?

1050

Hon. John Milloy: Speaker, there we have it. The leader of the New Democratic Party now believes that governments should interfere in the work of the Ontario Provincial Police.

I'm not sure how they do things over there, but on this side of the Legislature, when the Ontario Provincial Police is involved, we respect their independence and we get out of the way of their investigation. We don't interfere with their investigation.

What she is suggesting is incredible: that a leader of this party would ask a government to interfere in such an investigation.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier keeps insisting that she's doing things differently, but all people see are reports being kept under wraps, senior Liberals fleeing the province and a Premier who claims she sees nothing, has heard nothing and has done nothing. Does she really think that is good enough for the people of this province?

Hon. John Milloy: Let's deal with facts. The member is making reference to a document, which I am only aware of due to the court document that was released some two weeks ago. I have no information about this report. I shouldn't have any information about this report because it was done as part of an investigation by the Ontario Provincial Police.

Again, I cannot believe that a leader of a political party would be standing up here and counselling the government to interfere in a police investigation. It is quite frankly beneath her. We respect the independence of the OPP, and we will continue to co-operate with them, but in no way interfere in their very important work.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question, as well, is to the Premier. The Premier suggests that for six weeks in 2013 no one was in charge in the Premier's office, that although she was elected on January 27, was using the Premier's office for meetings and was chairing the Liberal caucus on January 30, she still says that she wasn't in charge. The OPP says that the transition happened immediately, yet the Premier disagrees.

What I find interesting is that one of the alleged hard drives that was wiped was a staff member's of the current Premier, and the Premier must understand how this looks. So I'm asking her, can the Premier tell us how Brianna Ames's computer came to be wiped on February 6 if she did not work in the Premier's office until after February 11?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Again, I would suggest that the honourable member do two things: First of all, review the court documents, which gives us a glimpse into an OPP investigation; then it talks about one person who is right now the subject of these allegations—unproven—and that is the former chief of staff to the former Premier, for activities that happened under his watch.

The second thing I would ask is that she start dealing with the facts and apologize for all that she has said. She's had experience with this before: her involvement with Bluedraft. She knows that when a legal battle goes wrong, she sometimes has to apologize, and maybe she should consider it right now.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I won't apologize for asking the tough questions to get to the bottom of this scandal, and you'd better get used to that.

Why would Brianna Ames's hard drive be deleted prior to joining the Premier's office? I'll give a quick answer: It wouldn't have been.

The Premier chooses to believe that she was not Premier until February 11, so let's go with that for a moment. She would have hired Brianna Ames between February 11 and March 8, if that is the case, yet according to the OPP ITO, which, for the government House leader, is a fact, Brianna Ames's computer would have

been one of the 24 accessed between February 6 and March 20, 2013. That means when the computer was wiped, it would have taken place after the so-called delayed Premiership.

Will the Premier and the government House leader stop playing games, tell us the truth and get to the bottom of this scandal right now or call a judicial inquiry like my leader would?

Interjections.

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

Government House leader?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, it is clear the OPP are interested in one individual, the former chief of staff of the former Premier, for events that happened under his watch.

But just to remind the member, let me quote: "The operators of www.bluedraft.com"—the member for Nepean-Carleton—"Ms. Lisa MacLeod and Chris Froggatt, would like to sincerely apologize to Maureen Murphy-Makin and Rick Morgan for wrongfully implicating them in an erroneous story in January 2004 ... We are sorry for the negative perception that may have been created since then and how it may have harmed the solid reputation and high integrity of both Ms. Murphy-Makin and Mr. Morgan.

"We admit that our sources were not reliable and proper accuracy and verification procedures were not followed prudently in publishing this story."

Mr. Speaker, she's done it once. It's time for her to do it again.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. Ontarians deserve answers about the \$1.1-billion scandal and they deserve answers about the Liberals' subsequent email deletion and data destruction. Now, Liberal insiders, who the OPP say are behind the mass email deletions and computer wiping in the Premier's office, are playing games with the committee. Peter Faist insists he can't come to Toronto, and he won't be available for a whole month, weeks after the dates being thrown around for a budget.

We think he has important information and we want him here as soon as possible. Have any members of the Premier's party been in touch with Peter Faist about the timing of his testimony?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: It is up to the committee to determine which witnesses to call; it's up to the committee Clerk, of course, to deal with those witnesses and try to schedule them. Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, there are procedures in place if committees cannot obtain a witness's testimony. This is all work for the committee.

I've got to tell you, Mr. Speaker, since we're on the topic of the committee, how disappointed we are that we tried once again—I believe it's the 14th time; I'm not

making that figure up—to ask the PC witnesses to come before the committee on Thursday so they could talk about what I would have thought would have been—

Interjection.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Withdraw.

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

Hon. John Milloy: They could answer such questions as, when they promised in the last campaign that if they were elected they'd cancel the gas plants, whether they asked about costing, about the policy analysis that was done, about the interaction that they had with the Leader of the Opposition and others.

Fourteen times, and yet they refuse to come. It's very frustrating on this side of the House but, again, it's up to the committee.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Laura Miller, a former deputy chief of staff in the Premier's office, has timed her visit to the committee to fall on a possible budget date announcement. Just like the cynical timing of the tanning bed legislation, which we learned, from internal Liberal staff emails which were made public last summer, the Liberals thought would "make a fabulous headline in Saturday papers" just to distract from scandal, this seems like another attempt to change the channel.

The timing, again, looks convenient for the Liberals. Did Ontario Liberals help Ms. Miller pick her date?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, it is a case where they can't take "yes" for an answer. The committee has asked for certain people to come forward, and he mentions one witness who has made herself available. I understand, obviously, from media reports, that she is in British Columbia and she's coming forward and testifying before the committee. I think we should allow the committee to handle that work and handle that testimony.

Again, if the member is frustrated, we are frustrated. As I say, we have tried 14 times. I'll give you one example: the candidate for the PCs in the last election, a gentleman by the name of Zoran Churchin—he has actually been re-nominated and will be running again—we've called him 14 times.

We want to know who approved the robocall scripts, the flyers and campaign announcements promising to cancel the plant. We want to know about their costing during their campaign promises. I believe he was present when the Leader of the Opposition made his famous YouTube—

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

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Government Services. Minister, when Premier Wynne announced the Open Government Initiative last October,

she made a commitment to make Ontario the most open and transparent government in the country. Our goal is to change the way citizens think about and interact with their government, and ultimately to rethink government so that it works better for the people of Ontario.

An integral part of our Open Government plan is open data. Like governments around the world, Ontario generates and collects huge amounts of data, facts and statistics. A key Open Government commitment is to make the data we collect available to the public in machine-readable formats.

Minister, can you tell my constituents what is being done to make data more open in Ontario?

1100

Hon. John Milloy: I want to thank the member not only for the question but for the important work that he has done in terms of open government. Making government data open by default—that is, the collection of statistics and other data that governments collect—is an important part of our Open Government plan. We launched our open data catalogue in 2012, which contains 178 sets of data available for the public to access online. In consultation with every ministry across the government, we've developed a master list of over 1,000 potential open data sets that could be posted online in our catalogue.

Yesterday we announced that instead of the government deciding which data sets to undergo the process of making them machine-readable, access them and release them, we will ask the people of Ontario to tell us their open data priorities by using an online voting tool—what the kids call crowdsourcing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you, Minister, for taking the opportunity to engage the public in open government and to find out what's important to them. Ontario has taken an exciting step on the road toward open data, as the first government in Canada to develop an organization-wide data inventory like this for public voting.

As data topics like traffic, student achievement and health care wait times become accessible, citizens and businesses with innovative ideas will find solutions to help people in their everyday lives and encourage economic growth throughout the province.

Minister, can you tell us more about this open data inventory and how it will work? What about safeguards for things like privacy and confidentiality?

Hon. John Milloy: Preparing and posting data sets is a complex process. Obviously, we must assess data to protect privacy, security and confidentiality. We must prepare it in an open, machine-readable format and review data to ensure accuracy and accessibility. This process can take between several weeks or even up to a year, depending on the volume and complexity of the data. That's why we want the public to help us focus our efforts so we can prepare the most sought-after data for priority posting.

As far as privacy protection goes—as you know, we take that very seriously—Ontario will release data in a

responsible way that protects the privacy of its citizens. The inventory does not include data containing personal or confidential information; legal copyright and security restrictions are protected; and public safety is prioritized above all.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, you announced yet another transit plan, but you still refused to tell Ontarians how you'll pay for it. Well, your Minister of Transportation let the cat out of the bag. He said the money will come from—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Your Minister of Transportation said that the money will come from “everything from health care to education.” Really, Premier? That is your idea? Is that in addition to raising taxes on businesses and income earners over \$75,000?

Premier, it's clear you have no plan. As with everything else that you announced, you can't explain how you're going to pay for it. Premier, don't Ontarians deserve better than that?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Transportation is going to want to speak to the supplementary, but I just want to say how thrilled I am that we are able to bring a plan—we will bring the plan forward in our budget—to invest \$29 billion in transportation infrastructure, including transit, over the next 10 years: \$15 billion in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, and \$14 billion outside of Toronto.

We are very clear where the money is going to come from. We're very clear that there will be some repurposing of the gas tax and HST. We have said clearly that we want to get the most out of our assets. And we have said that there will be new revenue tools in the budget. We will bring that plan forward, and I hope that the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues will support that transit plan.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Rural Affairs will come to order, and the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound will come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): My sympathies. Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Other than your cuts to health care and education, we're still waiting for you to explain how you're going to balance your budget. We've disclosed the \$4.5-billion budget gap which you kept from the financial community. The Bank of Canada said revenues would fall, and now we've heard that your revenues are \$5 billion less. Leaked budget documents show you're

going on a \$5.7-billion spending spree. Everything you announce involves raising taxes and adding more debt.

Our leader, Tim Hudak, has a plan he unveiled yesterday that makes transit and roads a priority without raising taxes. Why are you insisting on raising taxes and taking money out of health care and education when we've given you a plan to do it without raising taxes?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: If the member opposite had listened to the whole remark that the Minister of Transportation made yesterday, he would have realized that the minister was clear that there is money that is being repurposed, but that does not mean we will be cancelling programs in education or health, unlike the party opposite. The member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore basically said, in their plan, people will have to choose between full-day kindergarten and transportation infrastructure. That is a ridiculous choice. That is not a choice that we would ever put before the people of Ontario. It means that their plans to build transit are actually misguided, as well as magic.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. This morning, in the paper for all to see, is an exposé commenting on the growing trend of prescribing antipsychotic drugs to long-term-care residents. In some long-term-care homes, over half of the residents are on these drugs that are often dangerous drugs. The consequences of excessive prescribing of off-label use of antipsychotic drugs can be and have been deadly.

Can the minister explain why she has allowed this problem to balloon into crisis levels?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. There is no question that the care and safety of residents in long-term-care homes is of paramount importance. I must underline that doctors must prescribe medications appropriately and only as necessary. However, there is recognition across the long-term-care sector and within government that residents with challenging behaviours should receive non-pharmaceutical care whenever possible.

That's why we are investing in Behavioural Supports Ontario. Behavioural Supports Ontario is really showing enormous potential in the training—it encourages non-pharmaceutical interventions to address aggressive behaviour. We've hired 600 full-time staff through BSO. They're working with residents and providing real results in long-term-care homes.

I will speak more in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: For years, long-term-care homes have alerted this government to this growing problem of coping with the growing numbers of seniors who suffer from dementia. They have told the ministry of the rising

use of antipsychotic drugs and that this trend was continuing. Way back in 2007, the Ontario Auditor General released a report that alerted the government to this problem, as well as issues about the lack of consent for the use of those drugs.

Can the minister explain why this problem isn't being taken more seriously by this government, as the use of antipsychotic drugs continues to rise exponentially in our long-term-care homes?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: If a drug needs to be prescribed to a patient, under the Long-Term Care Homes Act, a drug cannot be given to a resident unless it has been prescribed by those who are allowed to do so under the Regulated Health Professions Act. Before a treatment can be given to a resident, consent must be given by the individual receiving the treatment. If that person is unable to give consent, then the substitute decision-maker must do so. A resident in a long-term-care home cannot be restrained by use of a drug unless immediate action is necessary to prevent serious bodily harm to themselves or others.

1110

I acknowledge that more work needs to be done on this issue, and everyone who works within the long-term-care sector agrees that more needs to be done. We are investing in Behavioural Supports Ontario to support non-pharmaceutical control of behaviours that could cause harm to residents and others.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. In 2004, our government launched a transformation of Ontario's developmental services. This transformation emphasized community inclusion and increased independence for individuals.

However, many members in this House, including myself, heard from families telling us that we need to do more to support families affected by developmental disabilities. I know the minister has been a strong vocal advocate on this cause, and has spent the last year consulting to improve developmental services.

As a proud member of the Select Committee on Developmental Services, I have travelled across the province with the committee and heard from families affected by developmental disabilities. We heard from parents who urgently need respite care or residential support for their adult children as they grow older.

Last Friday, Minister, you made an exciting announcement. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can he please share with the House what the proposed plan for developmental services is?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'd be delighted to do so. I just want to thank the member from Scarborough-Agincourt both for her question and her own fierce advocacy on this front.

The member is absolutely correct about what we have heard from families across the province. That's why I

was proud to recently announce a bold plan. I'm delighted to share with the House this morning that our government plans to invest some \$810 million over the next three years in support of developmental services.

In total, the proposed new investment would represent the single largest infusion of support to the developmental services sector ever. This is the next step in our plan. It's about giving people with developmental challenges the tools they need to be full citizens in our society.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Soo Wong: I want to thank the minister for his answer, and also congratulate him on this milestone achievement. I know that many families from across the province appreciate his leadership and dedication to take these next steps to improve and support families affected by developmental services.

The proposed new money is a truly unprecedented commitment to developmental services in Ontario, and the magnitude of this announcement cannot be overstated. I know that families in my riding are delighted to receive this announcement. They also would like to know what the new investment would do to help support them.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Can he please inform the House what the goals are of this investment and how this new money would be allocated?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Well, it has been a lot of work. I'm delighted to say that this new money will wipe out the wait-list for developmental service direct funding in the province. Over four years, it will support an additional 13,000 individuals through the Passport Program, including 4,000 new individuals we anticipate coming on stream.

It will eliminate the wait-list for Special Services at Home—just within two years—and will help 8,000 children and their families. Our plan will provide residential support for more than 1,400 new individuals, strengthening our ability to respond to people with special needs. Furthermore, more than 4,000 people would receive help to plan or make the transition—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I want to thank the Premier for being so supportive of this initiative, and for her ongoing encouragement, support and leadership.

POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question this morning is to the Premier. Premier, last week I rose to question why your chief of staff, Mr. Tom Teahen, failed to appear on the seconded list despite his annual salary for 2013 of over \$344,000.

Today your chief of staff is in the news once again, this time joining six other Liberal entities in allegedly violating the Election Finances Act, section 29 of which states clearly that "No political party, constituency association" or "candidate ... shall directly or indirectly ... accept contributions from any person" residing outside of Ontario.

Premier, of course I'm referring to the seven donations totalling nearly \$11,000 made by Mr. James Barry, a

resident of Quebec and the union boss for your friends the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

Premier, will you direct your chief of staff to immediately return the nearly \$1,000 that was illegally donated to his own Liberal campaign in Beaches–East York?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities has something to add to this, but I just want to make sure that—the rules around political donations are really important. They are a very important part of our democratic process.

Today's article was the first that I'd heard of the question raised by the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. It's my understanding that Elections Ontario has been asked to look into questions about particular donations. I understand that the individual in question has said that—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. Even when I eyed him and he continued—I will ask the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound to come to order. This will be his last chance.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I understand that the individual involved has said that there has been a clerical error that has been made, but we will work with Elections Ontario. Of course, if they have any questions, we will absolutely work with Elections Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Back to the Premier: Premier, in 2009 your Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services and the past president of the Ontario Liberal Party accepted, allegedly, illegal donations from Mr. Barry, and even worse, the Liberal Party of Ontario accepted \$5,400 in illegal donations as well.

But Premier, that's not all. To reward Mr. Barry, your government appointed him to the board of governors for the Ontario College of Trades.

Premier, will you demand that all money donated from Mr. Barry be returned, including any illegal donations accepted by your chief of staff and your Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, and will you take the necessary steps to remove Quebec resident Mr. Barry from the board of governors of the Ontario College of Trades?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Brad Duguid: The incorrect information in the member's question is just unbelievable.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: He lives in Quebec, Brad.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, these guys will stoop—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, a complaint was made to Elections Ontario, and Elections Ontario is looking into it. The allegation appears to be that there was a clerical error made. I'm sure that whatever was done will be corrected.

But Mr. Speaker, here we go again. We have James Barry, who's the president of the IBEW. He represents 14,000 electrical workers across this province.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: He lives in Quebec.

Hon. Brad Duguid: When you smear that gentleman's reputation, you smear the reputation—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Simcoe North is warned.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, nothing is more important to people than their reputation. We're in a business where we're used to those kinds of smears coming at us. I don't think it's fair for people outside of this chamber to be—

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

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Premier. After wasting a year dithering on transit, the Premier made a dozen or so announcements yesterday—so many, it's hard to take them seriously.

But one announcement stood out. She said she would fund transit by shuffling—sorry, repurposing—gas tax money. The Premier used to attack the Leader of the Opposition, and she did it again today, for threatening to fund transit by sacrificing health care and education. Remember that? But when asked last night where this gas tax money would be repurposed from, her own Minister of Transportation said, "Everything from health care to education."

My question for the Premier is: How much will your government cut from health care and education to pay for transit?

1120

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, first—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark, come to order.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the member for Nipissing and the member for Trinity–Spadina, who I both consider friends, would offer an apology today. The reason I think an apology is appropriate is because if you listen to the tape, what it actually says is a direct question: "What does general revenue fund?" And I said, "Everything from health care to education," which is actually the truth.

To either friend, including my friend from Nipissing, who I consider a friend—and I'm looking him in the eye right now—who tells me he doesn't like that kind of

politic—he is now proffering that kind of politic. And if you want—

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: First the government floated a scheme to privatize and toll our highways. Then they talked about raising the HST and gas taxes. Then they denied they were even in favour of tolls or the HST or gas tax increases, and instead proposed a fire sale of public assets. Now the latest plan of the week is to pay for transit by reallocating—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration can hide his face. I still see it. Stop.

Carry on.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Now the latest plan of the week is to pay for transit by reallocating or repurposing money from health care and education budgets. When it comes to funding transit, the government is making it up as it goes along. We still have no idea where the money is going to come from. What services are we cutting? Which taxes are you raising? What is the government's plan?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Coming from a party whose municipal wing can't vote for a single new tax increase that they've been given, that they asked for; coming from a party that has no transportation plan for highways, transit or roads; coming from a party that can't articulate a single source of revenue to support transit—not a single source. No plan, no credible plan, no costed plan—and no apology for saying things on the record that you know are not true—tells people in Ontario a whole bunch about your character and a whole bunch about your lack of leadership.

We are quite happy to ask you one last time—

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

Hon. Glen R. Murray: —to take this historic moment—

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'll make that decision. The member from Nepean–Carleton will come to order.

New question.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. The member from Durham will withdraw.

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes, I withdraw, Speaker.

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

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Bob Delaney: This question is to the Minister of the Environment. Minister, next Tuesday, April 22, is Earth Day. Earth Day is the largest environmental event in the world. More than six million Canadians—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville will come to order. Do it again and I'll name you.

Mr. Bob Delaney: —including nearly every school-aged child, will participate in an Earth Day activity in their respective communities.

When Earth Day started in 1970, North Americans drove gas-guzzling cars that drank leaded gasoline. Belching smokestacks were then seen as a sign of a strong economy instead of an environmental shame. Since 1970, Earth Day has been a chance to raise our awareness of how this planet is the only home we'll have and focus on how we can protect it.

Would the minister explain how our government is doing its part to protect the environment here in Ontario?

Hon. James J. Bradley: That's an excellent question. I know it was the question of the member for Leeds–Grenville, that has been stolen.

With Earth Week only a week away, I'd like to remind the House that our government has made the environment a priority again in Ontario. Ontario's elimination of coal-fired electricity generation is, as everyone knows, the single largest greenhouse gas reduction initiative in North America. Federal ministers even use that in their international arguments.

Additionally, initiatives have been taken to reduce toxics in our ecosystems, to reduce waste, to protect Lake Simcoe, to clean up contamination, to protect green space and to invest in science and transportation. We've created opportunities for individuals and communities to become involved in the protection and the restoration of the Great Lakes through the Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund.

This government takes the health of the environment very seriously. We encourage members opposite to work with us to pass our important proposed pieces of legislation and further protect the environment for future generations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Minister, conserving our Great Lakes' water supplies and protecting our water quality is essential to ensuring the health of our families, our communities and our economy. It's essential that Ontario provide communities with the tools to ensure that the Great Lakes will continue to supply our drinking water; power our towns and cities; irrigate our farms; enable sport fishing; and provide recreation and relaxation on the water for Ontario families and visitors.

The Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund provides many ways to help preserve and protect the Great Lakes. Would the minister please share some ways in which this is done?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm delighted to. Mr. Speaker, for all members of the House, the Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund is designed to support local community actions to protect and restore wetlands, beaches, shorelines and coastal areas by offering modest grants for non-profit groups for cleanup projects. Since we launched this program two years ago, we have

awarded more than \$3 million to 156 groups to make improvements in their corner of the Great Lakes.

Here are a few examples: improving habitats for native fish, and plant more than 2,000 native trees and shrubs with the help of more than 80 community volunteers in the Ajax-Pickering area. In Burlington, I was pleased to work with 100 volunteers to improve the coastal environment of Lake Ontario's Beachway Park by planting native grasses, shrubs and trees, removing invasive species and picking up litter. Additionally, community cleanup events took place on Manitoulin Island.

The deadline for non-profit groups to seek funding for their projects is upcoming. It's May 9. I encourage all communities to seek this funding and to help clean up their portion of the Great Lakes.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Rod Jackson: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Friday, the BLT—the budget-leaking team—and the minister announced \$810 million over three years to alleviate some wait-lists for developmental services.

Applause.

Mr. Rod Jackson: Clap for yourselves. Ontario invests \$1.7 billion in developmental services, a 63% increase since 2003.

Applause.

Mr. Rod Jackson: Clap again. But here's what you're applauding for: You're applauding for a decade of investment that still hasn't improved your ministry's performance.

Under Liberal reign, reliance on OW and ODSP has grown by 50% and 40%. The problems are so pervasive, especially for people with disabilities, a committee was struck to help the minister do his job.

Minister, why does your party think spending more money is the only solution when it hasn't worked for you in 10 years?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm amazed; actually, I'm almost speechless with the question. Coming from a party that, when in office, tried to balance their budget on the backs of the poor by cutting 23% from social assistance and developmental services, that didn't increase the minimum wage, that didn't increase OW or ODSP once in their tenure, that voted against every initiative this government has taken since we came to office—we don't have anything at all to learn from you over there, sir, I say.

Interjections.

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

Supplementary?

Mr. Rod Jackson: The minister has got to do much better than go back in time.

Minister, the truth is Comsoc is a neglected portfolio. The quintessentially Liberal cop-out to the developmental select committee is to throw more money at services to

avoid doing the hard work to actually improve them. The quintessentially Liberal response to the 2012 Lankin-Sheikh report, just like Drummond, was pretending that it didn't even happen.

Minister, the most vulnerable people in our province won't be bought and they won't be ignored. When will you respond to the Lankin-Sheikh recommendations, and undertake to actually improve service delivery for people with developmental disabilities for real?

Interjections.

1130

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

Hon. Ted McMeekin: That's all we've been doing since the Sheikh-Lankin report came out. And speaking of stakeholders, we circled back with over 280 groups to get their feedback. I want to tell you, the people the member opposite is talking about being so unhappy—that was reflected on Friday with the 600-plus emails and tweets that we received and the fact that it was trending nationally, right across this country, as being the single most important investment in the developmental services sector since we came to office in 2003. I'm proud of that.

Time doesn't stand still. The answer isn't all money. The answer is investing and ensuring that people with unique challenges have all the opportunities to fully participate in our society that so many of us take for granted. We're going to make sure that happens.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Cindy Forster: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. The Brantford Expositor recently published a series of articles on the Ministry of Health inspections at long-term-care facilities in the Brantford area. What the newspaper found and reported is very disturbing. The Expositor has learned that long-term-care facilities in the Brantford area have not had a full inspection for almost five years, in spite of the government's promises that all homes will get this level of oversight. Does the minister think that this failure is acceptable?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have committed that all homes will have received a rigorous inspection by the end of this calendar year. We have hired, I believe, an additional 90 inspectors who have been trained and are doing that work now.

I stand by my earlier commitment that every long-term-care home in this province will have had that rigorous quality inspection by the end of this calendar year and annually thereafter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Here is what the Expositor reported on the ministry's website:

"And the revamped ministry website, which aims to 'ensure transparency and protect residents' is so difficult to navigate and evaluate, most people would find it impossible to get a true picture of problem homes.

“There’s no direct way to compare one home to another, or to compare a home to a provincial average.”

The ministry is not providing people with a clear report about the condition of long-term-care homes and whether or not they are meeting the legislative requirements. Minister, do you think the seniors in Brantford deserve better?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: What I can reiterate is that we are committed to improved inspections, more rigorous inspections and results posted online. In 2003, there were 59 inspectors working in the province of Ontario. We now have 180 inspectors, with additional recruitment under way, including 90 new inspectors hired since September 2013.

Since the implementation of the Long-Term Care Homes Act there have been over 8,200 inspections conducted. I have committed, as I said earlier, that every home in this province will have that RQI by the end of this year and annually thereafter.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Mr. Steven Del Duca: Today my question is for the minister responsible for seniors. Minister, you recently visited my wonderful riding of Vaughan with the Premier to attend a seniors round table. We hosted more than 600 seniors at this particular event who came from over 100 different seniors groups. I want to take a quick moment to pay tribute to Mario Ferri, Tony Porretta and the rest of the organizing subcommittee that worked so hard to pull this together.

This particular round table provided the seniors from my community with the opportunity to hear presentations that discussed a variety of topics that are important to them and their families. I’m still receiving phone calls from constituents praising this event and telling me that they can’t wait for another healthy seniors round table to take place in Vaughan.

At this event, the minister discussed the issue of social isolation felt by many seniors across the province. Can the minister please elaborate on some of the ways in which our government is addressing this important issue?

Hon. Mario Sergio: Indeed, it was a very impressive sight to see some 600 or more seniors, and I have to say congratulations to the member from Vaughan, because he did work very hard in bringing the seniors there. What’s more impressive is that the seniors came very well engaged, and they were ready with their many questions, from pensions to realty taxes.

I have to say, in answering the question of the member, that Ontario’s Action Plan for Seniors is the framework within which we have a number of other plans to serve our seniors.

The last one: It’s wonderful, and I’m so elated to say that it has been received extremely well by our seniors’ organizations: the Seniors Community Grant Program. It’s so successful that we are continuing—

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

Mr. Steven Del Duca: I want to thank the minister, not only for his response and not only for being in Vaughan a couple of Fridays ago for this round table, but for his exemplary work on behalf of seniors right across the province of Ontario.

Minister, during your remarks at this particular round table event, you provided attendees with an update regarding the implementation and the protections offered under the Retirement Homes Act. For the first time in Ontario, seniors living in retirement homes have strong protections under this act.

Can the minister please inform the House on the status of the risk officer and complaints review officer? These are two very important accountability and transparency provisions in the act that help to further a resident’s protections.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Indeed, Speaker, it is comforting to know that the Retirement Homes Act offers our seniors in retirement homes very strong protection under our provincial law. With the beginning of the year, we moved into phase 5 of the Retirement Homes Act. We now have in place the risk officer assessing the effectiveness of the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority, including care and safety standards and residents’ rights. The risk officer and the complaints review officer prepare public reports and statements, and residents now have access to the complaints resolution process as well.

The risk officer and the complaints review officer provide accountability and transparency, and furthermore, they provide more protection for our seniors to live in retirement homes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1137 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I’d like to introduce Elliott Silverstein from CAA, Peter Karageorgos from the Insurance Bureau of Canada, and Dara Carpenter from Intact Insurance, who are here today to witness the tabling of our towing legislation. As well, I would like to welcome Ministry of Transportation staff on behalf of Minister Murray: Robert Bonofiglio, Dawn Stevely and Joanne Gort, here to witness the introduction of the legislation as well. Thanks for being here.

SPECIAL REPORT, INFORMATION AND PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just before I move to members’ statements, I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a special investigation report from the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario entitled Crossing the Line: The Indiscriminate Disclosure of Attempted Suicide Information to US Border Officials via CPIC.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: In March, I had the pleasure to join the Huron Federation of Agriculture and the Bruce Federation of Agriculture on their annual Meet the Members Day, along with my federal counterpart, MP Ben Lobb, and municipal representatives as well.

These annual events provide a forum for agricultural leaders across my riding of Huron–Bruce to meet with elected officials to discuss the pressing issues that are impacting agriculture and food locally and across the province.

Speaker, you won't be surprised to hear that the price of electricity was at the top of the list of concerns, as it is in all sectors of Ontario's economy, from manufacturing to retail. Ontario's agri-food sector can be very power-intensive, and the cost of electricity is a serious problem.

Furthermore, like the rest of Ontario's manufacturing sector, food processing and ag inputs have been hit particularly hard in recent years.

I have to note that the impact of red tape was also cited as a priority, as it hampers productivity and holds back growth. In fact, one commodity representative noted that his farming business must interact with nine different Ontario ministries, many in a redundant manner.

Finally, the recent angst generated by the uncertain future of Kemptville college has led to concern amongst the agricultural community. It was noted that currently there are three jobs waiting for every graduate of an agricultural college. If campuses keep closing, fewer graduates will lead to major labour shortages in the industry.

We need jobs in Ontario, and we support Tim Hudak.

ORAL HEALTH

Mr. Michael Prue: April is Oral Health Month here in the province in Ontario. On April 4, I had the good fortune of going to Brush-a-mania at Crescent Town school. What a wonderful time that was, with hundreds of kids there, all learning of the importance of brushing your teeth. I was joined by Dr. Rick Caldwell, the ODA president; by Dr. Raffy Chouljian and Dr. Andrew Syriopoulos; and, of course, by the Rotary Club of East York. The guest of honour was a guy dressed up as Timmy the Tooth, who was walking around, and the kids were absolutely fascinated.

For me, the most important was having five children about six or seven years old, all lined up in a row, dressed up in teeth costumes. Everybody in the whole room—100 kids—was brushing their teeth. They were having a great time.

The East York Mirror came and immortalized at least two of the kids standing there with toothbrushes in their mouths, dressed as a tooth. It appeared on the front page of the East York Mirror this past week, so that all of the kids, not only in the school but across East York, could see the importance and the message of oral health. It was

important to let them know that teeth need to last a lifetime.

Another thing that happened after that is, I had an opportunity to meet with some of the parents, who were in a room downstairs. The parents, many of them new immigrants, were learning about health care facilities available to them here in Toronto and in Ontario, and they were very, very happy that we were putting the message to their children about the importance of oral health.

HOSPICE AT MAY COURT

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Hospice at May Court for the care and respect they gave to my father and our family over the last three weeks of his life.

To Doctors Mai, Riley and Tucker, thank you for your advice and for giving us a clear understanding of what to expect, and for ensuring that Dad was comfortable in his last days.

To all the nurses and personal support workers, thank you for the gentle and loving care you gave us. You laughed with us and, most importantly, you were always interested and engaging with Dad, qualities that were important to him throughout his life.

To the volunteers, thank you for your kind words and deeds.

To all the staff and volunteers, you should know that you give expression daily to what our community hopes for our loved ones and our families at a very important time: peace, dignity, respect, love. If there are rest stations between heaven and earth, the Hospice at May Court is certainly one of them.

SOUTH GLENGARRY BUSINESS
AND COMMUNITY AWARDS

Mr. Jim McDonell: In this great province of ours, we all know people who have gone beyond what we generally expect, to make a real difference. It may be in the business they started or operate today, in the dividends it returns to the community or the people who have given hours and hours of their limited time back to the community.

At this time I wish to take the opportunity to recognize some of the residents of my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, who, through their hard work, business initiative and spirit of service to their peers have made a huge difference in our community.

At the ninth annual South Glengarry Business and Community Awards, the people of South Glengarry chose to recognize the following dedicated and deserving citizens for their contributions to the township:

The Youth Merit Award went to Kathleen McDougald. The Community Service Award was given to Chelsea Hope. Scott Fourney of Fourneyview Farms received the Excellence in Agriculture Award. Cruickshank construction was recognized as Business of the

Year. Dimitrios and Colette Kritikos of Dimitri's restaurant received the Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

A certificate of appreciation was also awarded to Todd Rozon, Bruce Munro, Tish Humphries, Rick Marvel and Micheline Carter for their successful fundraising canvass for the Cornwall Community Hospital.

The South Glengarry Citizen of the Year Award went to Sylvia Thomson, a recognized long-term volunteer in many local groups, including Martintown Women's Institute, the Martintown Community Centre and the Martintown mill restoration group, and she was a founding member of the Martintown Horticultural Society. For many years now, the flower arrangements spread around the village and on the bridge surrounding the village signs have been her doing and the envy of the township.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate all the recipients for their contributions in making our lives just a little bit better. Thank you.

SEED YOUR STARTUP

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm proud to rise as MPP for London West to recognize the winners of the third annual Seed Your Startup competition, held in London on April 9, 2014. The competition was organized by BizInc, a student incubator launched three years ago to seek out, support and promote student entrepreneurs at Fanshawe College and Western university. Seed Your Startup provides seed funding to student projects to help young entrepreneurs grow their business over the summer.

This year, over 40 business proposals were submitted, with the top five projects in two categories invited to pitch their ideas to a panel of London-area judges. Prizes worth over \$10,000 in cash and services were donated by local sponsors.

The Best New Operating Business Award, worth \$7,000 in cash and services, was won by Megan Kraft from Western and Daniel Phillips from Fanshawe for dpms, a socially conscious, high-quality and locally made lifestyle brand.

A second prize of \$3,000 in cash and services was awarded to Western student Jessica Hodgson for Kaleid Snow Gear, maker of snowboard shin guards.

Seed Your Startup shows the important work that is being done for my constituents by BizInc to help students build a business and create their own careers. In just three years, BizInc has worked with 390 entrepreneurial teams from Western and Fanshawe. In turn, 70 new operating companies have been created, employing more than 130 young entrepreneurs and contributing more than \$2 million to our regional economy.

Helping students start businesses in London makes good economic sense, and BizInc is where it all begins.

1510

WHAT'S UP WALK-IN CLINIC

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I'm honoured to rise today to talk about an event I had the pleasure of attending in my

riding of Scarborough-Guildwood during victims' awareness week: The opening of What's Up Walk-in Clinic at 181 Galloway Road, an initiative by the Bereaved Families of Ontario and East Metro Youth Services to help youth find a safe space in which to explore grief and to reduce the isolation of youth who are dealing with loss.

On October 31, 2013, Bereaved Families of Ontario was approved for an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant of \$66,300 over 24 months to modify and expand the peer-led grief support program for youth in priority neighbourhoods across the city. BFO and East Metro Youth Services have partnered in Scarborough-Guildwood to provide bereavement support services to youth grieving a homicide or death due to natural causes.

The official launch of the program was held on Friday, April 11, and it was brought forward with the support of Lesley Parrott, who shared her journey, really, of moving to a place of joy and healing after the untimely murder and rape of her daughter, Alison. Three other mothers and women shared their stories as well, as they planted a tree as a symbol of their hope and healing.

This service is an effective support for our young people to help them overcome a tremendous loss.

I want to thank Aruna Ogale, executive director of Bereaved Families of Ontario, and Claire Fainer, executive director of East Metro, for their foresight on this initiative.

LIFE-SAVING SKILLS

Mr. Steve Clark: I rise today to recognize four real-life heroes who made the biggest save of the Brockville Gentleman's Hockey League season. Their save had nothing to do with keeping the puck out of the net, but it did involve incredible teamwork. The heroic actions of Kim Hansen, Bob Wheeler, Al Perry and Chris Robertson saved Dan Doyle's life after he collapsed to the ice, lifeless, last month.

Fortunately, the Brockville Memorial Centre, where the game was played, is equipped with a public access defibrillation unit, or PAD. Acting immediately and working as a team, Hansen, Wheeler, Perry and Robertson gave Doyle the two defibrillator shocks that saved his life.

As Hansen, a dentist from Prescott—who I understand has been involved in two previous life-saving incidents—told a Brockville newspaper, "He was gone. We brought him back." Amazingly, Doyle was conscious and talking when Brockville firefighters and Leeds-Grenville emergency services paramedics arrived and got him to hospital.

It's fitting these four heroes are being honoured on First Responders Day, May 1, at the St. John Ambulance Brigade of Leeds-Grenville and Lanark's Canadian Heroes event. This recognition is important, and I join all of Leeds-Grenville in commending them.

This event has also increased awareness about how life-saving skills can make the difference in an emergency.

Indeed, St. John Ambulance has received many inquiries about CPR training and requests for PADs.

What a great legacy to know that Dan Doyle won't be the only person who gets to keep playing, thanks to these heroes.

PAPER BILL CHARGES

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Speaker, for years, all of us have been getting bills from our local phone companies and our local cable companies on paper with no extra charge, but I'm sure lately many of us might have noticed that for a paper bill, these companies can charge anywhere between \$2 and \$4, and they've given two reasons when you go to their websites or talk to them.

One, they say it's environmentally better to send it electronically, and I happen to agree with them. But in that case, my only question to them is, why do they keep mailing all of us paper flyers advertising their services if they're so concerned about the environment? The other thing that they go on to say—in fact, one of them said, “It is so convenient you can print your own bills.” There goes the whole argument around the environment.

Their second argument is usually around the fact that, “It's cheaper for us to send an electronic bill.” Well, in that case, pass on the savings. If it's cheaper for you to send me an electronic bill, if I sign up online, give me the discount, because the cost of mailing hasn't gone up that much. You've been mailing those bills for free forever. Now, if you've found a cheaper way, pass on the savings; don't penalize and charge extra for the old system.

Particularly, my main concern is around fairness. I don't think it's fair to seniors, to the disadvantaged or even those who may not be very familiar with electronics. So I'm going to be introducing a private member's bill to ban these fees, and I just wanted to make a statement.

BURLINGTON BUSINESS COMMUNITY AWARDS

Mrs. Jane McKenna: On Thursday evening, I had the pleasure of attending the Burlington Chamber of Commerce's Business Awards Gala. Every year, this fantastic evening showcases the very best of our city's business community, and 2014 was no exception, Speaker.

In addition to the chamber's Business Excellence Awards, the gala also featured the presentation of the Burlington Economic Development Corporation Business Exports Award and community service awards. Nominations are based on overall business excellence, and the criteria includes excellence in business leadership, community contributions, entrepreneurship, environment, employee welfare, innovation, and market growth.

Seventeen local organizations across the spectrum of categories were named as award finalists. Some of the notables included: EcoSynthetix in the manufacturing category; Nickel Brook Brewery in the retail/wholesale

category; and Burlington Youth Soccer Club and Cogeco Cable Canada in the small and large service categories respectively. Deloitte was named employer of the year. Up-and-comer David Lammers took home the Young Entrepreneur Award, and Anaergia was awarded the BEDC Business Export Award.

Finally, community service awards went to Smith's Funeral Home in the business category and to Halton Women's Place in the not-for-profit category.

Congratulations to all nominees and everyone who dedicates themselves to make Burlington a great place to do business.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE PROTECTION ACT, 2014

LOI DE 2014 SUR LA PROTECTION DES USAGERS DE L'ASSISTANCE ROUTIÈRE

Ms. MacCharles moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 189, An Act to amend various acts with respect to tow and storage service, the enhancement of consumer protection, commercial motor vehicle and tow truck regulation, and the enforcement of legislation / *Projet de loi 189, Loi visant à modifier diverses lois en ce qui concerne les services de remorquage et d'entreposage, l'amélioration de la protection du consommateur, la réglementation des véhicules utilitaires et des dépanneuses et l'exécution de la législation.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Speaker, I'll make my statement during ministerial statements.

AUDITOR GENERAL AMENDMENT ACT, 2014

LOI DE 2014 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE VÉRIFICATEUR GÉNÉRAL

Mr. Norm Miller moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 190, An Act to amend the Auditor General Act / *Projet de loi 190, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le vérificateur général.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Norm Miller: This bill would amend the Auditor General Act, and it would allow the Auditor General to

conduct special audits of public contractors. A public contractor includes any body or entity that delivers programs or services on behalf of the crown and that receives payment or financial assistance from the crown or another entity, or is empowered by the crown to collect fees for its services.

Mr. Speaker, it's my feeling this will help the Auditor General to do her job more effectively.

1520

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

TOWING AND VEHICLE STORAGE

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: It is a great privilege to rise in the House today to tell you about the steps our government is proposing to take to regulate the towing and vehicle storage industries for over nine million drivers in Ontario. The Ministry of Consumer Services has been working very closely with our colleagues in two other ministries—the Ministry of Finance, under the leadership of Minister Sousa, and the Ministry of Transportation, under the leadership of Minister Murray—to develop the changes to the current laws governing these industries, which are before you today.

Proposing to regulate towing and vehicle storage is, in fact, a three-part fulfillment of a larger commitment that our government made to the people of Ontario. If these legislative changes are passed, they would help strengthen consumer protection, improve road safety, and reduce automobile insurance fraud.

My ministry's work on towing is part of our comprehensive efforts to strengthen protection for consumers in this province. I have spoken in this House many times about the changes we've made to areas such as door-to-door sales, debt settlement companies, and real estate transactions, as well as wireless and cellphone contracts.

As a way of empowering consumers to ask the right questions about their rights, we've recently launched our Consumer Protection Ontario initiative through ads on television, in movie theatres and online.

To begin our discussion today on towing and vehicle storage, I'd like to outline some of the concerns surrounding these industries and, to be frank, some of the significant problems that exist. There are approximately 1,200 tow truck and vehicle storage operators in Ontario, and about 3,000 tow truck drivers. Most of them provide good service to their customers and contribute to keeping our roads free and clear by removing vehicles, including those involved in collisions, quickly and efficiently.

But we've all heard in the media that some of them simply do not meet the standards expected of them. A number of serious concerns have also been raised about the industry by consumers and the Insurance Bureau of Canada. We know, for example, that some tow truck drivers charge exorbitant rates, leaving vulnerable accident victims feeling surprised and distressed.

We're also aware of other dubious tactics used by some operators. Some people have reported being faced with demands for hundreds of dollars in cash at the scene of an accident before the service is even provided. Others have reported having their vehicles towed to far-off storage facilities to increase mileage, thus raising prices for consumers.

Many of us have heard stories of people going to pick up their vehicle from vehicle storage lots, only to find they've been asked to pay unexpectedly large amounts before their vehicles are released.

Last month, our government introduced Bill 171, the Fighting Fraud and Reducing Automobile Insurance Rates Act, which, if passed, would allow government to set regulations to define "fair value" for storage and set reasonable notice periods for the storage of the vehicles.

It's worth noting that from a road safety perspective, tow truck drivers, unfortunately, also have a very high collision rate, caused in part by aggressive driving when trying to get to collision scenes first. According to the Ontario Road Safety Annual Report, tow truck drivers in Ontario had a 19.7% collision rate in 2010. This is compared to only 1.1% for other commercial vehicles and 3.3% for private passenger vehicles.

There have also been allegations that some tow truck drivers contribute to the inflation of auto insurance claims by steering claimants to particular storage providers and auto body repair shops. I know that many of you can share similar stories; ones that you, your family or friends have experienced first-hand. These are the kind of unfortunate situations we are trying to eliminate from the province.

From the consumer protection side, these changes would amend the Consumer Protection Act, the act that forms the basis for many consumer rights here in Ontario. The amendments would establish towing- and vehicle storage-specific consumer protections and give the government stronger enforcement powers. New rules would require towing and storage providers to do the following: first, publish their rates; second, provide an itemized invoice; third, accept payment by credit card if requested; disclose to the consumer any interest a towing and storage provider may have in a location or facility to which a vehicle may be towed for repair or storage; and give the consumer access to his or her towed vehicle to remove personal property.

I want to stress that the legislative changes we're proposing here have been developed through a great deal of consultation. They have the support of most of the 17 municipalities in Ontario that already license tow truck operators, and they are the result of recommendations we have received from a group of stakeholders who make up our towing advisory group, with representatives from the towing and insurance industries, consumer advocate groups, automobile clubs, the vehicle financing and leasing industry, Ontario municipalities and, last but not least, police services. This group provided us with advice and input on a wide range of issues related to the towing industry.

We have a second advisory group, Speaker, on storage, which includes stakeholders from the vehicle storage industry, and they have given us advice specifically on the sector.

Again, I want to stress that we've developed this new legislation in consultation with people who live and breathe towing and vehicle storage in this province.

From the perspective of road safety and building on the great work Minister Murray has been doing, these legislative changes would amend the Highway Traffic Act to remove the current exemption for tow trucks under MTO's commercial vehicle operator's registration system, also known as the CVOR system.

In addition, the new legislation would allow us to set qualifications and standards governing the operation and use of tow trucks, including driver certification and training requirements, and prescribe penalties to violators.

What we are proposing here today is a first step to regulating the towing and vehicle storage industries in Ontario. We'll continue to work with all parties involved to explore the best way forward, including working with municipalities—in particular, those who have already taken action to license towing in their jurisdictions—to learn from their experiences and, of course, to reduce any potential duplication.

Our goal for this is that the municipal systems that do exist can work in tandem, or that those municipalities that are regulating tow trucks and no longer wish to do that can move to a provincial system.

To sum up, our proposed legislation would, if passed, have three major impacts, Speaker. It would support consumers being treated in a fair manner by towing and vehicle storage providers; second, it would make the province's roads safer for Ontario's nine million licensed drivers; and third, it would support greater integrity in the auto insurance claims process involving these industries.

The bottom line is this: In Ontario, we want drivers involved in traffic collisions or in need of roadside assistance to have confidence that the tow truck driver helping them is reputable and will work safely and provide honest and fair dealings, and we are committed to working with the towing and vehicle storage industries in Ontario to make that happen, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's now time for responses.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Many of us do have experiences with the towing industry, and mine have been positive down in Haldimand-Norfolk. We've got local companies and garages that help out with understanding and honesty, and their reputation is evident. The same goes for CAA. I've been a long-standing member, and I value their service.

However, I do recall an incident a number of years ago with my—I used to own a 1963 Plymouth Slant-6. It got towed off a Toronto street. I finally got around to tracking it down, and after hearing about the storage charge and the parking ticket, I decided to walk away. We have an expression down our way: Never drive a car you can't afford to walk away from.

Interjections.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Several times. I know there was a bit of a confrontation in the yard, because I wasn't going to pay for it, but I did want to get my tools out of the trunk.

1530

In some quarters, it has gotten much worse, as we've just heard. We read the media reports of the pirates out on the 401 and the QEW through the GTA. So we know there are good guys and there are bad guys.

Back in November, Peter Cheney wrote a Globe and Mail article about some of the horror stories. The headline: "Pirates on the Highway Are Costing Ontario Drivers Billions." Mr. Cheney describes how tow truck drivers, as we know, dial in to police frequencies and they wait. We've all seen the truck and driver waiting on the ramps. The article reports that a day's pay can range from \$150 to five figures. Apparently, according to the article, tow truck drivers can make up to \$10,000 in one call, as they work the system. According to the writer, there's an ugly roadside game, with padded bills and under-the-table payments from paralegals, rehab clinics and body shops.

There are reputable tow truck drivers out there; I know many of them. However, a crash or a breakdown, for example on the 401, can go either way. If lucky, a motorist gets fair treatment, reasonable rates and good service, or they can find themselves—and I quote the article—"plunged into a netherworld of extortionate fees, kickback-laden referrals and barbed-wire impound lots where their car is held hostage until the bill is paid."

He continues: "Running through the heart of the country's biggest city, Highway 401 is the Grand Banks of towing—and sometimes, its Somali coast. According to a provincial task force that investigated insurance fraud, unscrupulous tow truck operators are at the front line of a black-market enterprise that costs Ontario drivers \$2 billion each year." The task force found that this type of fraud adds up to about \$700 on every GTA insurance bill.

As I said, there are many good tow truck drivers—the CAA; I think of Misner's down my way; Queensway Garage; and Shortt's Garage, just to name a few.

When I hear about another issue, vehicle storage scams—again, I can't help but wonder whether this legislation we're talking about today—yesterday, I was debating Bill 171, An Act respecting insurance system reforms and repair and storage liens. Today we're debating this newly introduced Roadside Assistance Protection Act, again with respect to storage. I trust there's no duplication here. I hope there isn't.

The Bill 171 amendment to the Repair and Storage Liens Act was designed to stop fraudsters from charging exorbitant storage rates. My question: To what extent does this new bill try and do the same thing?

Some storage facilities begin to charge the owner of the vehicle immediately, and the problem is, the owner may not know that. Current legislation allows the facility to hold the vehicle for 60 days. The revenues build up before they're notified.

Speaker, I hope this initiative is done as efficiently as possible. We don't need more red tape or paper-pushing

for the industry, and we don't need to punish everyone for a few bad apples.

Our fear is unnecessary red tape and overregulation. As was mentioned, when it comes to certification and training for owners, operators and drivers, not everyone needs that kind of training. Not everyone is on the 401. The last thing we need is a repeat of the College of Trades.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour to be able to rise today and speak on behalf of my NDP colleagues regarding the Roadside Assistance Protection Act and the introduction of it. It's nice to see people here from the CAA. I've been a proud CAA member my whole driving life.

Now that I'm a northern member, I drive down the 400 and the 401 a lot, and I see lots of tow trucks. There are not too many tow trucks in northern Ontario around Highway 11, but when you get to the 400 and 401, there are lots of them.

I've had a bad experience with a tow truck driver myself, and I think it's a good thing that we're discussing this. We are all afraid of overregulation, but regulation has a place. The people who are doing a good job usually aren't afraid of regulation, because regulation protects the people who are playing by the rules, the people who are out to serve others.

On behalf of our caucus, we're looking forward to debating this bill and seeing what it brings.

ONTARIO BUDGET

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

Hon. Charles Sousa: I would like to take this opportunity to make a formal announcement to the House that I will be tabling the 2014 budget on Thursday, May 1 at 4 p.m.

PETITIONS

HYDRO RATES

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

"Whereas household electricity bills have skyrocketed by 56% and electricity rates have tripled as a result of the Liberal government's mismanagement of the energy sector;

"Whereas the billion-dollar gas plant scandal, wasteful and unaccountable spending at Ontario Power Generation and the unaffordable subsidies in the Green Energy Act will result in electricity bills climbing by another 35% by 2017 and 45% by 2020;

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

"Whereas home heating and electricity are essential for families in rural Ontario who cannot afford to continue footing the bill for the government's mismanagement;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately implement policies ensuring Ontario's power consumers, including families, farmers, and employers, have affordable and reliable electricity."

I agree with this and will be passing it off to page Bani.

MINIMUM WAGE

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I fully support the petition and I will give my petition to page Calvin.

CYSTIC FIBROSIS

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas cystic fibrosis is a multi-system genetic disease primarily affecting the lungs and digestive system;

"Whereas one in every 3,600 children born in Canada has cystic fibrosis, making it the most common fatal genetic disease affecting Canadian children and young adults;

"Whereas there is no cure for cystic fibrosis, but the drug Kalydeco is the first medication that has shown success in targeting the underlying genetic cause of cystic fibrosis for patients with the specific G551D mutation;

"Whereas this drug helps improve the function of the defective protein, leading to better lung function, weight gain, and lower sweat chloride levels and access to Kalydeco could lead to a healthier, longer life;

"Whereas Kalydeco has been approved by Health Canada, but the approximately \$300,000 annual cost

makes it an unaffordable treatment option for the overwhelming majority of Ontario families;

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

“That the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care take immediate action to expedite listing Kalydeco on the province’s drug formulary so this treatment is available to Ontario families.”

I certainly agree with this petition and I will sign it.

GASOLINE PRICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes to me from Mr. and Mrs. Carrière from White Road in Lively in my riding, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas northern Ontario motorists continue to be subject to wild fluctuations in the price of gasoline; and

“Whereas the province could eliminate opportunistic price gouging and deliver fair, stable and predictable fuel prices; and

“Whereas five provinces and many US states already have some sort of gas-price regulation; and

“Whereas jurisdictions with gas-price regulation have seen an end to wild price fluctuations, a shrinking of price discrepancies between urban and rural communities and lower annualized gas prices;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: Mandate the Ontario Energy Board to monitor the price of gasoline across Ontario in order to reduce price volatility and unfair regional price differences while encouraging competition.”

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

1540

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. John Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

I agree with this petition, I’m affixing my signature and giving it page Megan.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I concur with this petition and will affix my name to it.

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

Mr. John Vanthof: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas a motion was introduced at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads ‘that in the opinion of the House, the operation of off-road vehicles on highways under regulation 316/03 be changed to include side-by-side off-road vehicles, four-seat side-by-side vehicles, and two-up vehicles in order for them to be driven on highways under the same conditions as other off-road/all-terrain vehicles’;

“Whereas this motion was passed on November 7, 2013, to amend the Highway Traffic Act 316/03;

“Whereas the economic benefits will have positive impacts on ATV clubs, ATV manufacturers, dealers and rental shops, and will boost revenues to communities promoting this outdoor activity;

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

“We call on the Ministry of Transportation to implement this regulation immediately.”

I wholeheartedly agree, affix my signature and give it to page Isabella.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Todd Smith: I am pleased to present this to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario on behalf of residents in Prince Edward–Hastings:

“Whereas household electricity bills have skyrocketed by 56% and electricity rates have tripled as a result of the

Liberal government's mismanagement of the energy sector;

"Whereas the billion-dollar gas plant scandal, wasteful and unaccountable spending at Ontario Power Generation and the unaffordable subsidies in the Green Energy Act will result in electricity bills climbing by another 35% by 2017 and 45% by 2020;

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

"Whereas home heating and electricity are essential for families in rural Ontario who cannot afford to continue footing the bill for the government's mismanagement;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately implement policies ensuring Ontario's power consumers, including families, farmers, and employers, have affordable and reliable electricity."

I agree with this and will send to the table with Mustfah.

SHALE BEACH

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank Mr. Barry Cripps of Collingwood for sending me this petition—actually a whole batch of petitions.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Transportation closed public access to Shale Beach off Highway 26 in the town of Blue Mountains suddenly and with no consultation; and

"Whereas the closure will impact fishermen, swimmers and visitors who have been frequenting the beach for generations with no problem; and

"Whereas the closure will remove one of the only wheelchair-accessible fishing locations in the area; and

"Whereas the McGuinty-Wynne Liberal government won't let Ontarians enjoy anything for free anymore without implementing a new tax or a new fee;

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

Interjections.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm glad you're finally paying attention; it's a serious issue in my riding.

"That Premier Kathleen Wynne and the Minister of Transportation immediately restore access to Shale Beach so that residents can continue to enjoy the beach and all that it has to offer for generations to come."

Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree with this petition, and I will sign it.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm proud to introduce yet another petition from my riding addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

"Whereas the overwhelming majority of reductions in vehicle emissions were, in fact, the result of factors other than the Drive Clean program, such as tighter manufacturing standards for emission-control technologies;...

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

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

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

Speaker, I wholeheartedly agree with this and send it over with the page.

AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES

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

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

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

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

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

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

I agree with this and will be passing it off to page Isabella.

CYSTIC FIBROSIS

Mr. Todd Smith: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas cystic fibrosis is a multi-system genetic disease primarily affecting the lungs and digestive system;

"Whereas one in every 3,600 children born in Canada has cystic fibrosis, making it the most common fatal genetic disease affecting Canadian children and young adults;

“Whereas there is no cure for cystic fibrosis, but the drug Kalydeco is the first medication that has shown success in targeting the underlying genetic cause of cystic fibrosis;

“Whereas this drug helps improve the function of the defective protein, leading to better lung function, weight gain, and lower sweat chloride levels. For a CF patient with the specific G551D mutation, access to Kalydeco could lead to a healthier, longer life; and

“Whereas Kalydeco has been approved by Health Canada, but the approximately \$300,000 annual cost makes it an unaffordable treatment option for the overwhelming majority of Ontario families;

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

“That the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care take immediate action to expedite listing Kalydeco on the province’s drug formulary so this treatment is available to Ontario families as it is to those in several countries including the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom.”

I’m pleased to sign this and will send it to the table.

AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I have a petition here that reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

I couldn’t agree with this more and I will affix my name to it.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I agree with this and will be passing it off to page Anthony.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FAIR MINIMUM WAGE ACT, 2014

LOI DE 2014 POUR UN SALAIRE MINIMUM ÉQUITABLE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 27, 2014, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It’s my understanding that the last time we debated Bill 165, the member for Northumberland–Quinte West had the floor and completed his remarks, so we now go to questions and comments with respect to his speech. Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I’m actually looking forward to this debate this afternoon to speak on Bill 165. Unfortunately, I wasn’t here in the House to hear the member from Northumberland–Quinte West’s comments, but I do want to express how important this issue is and that I’m glad to see that we are going to have a good thrust of the debate on this issue. As the NDP members, we have some great suggestions that we hope this government will be listening to and perhaps adopt, because they’ve adopted a lot of other ideas in the past that we have brought forward.

In my riding of London–Fanshawe, my community has, of course, one of the higher unemployment rates in Ontario. We need good jobs brought to Ontario, not just temporary, precarious jobs. We need full-time, good-paying jobs with benefits, with retirement plans so that when people have worked for 20 or 30 years, they can rest assured that at the end of their career, at the end of their choice of occupation, they’re going to have some stability in their retirement, they’re going to be able to afford their home, put food on the table and pay their expensive hydro bills that this government, unfortunate-

ly, has had a role to play in, as well as the Conservatives by privatizing our energy system.

Again, I look forward to hearing the debate today. I will be speaking for 10 minutes on this bill later on. I look forward to hearing the summary wrap-up from the member from Northumberland–Quinte West.

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

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It is a pleasure to respond to the member from Northumberland–Quinte West. As the previous speaker noted, I can't remember what he said, but I have a feeling that I know what he said.

What I've heard from people around the province of Ontario on this issue is they want it to be fair, they want the minimum wage to be balanced, and they want it to be predictable. We're increasing minimum wage to \$11 on June 1. That means that Ontario once again will have the highest minimum wage in all of Canada. The 75-cent increase accounts for inflation, since we had the last increase in March 2010.

The minimum wage will be revised annually, if this bill passes, by a percentage equal to the percentage change in the Ontario consumer price index, which most people think is fair. It allows businesses to plan ahead, and it also allows those who are earning at this level to know that their earnings will keep up at least with the pace of inflation as it moves forward. This would put in place a full review of the process determining how the minimum wage is set every five years.

Speaker, we've had a lot of debate on this. I think Ontarians are ready to see this pass. I think that a number of individuals in this House are ready to see it pass. I'd ask that the members allow this to move on to committee. If there are improvements to be made to the bill, they can be made at that time; then return it to the House for full passage. That's what it deserves.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Thank you very much, Speaker. I'd like to congratulate our PC member from Northumberland–Quinte West, who did a great job here in the House talking about this bill. Of course, the PC caucus, as I indicated to the former labour critic, will be supporting tying the minimum wage increases to inflation. Of course, we should give a shout-out to the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and their members across the province who have really put a lot of time into this issue. They gave, I think, a very balanced report to the Minister of Labour a while ago on this.

Of course, when I did the one-hour lead on this bill, I gave our party's position and really highlighted to the former minister, and I'd reiterate today to the current minister, that we need to get on with the plan of creating well-paying jobs in the province of Ontario.

I know the member from London–Fanshawe mentioned about her riding being hard hit when it comes to the number of people unemployed. Of course, I represent a riding in southwestern Ontario where we've lost tens

and thousands of jobs in the manufacturing sector. One interesting statistic is that in the last eight years, London has lost one third of all their manufacturing jobs. I think that's a really frightening statistic.

I'm afraid that the Liberal government is a little tired, spending a lot of their time, I guess, hiring lawyers and slapping people in the House with lawsuits. I think they need to get on with the job of creating private sector jobs in the province of Ontario.

Just before I close, a report came out from the Fraser Institute yesterday saying that Ontario is only creating 4% of private sector jobs, where the rest of the provinces are doing a lot better than Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Speaker. Obviously, we would have liked to have seen it raised higher; we've suggested 50 cents in 2015 and 50 cents in 2016. They may be smiling over there that we do want to raise it higher. We had a suggestion, which has fallen on deaf ears, that we lower the small business tax: a reduction from 4.5% to 4% on June 1 to accompany that so it doesn't have a negative impact on small business, from 4% to 3.5% on June 1, 2015, and from 3.5% to 3% on June 1, 2016.

What that does—it doesn't put a burden on the small business, the mom-and-pop shops. They certainly can counter the increase to the minimum wage with these reductions in their small business tax. And we can certainly look at other exemptions for small business.

The number \$14 was floating around. That's quite an increase, and we certainly want to work towards that goal as quickly as we can, because what we call it is a livable wage. What the government and the official opposition don't realize is that a livable wage means that you can pay your bills and don't have to go on the system for help. You can pay for your own food. You might even be able to get a job that's reasonable, that will get you by. It's a livable wage. They don't get it; they don't get it. We get it and we're trying to move in a direction that we can get to that point where a lot of Ontarians who are suffering and can't pay their hydro bill—that's another story for another day; it's off the map.

Don't forget that when these people go to a grocery store—if you're making \$50,000 or \$60,000 a year, the guy who is making \$25,000 or \$30,000 is paying the same price for that loaf of bread, the same for milk, the same hydro bills and everything else. He can't compete and he ends up losing his house and is out on the street—especially people on fixed income. It's unacceptable. They've got to move in a faster direction towards raising the minimum wage.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. That concludes our time for questions and comments.

We return to the member for Northumberland–Quinte West for his reply.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have to say I'm a little taken aback that the

members don't recall my stirring and emotional speech from over a week ago. You've seen the movie *Braveheart*, when Mel Gibson is running around? It was almost that stirring.

1600

Interjection.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Yes, you can't take away our freedom.

I want to thank the members for their comments. On a more serious note, this is a very serious bill: Bill 165.

Studies have shown—and I hear it in my communities from small businesses, particularly in the service industry—that this 75-cent-an-hour raise is going to have a huge impact on their bottom line. I've already heard from numerous restaurants and small businesses that they're actually going to have to lay off some of their part-time workers or shift from full-time employees to part-time employees, so it's going to have a devastating impact.

More to the point, this minimum wage bill, Bill 165, is going to have an insignificant impact compared to what the Liberals are proposing with their Ontario Pension Plan, the OPP. This Ontario Pension Plan is going to take upwards of \$45 a week out of the pockets of each and every employed citizen in the province. That's \$45 a week.

If an individual was working for minimum wage, that 75-cent increase equates to a \$30-a-week pay increase, but they'll have to contribute to their Ontario Pension Plan, which is going to cost \$45, so they're actually losing \$15 a week out of pocket.

Again, Liberal economics don't make sense. The OPP is going to kill this province, as well as Bill 165.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for recognizing me and giving me a chance to speak about Bill 165. We've had a lot of discussion on this topic, and I'm glad to be able to express my opinion on it as well.

The riding of Niagara Falls has seen a lot of good-paying jobs pick up and leave over the last number of years, and many people in our community lost good-paying jobs and are now working for minimum wage.

Not too long ago, I was out in one of the coldest winters we've seen in a while, knocking on doors and talking to people. I've got to tell you: It was clear that people were deeply concerned about their jobs and how they were going to pay their bills. They weren't just worried about making ends meet for themselves, but about what kind of future there would be for their kids and grandkids. They didn't want to see young people in the community leave to go someplace else. They wanted them to have a chance to stay in their own communities to work, play and raise their children, in Niagara.

Minimum wage jobs aren't just for kids looking for summer work anymore. Between 2004 and 2012, we've seen the number of minimum wage workers who are age 35 and over increase from 17% to 27%, including many seniors. It was clear when I was knocking on doors that it

is an issue that affects everyone, and we need to take serious action to ensure that people aren't being forced into poverty. Low-wage jobs affect us all. Jobs across many industries have wages near the bottom end of the pay scale, jobs such as bank tellers, security guards, child care workers, personal home support workers, teacher assistants and flight attendants.

In fact, increasing people's minimum wage helps more than just their pocketbook; it helps them lead healthier lives. People working for wages below the poverty line are more likely to have more long-term health issues like diabetes, heart disease and migraines, compared to those with a decent wage. Low-wage workers also have much lower rates of insurance coverage, vision care, dental care, prescription and hospital care services, leaving them and their families in a generally poor state of health. It's difficult to get access to healthy food because of these low wages, which also contribute to poor health.

Just this morning I was talking about Bill 162, on ways to help people eat healthier. We see an increasing number of working Ontarians relying on food banks to get by. We've seen years of prices on just about everything going up and up and up on things like their hydro bills, their gas bills and their auto insurance. At the same time, we've seen years of this government failing to take a lead on helping everyday families with easing the cost of living.

It's really no surprise to me that when their announcement to raise the minimum wage came, it happened during the middle of a by-election. An important issue like minimum wage should never be announced during a by-election. It's something we've seen before, and I bet we'll see it again. The sad part is that even when you make this kind of announcement, it simply doesn't go far enough in helping the average Ontarian. People are finding themselves squeezed at every turn, and the choices they're having to make aren't getting any easier. Just recently, I received an email from a young lady in my riding asking for help. She was facing hydro bills that just keep climbing, and that is coming on top of all kinds of other increases. Just last month, she got hit with a home hydro bill of over \$450. She took the time to go back through her bills and found that her hydro bill had gone up an average of \$100 a month.

There's lots I can say about hydro rates, and I'm sure I'll be saying it sometime soon, but we need to make sure that people can afford to keep the lights on; that people can afford to heat their homes; that people can afford to buy their groceries and not have to choose between paying rent and paying to heat their homes.

The increase on the cost of living that this bill talks about won't come anywhere near the increase my constituents face on their hydro and gas bills. It's not enough, and New Democrats have put forward a smart, practical way of increasing the minimum wage. We can do better for the people of this province, for the people of Niagara. I don't think we need to settle for the current plan. We can make people's lives easier by: raising the minimum wage by 50 cents in 2015 to \$11.50; a further

50 cents in 2016 to \$12; and tie the minimum wage to inflation while giving employers four months' notice before any additional increases.

We need to set these increases in a smart and clear way. I come from Niagara Falls, one of the biggest tourist destinations in the world, and the businesses in my riding know all about busy and slow seasons. It's one of the hardest things for many of the small businesses in my riding.

The Falls are definitely beautiful in the winter. I saw a lot of Liberal and Conservative members in the Niagara Falls riding during my election. They never called me for a tour of the Falls, though. They missed out because when the Falls are frozen over, it's beautiful. So, hopefully, when the Liberals and Conservatives came to our riding, they took the opportunity to see the Falls. It was one of the first times it was ever frozen over, so I certainly hope that you did that. But we get way more people coming to the Falls in the summer. This winter was especially tough, since it lasted for so long, even snowing today. I know; I was out in it. It seemed like it was still going on.

Without knowing when they can expect to see more people coming to town, businesses hold off on hiring more staff. I've listened to the owners and the operators of these businesses, and I know they need a clear timeline to be able to plan for changes and not have them forced on them all at once. That's why increasing the minimum wage gradually and consistently is the best way to go. We've listened to their concerns, and that's why we're proposing a gradual increase over the next two years and at the same time helping out small businesses on their taxes to offset the minimum wage increases gradually. It makes the most sense. They'll be able to know what is coming, when, and make their plans as a result.

The Liberals and Conservatives want to keep lowering the corporate tax rate for big companies. We've seen that time and time again. They don't reinvest their money back into our communities. We know that these big companies are sitting on nearly \$500 billion. There's no reason we should let that happen. That's money that isn't being reinvested back in our communities, our hospitals, our infrastructure or in giving the workers higher wages.

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In 2012, almost half the minimum wage earners in this province were working for companies with over 500 employees. It's companies like Pizza Pizza, who increased their profits by 37% last year, and they don't need more giveaways. They need to invest in their employees in the form of better wages and benefits.

The other week I was in Fort Erie and I had breakfast at a new restaurant called Breakfast Café that recently opened up. I was speaking to the owner about the difficulties of opening a new business, and she told me that the only reason she could open was because of the jobs that would stay in her community because they fought to keep the racetrack open.

Although the Fort Erie racetrack is open, we still have a number of issues to work on at the track. The people

working at the track aren't corporate CEOs, but local people working hard to make ends meet. When they can, they take their hard-earned dollars out into the community and they spend it at other local places like the restaurant I was eating at. When people can afford to pay their bills and set aside a little something for themselves, it helps the local economy.

Increasing the minimum wage can help bring workers out of poverty. Our plan to bring the minimum wage to \$12 an hour is closer to the low-income cut-off than the current \$11 minimum wage.

Speaker, we can move forward on raising the standard of living for thousands of Ontarians across this province and, at the same time, help the small businesses that are the cornerstone of our economy. We know it's not going to hurt job creation. Ontario increased the minimum wage from \$7.75 to \$10.25, and we saw almost 150,000 jobs added.

In addition, Ontario needs to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Do you want to finish the sentence?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm good. I'm finished.

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

Questions and comments?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to thank the member from Niagara Falls for his comments.

We've had over nine hours of debate so far, and 40 speakers have talked on Bill 165—over 40 speakers. So I think it's time for us to wrap this up.

It sounds as though the NDP supports what we're doing. But I think, historically, if we look back and think about what has happened in this province over the last couple of decades when it comes to minimum wage, it makes me proud, as a Liberal, to stand here. This is exactly why I ran for office. I believe that our party has brought forward some progressive legislation that, if passed, will really correct, I think, what was done during the Harris years under the PC government. The minimum wage was locked in for eight years at \$6.85. I don't know how anyone in this province could live on that type of pay. When we got into office, we increased the minimum wage from \$6.85 to \$11—that's, I think, around a 56% increase.

It's interesting. I had a group come into my constituency office last Friday, and they said, "Michael"—and these were some very progressive people. They were a bit taken aback that the NDP was silent during the entire debate. Even during the campaign by many different organized labour groups to push for a higher minimum wage, the NDP were completely silent.

In fact, in the Toronto Star, I think it was on March 4, it said, "The party's rightward shift ... seems to represent a departure from its traditional message of social justice." My question is, why isn't the NDP moving forward on this with the Liberal Party? Why isn't the NDP standing up for the people it says it represents?

Any type of increase from \$6.85 in 2003 to where we are now is a good thing for Ontario. We want to tie it to

something that's predictable, that's good for business and good for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Northumberland—Quinte West.

Mr. Todd Smith: Prince Edward—Hastings, actually.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Prince Edward—Hastings. I apologize.

Mr. Todd Smith: Northumberland—Quinte West is a lovely spot; well represented, too, by my good friend Rob Milligan.

I would like to bring some comments on the 10-minute speech from the member from Niagara Falls. One of the things that the member from Niagara Falls spoke about was the difficulty that people in Ontario, and specifically to his riding in Niagara Falls, are having in dealing with the increasing cost of living in Ontario. The current government doesn't seem to understand that the decisions that they've made have seriously impacted the lives of people of Ontario and their ability to keep their homes, the ability for them to pay their bills and just the ability for them to enjoy their life here in Ontario. I don't think they quite understand that.

The member from Niagara Falls told a couple of stories. I would like to share one with you if you have a moment, Mr. Speaker, from Bill and Shirley Brennan, who actually live in my riding. If I could read this letter to you, a letter they sent to me: "I am a 78-year-old senior citizen and my wife is 75. We are trying hard to continue to live in our own home which we heat with electricity.

"At the end of January 2014 we each received an increase in our OAS"—old age security—"of 55 cents monthly and also an increase in our CPP of \$6.68 monthly.

"Our equal billing payment to Hydro One for the months of January, February and March was \$516 monthly....

"We just received a new statement with a billing date of April 1, 2014, which indicates that our Hydro One equal billing payment starting in the month of April ... will be \$709 monthly."

That's an increase of \$193 a month on their hydro bill. They got 55 cents from OAS. They got \$6.68 from CPP. This Liberal government has really made life difficult for everyday people in the province of Ontario. It's time they realized that.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm very proud to rise today to comment on the remarks from my colleague the member from Niagara Falls. There were many things that he said in his speech that really resonated for me as the representative of the people in London West. The constituents that live in my riding share many of the same concerns that he mentioned, concerns about having jobs for themselves and for their children.

In London, we have two wonderful post-secondary institutions, Fanshawe and Western. Many students attend

those institutions and want to remain in that community. They want to stay there, raise their own families and create a life for themselves. But London is struggling with some of the highest unemployment rates in the province.

Another thing that the member from Niagara Falls pointed out was the number of working people who are relying on food banks to just get by. This is very significant in my riding. London Food Bank has just launched a very innovative—groundbreaking, really—approach, because they have been struck by the fact that even as the unemployment rate ostensibly declines, food bank use is continuing to rise. What this means is that people are moving into the labour market, but they're moving into low-wage jobs; they're moving into precarious jobs. They are not able to find employment that sustains them and their families, and they're having to go to the food bank.

We need to take the politics out of minimum wage rate setting. We need to ensure that our minimum wage policies enable people to live with dignity and support their families in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Excellent, thank you. It's a pleasure to speak in response to the member from Niagara Falls. I would like to state just for the record right now: Although the NDP were late to the parade, I'm glad to see that they're here and running to the front with the rest of us.

Here is the thing. We all agree that raising the minimum wage is the right thing to do. We all agree that tying it to CPI is the right thing to do. We've been talking about this for about nine hours now—about nine hours, Mr. Speaker. Why don't we just get this bill to committee? And then we could talk about those things that we all think are great ideas and actually see if we can get them—

Mr. Paul Miller: Oh, like Bill 71.

Mr. John Fraser: If you want to try to change the bill, then get it to committee. It's not going to happen here. So I would just like to suggest that we get this thing done and get it to committee.

1620

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Now we return to the member for Niagara Falls for his two-minute reply.

Mr. Wayne Gates: First of all, I'll address a couple of issues around layoffs if you increase the minimum wage—it's not accurate. It puts more money in people's pockets. I explained that what you do is, every penny you make, you reinvest into the local community. I'll use the example, again, because I think it's a good one: We know it's not going to hurt job creation. Ontario increased the minimum wage from \$7.75 to \$10.25, and we saw 150,000 jobs added. So that myth that if you increase the minimum wage, people are going to lay off—it doesn't say that. It doesn't, and it helps the local economy.

As far as us coming late to the game, I don't think that's a fair comment. It was in our 2011 platform, as

you're aware. I'm not going to speak on what transpired, but I know that since I came here as an MPP, around seven or eight weeks ago, I've talked on this issue a number of times. I think it's very, very important, the minimum wage, and how important it is to our communities.

I'll just finish by saying that the NDP would also cut small business tax rates from 4.5% to 4% this June, followed by 3.5% in 2015 and fall to 3% in 2016. Our plan is about more than giving people a raise; it's about taking a balanced approach to investing in our workforce and our community. Our plan includes a gradual phase-in and tax cuts for small businesses to ensure that the change is positive for families, employers and the entire community. It's the right thing to do, and it's the smart thing to do for our children, our grandkids and our community.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): On a point of order, the member for Northumberland–Quinte West.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I just wanted to correct my record from earlier when I said that the OPP is killing this province. By "OPP," I meant the Ontario pension plan, Mr. Speaker. So I just wanted to correct that for the record.

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

Further debate?

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to join the debate this afternoon on Bill 165, Fair Minimum Wage Act, 2014.

The bill amends the Employment Standards Act to adjust the minimum wage annually starting October 1, 2015, by indexing it to the Ontario consumer price index, or the CPI. The bill also stipulates that any changes in the minimum wage would be rounded to the nearest five cents and no adjustments would be made if it would result in a decrease to the current rate of \$10.25 an hour, which is the main minimum wage.

As our labour critic, the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, Monte McNaughton, pointed out, this new process is something many, including the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, have long been calling for. It's something we, too, agree is a step in the right direction. But while this bill will help create better stability for employers and workers in Ontario, what it won't do is help the one million men and women who woke up this morning without a job to go to.

We have yet another piece of legislation from the McGuinty-Wynne Liberal government that fails to address jobs and economic growth. My colleagues and I are generally supportive of tying the minimum wage to the consumer price index, but we certainly do not believe it is any kind of solution to the much bigger problem of getting our economy back on track.

Right now in Ontario, as I said, more than one million Ontarians are out of work. In 10 years, we've lost 300,000 jobs while the Liberal government has been in office. Most of these are well-paying manufacturing jobs. The debt has doubled. Our deficit is more than all other

provinces combined in Canada. It's been a year and a half since the Liberals prorogued the House, and still they have no jobs plans to get our province back to where it should be.

Last September, on behalf of our caucus and in my capacity as opposition House leader, I tabled a programming motion that cleared the decks and expedited the passage of, I believe, eight pieces of legislation with the clear intent to make way for the Premier to table a jobs plan. My motion opened the door for the government to restore focus to jobs and the economy.

It's now seven months later, and this government still has not introduced that jobs plan. Instead, we see more of the same bad habits from this Liberal government: more taxes and rate increases, scandal after scandal, and runaway spending.

Remember, we have an \$11.7-billion deficit and a \$273-billion debt. This Liberal government's own numbers show that they increased spending by \$5 billion over forecast last year, and they just announced another \$5.7 billion to be spent on 39 initiatives leading up to the budget; as we know, the date is May 1.

All the while, families and businesses in my riding continue to struggle. The Liberal government seemingly has no money for promised gap funding for the Collingwood hospital, which is \$1.2 million. They have no money to provide operational dollars to the Alliston hospice, Matthews House Hospice, to merely match what other hospices around Ontario are receiving. And they have no money for life-saving medication for 12-year-old Madi Vanstone, who suffers from cystic fibrosis, that would give her a chance at a good-quality life and would prolong her life, we hope, for many, many years until she passes away, like the rest of us, in old age. Madi, of course—I've raised the issue here many times in the Legislature—is a young girl, a very brave, beautiful young girl, from Beeton. And yet they have billions of dollars to spend on eHealth, Ornge and power plant scandals.

I recently launched my 2014 Simcoe–Grey business survey. So far, I have received close to 100 responses from local business owners about provincial issues affecting their business. All of them indicated high hydro rates as an issue. All of them said that further increases to business taxes will impact their livelihood. And they are very worried about—I guess it's probably going to be the cornerstone, at least according to the leaks, of the upcoming budget—the new Ontario pension plan which seems to be proposed, because that is a new payroll tax. There's nothing for free, folks; the Liberals may make it all sound very good, but at the end of the day there will be less jobs in Ontario.

All of the almost 100 businesses—again, all of them—said that they have to deal with between three and 10 provincial ministries—not one, of course, didn't have any ministry that they were dealing with—on an ongoing basis, bogging down operations, and very often they are asked for the exact same information from ministry after ministry after ministry. I got little notes on these surveys

wondering if the government even compares notes among themselves and has any plan to stop harassing these businesses.

Improving how minimum wage is determined is certainly an important process, but in the context of Ontario's overall employment rate, or Ontario's massive provincial debt and ongoing deficit, or the incredible pressures that small businesses already face, this simply shouldn't be the only thing the government is talking about. The Liberals need to look at the big picture. Our focus should be on getting people more than \$10.25 or \$11 an hour, and getting a plan in place to successfully do that.

Tim Hudak, the leader of the Ontario PCs, and our caucus have that plan: a plan to create jobs and attract businesses. It was tabled in February by Mr. Hudak. His private member's bill, entitled the Million Jobs Act, lays out the foundation of what this province needs in order to get our economy back on track and to make sure that people have a job in the first place.

The Million Jobs Act is designed to immediately begin creating jobs, and it will do the following:

(1) It will produce more jobs and increase take-home pay through lower taxes and less debt.

(2) It ensures affordable energy that will create jobs, not eliminate them.

(3) It focuses on training more skilled workers to meet the demand in trades and will help young people find good jobs.

(4) It will increase trade with other provinces, and aims to reduce internal trade barriers that cost the Canadian economy \$50 billion a year.

(5) Finally, it eliminates the bureaucratic runaround that inhibits job creation, lifting the heavy hand of government and reducing the some 300,000 regulations in Ontario that bog businesses in paperwork.

I think the most important thing that I can point out this afternoon and add to the debate here, focusing on Bill 165, is that one of the main concerns about the minimum wage in general is that almost 10% of the workforce is on minimum wage. In 10 years under Liberal reign, the number of Ontarians working in minimum wage jobs has gone from 3.5% of the workforce in 2003 to 6.3% in 2007, to 8.1% in 2009, and now to almost 10% in 2014. The increase is dramatic, and it's not good for our businesses or our families across the province.

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In contrast, when we were in government there was a decrease in the rate of workers in minimum wage jobs. Those making minimum wage went from 4.6% in the year 2000 to 4.1% in 2001, to 3.9% in 2002 and, finally, to 3.5% in 2003. The facts speak for themselves. It's clear from these numbers that the path that this government is taking us down is not in the best interests of our province and our families.

While the Liberals and the NDP focus so heavily on minimum wage jobs, the PCs are focused on getting people making minimum wage into careers. A small increase to minimum wage is not going to do that in and

of itself, especially when the Premier is hitting people with all kinds of other taxes at the same time, and I warn you about the new payroll tax coming up in the form of a pension.

I also believe that we will have to look at the impact a minimum wage increase would have on the small business community. I've heard from a number of businesses, as I said, in my riding, and the general consensus is that a wage increase may force them to re-examine the number of employees they have. One small business owner in Collingwood explained that he already pays his employees more than the minimum wage as a way to recognize their hard work and, in return, it gives them incentive to work hard. He worries that an additional wage increase would make it hard for him to keep that up and would likely result in having to lay off staff.

In October, I met with the Ontario Convenience Stores Association on this issue. At the time, they had heard rumours that the minimum wage might increase to \$14 an hour. They warned that this level of increase would lead to the closure of approximately 20% of their stores. They also indicated their concern with the increasing cost of energy as their stores depend on a lot of refrigeration and cooling.

So, Mr. Speaker, we should thoroughly examine the benefits of increases to the minimum wage as there is evidence to suggest that low-income workers do not significantly benefit from a wage increase. Look at Alberta. They have the lowest minimum wage as well as the lowest poverty rates in all of Canada. In that province, minimum wage doesn't seem to be tied to the financial situation of low-income earners. There are other ways to improve the plight of low-income workers.

Having said that, we will support this legislation. It is a small step in the right direction, but the government needs to do other things, like lower taxes overall. Stop taking people's money in the first place. Leave it in their pockets, and then you wouldn't have to worry so much about the minimum wage.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, I was listening to the official opposition House leader and he had mentioned that—I think he said out west. I think he said Alberta has a lower minimum wage than Ontario and it doesn't seem to be a problem out there. There's no poverty out there. People are surviving on that lower minimum wage.

I throw out there that they're probably working two, three, four, five and six jobs on minimum wage just to make ends meet. There's absolutely no realistic explanation that someone can live on minimum wage, have a home, send their kids to secondary education, PSE—post-secondary education—pay for a pension and put good, quality, healthy food on the table. I beg to differ with that fact. He could prove me wrong if he likes, but I certainly don't agree with that.

Minimum wage, Speaker—and I've heard the Liberal government members also speak about how they want to

pass this bill and get it on to committee. I've heard that mantra several times on different bills, and it's really concerning. I recall the family caregiver bill. They were pushing that, you know, we needed to send that off and we didn't need any more speakers. I think it was the blood donor bill as well that they wanted to push off and not have any speakers on. And now this is the third bill that they're asking us to quickly move through the channels of the House so that we can get to other business.

Speaker, we need to respect the democratic process of this House, and we need to hear—if people want to speak to this bill who represent members of their riding, they need to stand up and do that and not be pressured or pushed by the agenda of this government to move things through the House at their speed.

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

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to respond to the comments from the member from Simcoe–Grey on Bill 165, which is the Fair Minimum Wage Act. I want to correct a misimpression that he may have left. He talked about small business owners being concerned because they thought that the minimum wage would be going up to \$14. In fact, the minimum wage is going to \$11 in June, which actually represents the cost-of-living increase, approximately, since the last increase in the minimum wage.

But that's not what this bill does. What this bill does is what small business owners that I've heard from have said that we should do, which is to have a fair and regular increment, because they can handle that. It's fair; it's predictable.

What this bill actually does is arrange to have the minimum wage go up by the cost of living on an annual basis. The measure would be the CPI, the consumer price index. That's what the bill actually does.

One of the things I've learned around here is that when everybody who gets up to debate the bill talks about something other than the actual content of the bill, the debate has probably run its useful course. That's what I've heard today: people talking about everything other than the content of the bill. That's probably because we've spent well over nine hours—probably almost 10. Well over 40 different speakers in the Legislature have commented. I really do think it's time that we sent this bill off to committee and moved it along.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Again, I'm just pleased to rise and comment on our member from way up north in the Collingwood area with regard to Bill 165.

Back in my training days, I used to work with many, many different corporations. One of the things that I would always say to them was, "If you treat your employees fairly and treat them with respect, they'll want to work harder for you." In many of these cases, a lot of these employees were, in fact, working for minimum wage. But then I would turn to these employees and I

would say, "You know what? You should always be working for a raise, because if your current employer doesn't give you one, then someone else will."

I don't believe that this minimum wage is a wage that has been designed for people to live on. People get accustomed perhaps to this particular minimum wage. Increasing it to \$11—it's tough to pay your bills on that; I'm sure it is. Therefore, oftentimes you'll find employees maybe having to carry two jobs in order to make ends meet.

But then I say to them, "What's your motivation to stay in that job at a minimum wage? What are you doing for yourself in order to better yourself so that you're not in that minimum wage category?" Again, "Working for a raise." If your current employer doesn't give you that raise, someone else will. To me, that's self-pride. That's people taking charge of their own careers and looking at it and saying, "You know what? I can better myself. I'm good enough. I'm smart enough. And golly, people like me." Of course, that was taken right out of Saturday Night Live; I know. But the fact of the matter remains: People need to take control of their own destiny.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I listened to the comments that were made by the member for Simcoe–Grey, and I just wanted to speak to a couple of the issues on behalf of the people I represent in London West. I think that this legislation is a very important step forward. I am glad to see that we are finally taking the politics out of minimum wage rate setting. We saw the Tories, certainly, use minimum wage as a political tool when they were in office, and we have seen, on the Liberal side of the House, four years of inaction when the minimum wage was sitting at \$10.25. Nothing was happening as the cost of living was increasing, and finally, in the middle of a by-election, there was an announcement that the minimum wage was going to increase.

That's not responsible, in terms of the people that we represent. It's not a fair and transparent way to respond to the issues that we face in our communities. I support the way that this legislation depoliticizes setting the minimum wage by tying the increases to the cost of living.

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One of the things that I am concerned about, however, is the fact that the increase uses an \$11 figure as a benchmark. What this does is, it institutionalizes minimum wage earners below the poverty line. Even as their wages increase with the cost of living, there is still a gap to take minimum wage earners above the poverty line, which is why New Democrats have proposed a \$12 minimum wage as a the benchmark before cost-of-living indexing sets in.

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the responses from the member for London–Fanshawe, the Minister of Education, and the members for London West and Chatham–Kent–Essex.

I'd say to the Minister of Education, the member for Guelph, that there was nothing in my 10-minute remarks that didn't talk about jobs and minimum wage. I know you hate when we talk about Tim Hudak's, the leader of the PC Party's, Million Jobs Act, because you don't have a jobs plan of your own. We've given you lots of opportunity to bring one forward, so before I finish this two minutes, I'm going to talk about it again.

Secondly, I agree with the member from London West, who just spoke: The good part about this bill is, it does take politics out of future increases—I hope. As a member here for many years, at one time I thought maybe we should have a committee of outside panellists so that people don't use it as a political football. I like that part of the bill. I see that the Ontario Chamber of Commerce agrees with it. It will, as the Minister of Education and others on the government side have said, stabilize the issue for a while.

It's a sad fact that, in my 23 years, I have never stood here before with 10% of the working population on minimum wage. It usually hovered around 3.1% to 4%. Clearly, the path of this government has brought us down, and it really is a spiral down. It isn't working.

Time and time again, we give you an opportunity for a jobs plan. We cleared the deck seven months ago, when Kathleen Wynne said, "If you pass some of these bills, Mr. Hudak, we'll bring forward a jobs plan." You never did that, and I doubt you're going to do that on May 1 with the budget.

The million jobs plan we brought forward will create more jobs. Whether you like it or not, it's based on what Mr. Hudak, the leader of the PC Party, and I did—and you, Mr. Speaker—as part of a cabinet many years ago. We created a million net new jobs in the province. We know how to do it, and we're going to ask the voters for a chance to do it again.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I rise today to speak to Bill 165, the Fair Minimum Wage Act, on its second reading. This is a very important bill, Speaker, to myself and my constituents in London–Fanshawe, as we are faced with a higher-than-average unemployment rate. It's no secret in this House that that's the case. Since I have had the privilege and honour to represent my constituents in London–Fanshawe, those are questions I have brought over and over again: about the unemployment rate in London and how people need good-paying manufacturing jobs.

We're also here today talking about the fact that this brings to light that how much people earn per hour is vital to our ability to bounce back from these tough economic times. From this government, we know that there has been no real, substantial job creation—in the city of London, anyway. It's very important we talk about how this is affecting the people of our ridings.

Some, like this government, will say that \$11 an hour is more than a fair increase to the minimum wage. However, what I have found interesting with this bill is

that it doesn't actually call for an increase to the minimum wage to \$11 per hour. What it actually does do is, it references a regulation that sets the dollar amount of the minimum wage, and it essentially says that, as of October 1, 2014, the percentage annual increase in the minimum wage will be equal to the consumer price index, or CPI. Fundamentally, all Bill 165 is attempting to accomplish is to enact a CPI-based indexing of the minimum wage in this province. The regulation the government has put into place to implement the \$11 minimum wage—and other levels for different classes of workers such as students—is now official and in e-Laws and is set to come into effect on June 1, 2014.

From this point forward, however, the minimum wage will be tied to the increase in the CPI, with the first CPI-linked increase to the minimum wage coming into effect on October 1, 2015.

Further, there does not appear to be a way to amend the legislation to get at the actual amount and amend it, with this bill in its current form. After years of inaction, the Liberal plan falls short of delivering a modicum of fairness to Ontario workers and families.

Families are being squeezed, Speaker, harder than ever before, and the response from this government is to target a technicality minimum wage to CPI? With people's bills increasing and paycheques decreasing, it seems to me like Ontarians are looking for us to do more.

My NDP colleagues and I believe that we need a better approach than the Liberal government is taking. New Democrats have a plan that is practical and responsible, to ensure that small business can grow and to help families facing poverty.

We believe that we can realistically increase the minimum wage by 50 cents in 2015 and do the same thing again in 2016. Moreover, we know that in order to implement effective minimum wage increases, Ontario's small businesses need help to offset these increases to wages.

The solutions that we propose are better thought out and more comprehensive than what the Liberal government is proposing. That's why, Speaker, we're proposing to lower taxes for small businesses while raising the minimum wage.

In addition, the NDP would crack down on tax avoidance, close loopholes and place fair and reasonable limits on public sector CEO salaries. This ensures that we can move forward with positive steps that ensure that our small business sector stays strong and can grow.

We have taken our time, listened to people earning the minimum wage, and spoken to small businesses paying the minimum wage, to find a practical, reasonable solution that sees workers and businesses thrive.

We know that both sides of this Legislature are fond of borrowing ideas—it has happened many times over the years—and this is one that we hope you'll take to heart.

Ontario's New Democrats have a plan to support small businesses as well as the lowest-paid workers in the province by phasing in a series of reductions in the small

business tax rate while increasing the minimum wage to \$12 per hour over two years.

Economic responsibility can and will lift hard-working Ontarians out of poverty while allowing small businesses to keep driving our economy forward, as they always have done. That's what our plan is geared to achieve.

Speaker, based on a minimum wage of \$11 an hour as of June 1, 2014, the NDP's three-part plan includes: a 50-cent-per-hour increase to \$11.50 on June 1, 2015; a further 50-cent-per-hour increase to \$12 on June 1, 2016; and annual cost-of-living increases, plus four months' notice for businesses. So we're going to have a CPI, which is the consumer price index, be increased, but we're going to have businesses have a four-month planning period for that.

These increases to the minimum wage will be accompanied by a reduction in the effective small business corporate tax rate as follows: a reduction from what the rate is now for small businesses—4.5% to 4% as of June 1, 2014; a further reduction from 4% to 3.5% on June 1, 2015; and then a reduction from 3.5% to 3% on June 1, 2016.

Speaker, this is a reasonable way of having the minimum wage increase but also helping the small business community in our neighbourhoods, which is the meat and potatoes and the roots of a lot of job creation in our neighbourhoods and communities—and they need that help.

So we're phasing the tax rate from 4.5%—from 2014 to 2016—to 3%, to help small businesses continue to thrive, create these jobs and keep our jobs. These cuts to the small business tax rate by a mere 0.5% will provide small business owners with essentially \$90 million in tax relief annually. This dramatically helps to offset any minimum wage increases and keeps our small business sector competitive.

1650

The NDP plan also calls for: immediate action on public sector CEO salaries and management bonuses—that's something we have to incorporate into this whole equation; the closure of the Liberals' new corporate tax loopholes worth \$1.1 billion annually; and a crackdown on corporate tax avoidance following the Auditor General's 2010 report finding, which actually stated that the Ontario government had left over \$2.4 billion in corporate taxes uncollected while laying off tax enforcement agents. That is not the way to reward businesses that are keeping tax dollars and not creating jobs. We should be having that enforcement so that we can collect those revenues from those tax avoidances that businesses are not paying.

I also find it perplexing that this government, which is currently embarking on a fire sale of provincial assets, could ignore or, worse yet, not bother to collect more than \$2.4 billion of tax money from corporations. I know what the NDP could accomplish with \$2.4 billion, and now we know for certain what the Liberal government is capable of doing with it—quite frankly, probably nothing productive—because they haven't addressed that issue.

Sadly, the amount of money that the Liberals walked away from in uncollected corporate taxes is more than they squandered away on the gas plant seat-saver plan. That's a scandal I think they're going to wear for a very long time.

One of the things that I wish all of us here could share is an understanding that low wages not only affect people's pocketbooks but their overall health, mental health and well-being as well. Wages below the poverty line increase rates of chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, heart disease, migraines and bronchitis, compared to decent wages. Low-wage workers also have much lower rates of insurance coverage for vision, dental, prescription medication and hospital care services, leaving them and their families in a generally poor state of health.

I think it's important today that we do have debates on minimum wage and we understand that there are better ways to help this actual minimum wage dilemma that we're facing. The Liberals have put something forward. It's good that it's on the table and we're discussing it, but I hope that when this gets passed and it does go to committee that we have some of the things that I've just talked about incorporated in these ideas.

I look forward to people's questions and comments on this.

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

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I rise to join the debate on Bill 165, Fair Minimum Wage Act. The opposition parties are needlessly extending debate on Bill 165 by continuing to put up speakers. The bill has now been debated for 10 hours. Over 41 members of the Legislature have either spoken to this bill or participated in the debate during questions and comments. Listening to the debate, it's been clear that the majority of members are in support of the bill. This signals that there is no true desire to have further meaningful debate on this bill, and their only goal is to delay. I'm calling on the opposition parties to stop stalling and help us pass this important piece of legislation.

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

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's always a pleasure to rise here in the chamber. This is just another example of this Liberal government trying to prevent the opposition party and the third party from debating—our democratic right—and expressing our concerns about a bill. The government has the ability to get this bill through, but I think the constituents in Northumberland–Quinte West would expect that their elected official, myself, would stand up and express their concerns.

I want to thank the member from London–Fanshawe. She obviously has some convictions that she stands behind, and you have to respect that. One of the beautiful things about being in this House, within all three parties, is that we have our convictions. Our ideologies don't always mix, but there are some things that we can find some common ground on.

I do, however, have some major concerns.

As I pointed out, good-paying jobs, there are lots to be had. Tim Hudak, our leader of the PC Party, has a plan, particularly when it comes to the trades and the high-skilled trades—the 1-to-1 ratio. These are good-paying jobs. You want to create jobs that are good-paying in the province of Ontario. This is an indication; this is a plan that we're putting forward that is going to create jobs that aren't minimum wage jobs. Mr. Speaker, these are great manufacturing jobs, as the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex points out. We have a plan to move forward to create good-paying jobs here in the province of Ontario, and that is how you kick-start the economy. That's how you lead, and that's how you get Ontario back on track.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, I enjoy standing up and listening to some of this debate, because it's really interesting. On one side, we've got a government that is raising minimum wage to a certain level—not to where we would like to see it, but it is moving in the right direction—and then I've got another party over here saying that with all the poverty in the province, they are going to create a million jobs.

I'll tell the official opposition: If you get me 5,000 jobs for the fourth-largest city in Ontario, which is Hamilton, I would be ecstatic. So I don't know where you're going to get these million jobs from. I think the million jobs are on Mars.

Interjections.

Mr. Paul Miller: They're dreaming. I think it's on Mars; I'm not sure, because it isn't Ontario, I'll tell you that much.

I really love it when they talk about poverty. Well, I know that about a year and a half ago there were three members of this House who took the challenge to live on what you get in a food bank hamper. Three—I was one of them. I lasted three days. I ate what I had: Kraft Dinner and all the stuff they hand out. It's not nutritious, and the doctor should know that. It's not nutritious, it's crappy food, and I was starved after the third day.

But all of a sudden, these guys are going to create a million jobs, all \$50,000- and \$60,000-a-year jobs. Amazing. The poverty level in Ontario is \$19,000 in a city. Your situation is not going to help those jobs in the city, trust me. I'll be happy if you can help Hamilton out just a little weeny bit, but you can't.

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller: I won't get my 5,000 jobs; I won't get 1,000 jobs. It's unbelievable how you can stand up and try to tell the people of Ontario you are going to create a million jobs when we've already lost 350,000 jobs. But all of a sudden—oh, I forgot: It's going to be 350,000 that they're going to get back, plus a million. So actually it's 1.3 million jobs they're going to create. You're dreaming—dreaming.

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

Mr. Grant Crack: In the opposition party, the dream does live on; that's for sure.

I just want to comment on my friend from Northumberland–Quinte West when he talked about his convictions and his ideologies. Let me tell you, Speaker, whenever there's a good piece of legislation put before this House, I can tell you, they filibuster and they delay. There's no more need. We all agree on this in this House. Send this to committee. Let's move it forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We return now to the member for London–Fanshawe for her reply.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Actually, I'm very delighted that I received some questions and comments from the member from York Centre, but you spoke about how we're needlessly extending debate. That's disappointing. But thank you for your questions and comments.

I would also like to recognize the members from Northumberland–Quinte West, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

I just heard the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell say, again, “Push this bill through; push this bill through.” You need to hear the NDP proposal. You need to hear it because it's going to be really important when you get to committee, because if history repeats itself—as it has been doing in committee—you're going to see that the NDP is going to make really effective, strong amendments that are actually going to help people. That's what you need to hear. I don't know which members will be on that committee, but the ones who aren't—maybe you could talk to your colleagues who aren't here who are going to be on that committee and explain what great proposals we have.

1700

So I say, come on; stand up. Let's hear your amendments to this bill, because we know that every time this bill goes to committee, it needs to have better things done to it and more work on it. So maybe our comments spark some ideas that you can give us back, and that's what debate is all about. Our ideas are brought to the floor. Maybe that will incentivize you or excite you to bring some ideas other than this bill, because we know it needs a lot of work. Everybody says it needs a lot of work. So I look forward, when this bill does get passed, that it goes to committee and some of our amendments are adopted and we can make it a stronger bill. With many, many bills before this House, NDP members have made those bills much stronger and more effective for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to rise today to add to the debate regarding Bill 165, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000, with respect to the minimum wage.

Minimum wage has in fact been a popular topic not only in the province of Ontario but all over North America. A great deal has actually been said regarding the issue, and now it has garnered the attention of the current government.

We can all agree that raising the minimum wage from time to time on a whim is probably not the most

responsible way to handle such a crucial policy, as it leaves businesses scrambling to try and figure out how they will shallow sudden increased costs.

A wise person once told me, Speaker, and I'm sure you would appreciate this, that it's not about how much money you make; it's about how much money you keep. I think there's a lot of truth in that. If lifting Ontarians out of poverty is the end goal, raising the minimum wage may not be the most effective option.

Exemptions in provinces such as Alberta and Saskatchewan are almost double what they currently are in Ontario. Such policies allow minimum wage earners to keep more money in their pockets at the end of the day, which is really what we should be striving for here today in Ontario.

It's my hope that the government has additional plans to offer other than just a minimum wage hike. This bill is one that I will be supporting, but it's only a piece of the puzzle—just a small piece of the puzzle.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has recommended that governments give businesses at least six months' notice when increasing minimum wage so they can adequately prepare for increased costs and other changes. Businesses large and small must be able to plan ahead for things like potentially higher payroll taxes when these policies are implemented. Unfortunately, in this case, businesses were only given four months' notice to get ready.

In the future, however, Bill 165 will provide structure and allow job creators to prepare for increases to the minimum wage. By tying future increases to the Ontario consumer price index, CPI, there will be more predictability when it comes to minimum wage. This is something that has been called for by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, and we are glad to see that they're calling for this. These concerns have been incorporated in the bill, as mentioned earlier.

As I also previously mentioned, minimum wage has been a hot issue around the province for the past several months. The topic has come up many times in my riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex.

My personal motto has always been, and will continue to be, “accessible and accountable,” so I met with groups on every side of the issue to hear specifically what they had to say and to educate myself on the issue properly. All parties seemed to agree that something should be done, but they often disagreed about exactly how that should be handled. We need to ensure that raising the minimum wage is done in a way that will actually benefit those working in Ontario instead of indirectly hurting them.

Many local business owners in my riding, the job creators in our community, are currently having a rough time keeping their doors open. Specifically, many of them are struggling just to keep the lights on.

I asked many business owners point-blank, “What's preventing you from expanding, or hiring more people, or giving your employees a raise?” Well, what I heard time and time again was that rising energy costs are in fact crippling businesses in Chatham–Kent–Essex.

For example, I spoke to a butcher in Chatham about the challenges of operating a business in Ontario today. His family business has been serving our community for the better half of a century now. This particular butcher shop requires a lot of electricity to run all of the refrigerators and freezers in his family-owned establishment. Because of this, he was worried that he may not be able to hire as many employees for the summer months, when he typically sees a spike in business. This is just one example, but there are countless others. These are the types of summer jobs that the youth of Chatham–Kent–Essex rely upon as they work their way through high school, then college or university.

Many local businesses have told me, quite bluntly, that there was just no way that they could take the hit of a sudden increase of minimum wage to \$14 an hour—and that was discussed and talked about several months ago—from, at that time, the current \$10.25 an hour. I was told on more than one occasion that such a drastic change would force employers to scale back on hours or reduce their total number of employees altogether. Now, we're going back to lost jobs and unemployment.

Various lobby groups, including Unifor Local 127, who I met back in my office in December, lobbied for a \$14-an-hour minimum wage. A one-time increase of that size would have the unintended consequence of forcing many minimum wage earners out of work. It would encourage many businesses to leave the province faster than they already are leaving—thanks, in large part, to this reckless Liberal government's energy policies and their scandal-plagued mismanagement of the province's finances.

Back when the minimum wage was increased from \$8.75 to \$10.25, my riding lost jobs, even in the greenhouse sector. The greenhouse growers were effectively forced to give all of their workers a raise of \$1.50 an hour more, not just those earning minimum wage, but everyone in their employ—an additional \$1.50. More job losses is not what we need here in Ontario. We certainly don't need any more job losses in Chatham–Kent–Essex. Thankfully, this bill seeks to make a more gradual change that we hope will minimize the job losses that can sometimes come about when a minimum wage is hiked.

I'm more concerned with creating good energy policies, minimizing red tape, lowering taxes, improving efficiencies and having a lack of scandals when it comes to running our province's finances so that we can attract more high-quality jobs to this great province of Ontario. That will keep existing jobs here in Ontario and bring more investment to the province.

While we often get stuck on the amount that minimum wage pays, we should also focus on the staggering number of Ontarians who are forced to work for this wage. Here is an absolutely shocking statistic that I want to share with the good people in my riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex and anyone else who may be watching this debate at home: Almost 10% of Ontario's workforce is on minimum wage. In 2003, it was a mere 3.5%. Coincidentally, that was the year that this now scandal-

ridden government came into power. The percentage of Ontarians on minimum wage has almost tripled, 10 years later, during their reign. It appears that Ontario is already winning the race to the bottom under the Dalton McGuinty-Kathleen Wynne government.

Welcome to Kathleen Wynne's Ontario: more minimum wage jobs, less well-paying jobs. What the people of Chatham-Kent-Essex want to see is a strong focus on creating an environment that will allow jobs to come back to Ontario. They want to see good jobs, ones that will provide a strong foundation upon which they can support themselves and their families. They want a little extra money in their pockets—more green in their jeans, as I call it—so that they can support local businesses or start to save up for a new house. This government has bragged that Ontario has the highest minimum wage in the country, but it will not comment on how Ontario compares to other provinces and jurisdictions when it comes to take-home pay after taxes.

1710

Although we're only discussing minimum wage jobs this afternoon in the Legislature, it is surprising to see that this government is starting to pay attention to private sector jobs. I only have a few seconds left, and I want to quickly share: When I was discussing, that cold winter day outside my office, with Unifor 127, and they were telling me that I needed to support a \$14-an-hour increase, I took six of those people standing in front of my office and said, "You're a boss, and you other five work for this boss. If this boss is forced to pay an extra \$4 an hour, that's \$20 an hour, times eight hours a day. That's \$160 a day extra in wage, but they don't have anything to show for it. Multiply that times five or six days a week. Multiply that by 50 weeks. Now you're looking at probably somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$50,000 extra in added wages."

Speaker, we will support this bill, but we can't allow small businesses to die.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It's a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people I represent in London West to address some of the comments that were made by the member for Chatham-Kent-Essex.

In particular, he talked about his conversation with members of Unifor Local 27, which is a proud member of my community; that is a labour union that has contributed greatly to our local economy and just to quality of life in London. But what the members of Unifor Local 27 recognize and what the NDP recognizes in our response to the legislation is that minimum wage policy really is economic policy. The member from Chatham-Kent-Essex talked about the possibility of job losses, but all of the evidence shows that increasing the minimum wage really primes the pump for the economy. Increasing the disposable incomes of people who have the lowest wages causes them to go out and spend. They pump more money into the economy, and it really is a benefit to us overall.

At the same time, we do recognize that there are inevitable cash flow realities for small businesses, that even the smallest increases in payroll costs can be difficult for some small businesses to manage. They have less flexibility in responding nimbly to increased cost pressures. That is why the NDP has proposed a reduction in the small business corporate tax rate, from 4.5% to 3% by 2016, at the same time that we're pushing for an increase in minimum wage to \$12 an hour as of the same time, 2016.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have to say the opposition parties are needlessly extending debate on Bill 165 as they are continuing to put up speakers. This bill has now been debated for over 10 hours. Over 43 members of the Legislature have either spoken to the bill or participated in the debate during questions and comments. It's clear that the majority of members are in support of this bill. It is clear there is no true desire to have further meaningful debate. The only goal is to delay.

So I'm calling on the opposition parties to quit stalling. Let's move this bill on. Let's pass this important piece of legislation. Let's get it done. People are counting on us to get this done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Northumberland-Quinte West.

Mr. Todd Smith: You got it wrong again, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Prince Edward-Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Just look at me and think "prince." Everything will be fine.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize to the member for Prince Edward-Hastings. Next time I'll get it right.

Mr. Todd Smith: You'll never forget that now.

I would like to add a few comments to my friend from Chatham-Kent-Essex, who spoke on Bill 165, and some comments from the other members of the Legislature as well.

First of all, I would like to commend the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex, who realizes there is more to this debate than just talking about a \$1-an-hour increase in the minimum wage. There is a larger issue here, and that is, we need to address why we're not creating good-paying jobs in the province of Ontario and why those good-paying jobs are actually leaving Ontario for other jurisdictions. He mentioned the fact that our party, the only one that actually has a credible jobs plan, has addressed the issues that we need to address, those fundamentals that need to change in the province of Ontario.

If you listen to the member from London West, who just added some comments, it seems to me that if the NDP were ever elected government in Ontario again, a \$25 minimum wage would be just fine with the NDP, because it's going to prime that pump. It really scares small business owners across the province when they hear the third party speak of raising the minimum wage

higher and higher, because it is having a negative impact, and it will have a negative impact, on the small businesses in my area. I know there has been a lot of discussion in the media about the McDonald's of the world and the Walmarts and the big corporations, but I'm looking after the majority of employers in this province, and they are small business owners who simply can't afford unpredictable increases to the minimum wage that are going to have a negative impact on their business and ultimately cost jobs in the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I say thank you to the member for Prince Edward–Hastings.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I enjoy rising again and talking to my colleagues, but it was kind of disappointing over the course of this afternoon, where one of our members talked as if people enjoy working in a minimum wage job and that it's almost like it's their fault. I can tell you, in my riding of Niagara, and, quite frankly, probably right around the province of Ontario, people lost their jobs through no fault of their own. Ontario workers go to work every day. They work hard. They're highly skilled. They're highly motivated. Their productivity is outstanding. But they go to work one day and what happens? They get called into the lunchroom and they're told that their plant is closing and they're not going to be entitled to any severance pay.

This is what happened at Vertis in Stevensville. Those workers, what did they have to do? They couldn't get their severance. The plant was closing. That same company was shipping the work right back into Ontario; they opened a plant just on the other side of the border and then they ship it right back to Lowe's—an almost continuous operation.

Nobody wants to lose their job in a plant. But what they all want to do, what we all want to do—as fathers, as grandfathers, we want to provide for our family. When you lose your job, guess what happens? You have to do what you have to do, and sometimes that means going to get a minimum wage job. Yes, you don't have the same benefit level and you might not have a pension plan, but you go and try to do the best you can for your family.

On this particular case, I ran into one of those workers from Vertis on Sunday, before I came up here. On Sunday night, I went to get gas at Gales gas bar in Niagara Falls on Lundy's Lane. The worker came up to me and said, "I'm from Vertis. We could never get our severance pay from the company, and this is the only job I could get."

So I think we should be very careful in this House on what we say about people that are desperate, that have to get a minimum wage job.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We now go back to the member for Chatham–Kent–Essex for his response.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Again, I want to thank the member from London West. The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care really didn't comment on 165. I also

want to acknowledge the member from Todd Smith Edward–Hastings—sorry, it's Prince Edward–Hastings; that's what it is—and, of course, the member from Niagara Falls for your comment as well. I appreciate that. I know the member from Niagara Falls—you speak from the heart. I know that.

To the member from London West: As you know, Navistar was in my riding. Unifor 127—I have a good working relationship with the members of 127 because they also know that from day one, when I went into office, I went to bat for them to try and get those jobs back that, unfortunately, Navistar shut them out on. Of course, now they're embroiled in a legal battle, trying to get their pensions and severances as well. I'm also going to bat for them as well, because these are people in my riding. These are people that we live with. Maybe we've coached their kids in hockey or some sports program, or we see them in the grocery stores. Unfortunately, these people are in desperate need because they've used up all of their savings, and that bothers me like you would not believe—well, you would appreciate that.

1720

Again, we talked about this bill, Bill 165, and we also talked about its importance. Minimum wage is what it is. What we're trying to do is increase it from \$10.25 to \$11 an hour. I mentioned earlier in my speech that sometimes it's not how much money you make, it's how much money you are able to keep; in other words, that green in your jeans. If we can allow people to have greater disposable income—we have to look at other ways of how we can make that happen. Sometimes raising the minimum wage for businesses is not as easy as one might think.

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

Mr. Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 165.

Before I do so, if you could grant me a little bit of leeway here, I would like to point out that we have three states of emergency now declared back in my riding of Prince Edward–Hastings: a serious flood in the Foxboro area of Belleville, where a state of emergency was declared on Thursday, and then just this afternoon, a state of emergency was declared in Tweed as well as the municipality of Centre Hastings. My thoughts are with the emergency measures teams in all three of those municipalities. They've been doing a great job with a team of about 500 volunteers in Belleville over the weekend to get the sandbags out there and make sure that the Moira River doesn't impact on too many properties. Congratulations to those who are in charge of the emergency measures team and playing an integral role around the table for all three of these municipalities, and of course the community members that have come from right across the province, from Waterloo to Ottawa and all parts in between, to the Hastings county municipalities that have been hit. We appreciate that, and our thoughts are with them right now.

It is an honour to rise and speak to Bill 165. We will be supporting that. I know that a lot of groups had

significant concerns about increasing the minimum wage, especially when I was small business and red tape critic and I had the opportunity, on behalf of the official opposition, to meet with small businesses in my riding and small businesses right across the province. They were worried about the effect that a steep increase in the minimum wage would have on their business. It would make it harder for them to make ends meet and keep their business going.

In small-town Ontario, like in Tweed, Bancroft, Bloomfield and Stirling, independently owned businesses are, of course, the backbone of the economy. A lot of the time, they make up the majority of the jobs that are available in that community. Over the course of the debate on this bill, not just in the House but in the press, there seems to be this idea that we're only talking about these huge mega-corporations like the golden arches and Walmart and other big, big companies. The people I'm worried about, Mr. Speaker, aren't necessarily the employees there. I'm worried about the small business owners in my community, whether it's a bed and breakfast in Cherry Valley or maybe one of the beautiful Prince Edward county wineries or a farm in Hastings county or a general store up in Coe Hill. These are the types of businesses that are employing people in my riding, in my community, and we have to make sure that we protect these job creators.

What the government doesn't seem to understand is that overhead dictates jobs if you're a business. There are costs that you can control, and there are costs that you can't control. All businesses have costs. As a matter of fact, they have lots of costs. What the cost is obviously depends on the business, but in my former role as small business critic for our caucus I heard from businesses right across the province about how the things that this government was doing were increasing the cost of them doing business.

Wages are a big part of the cost of doing business, and they're frequently one of the largest costs for business owners. We have got plenty of good small business owners who would love to pay their employees more because they recognize what an asset a good employee is to a small business, but their other costs are being driven sky-high.

The number-one cost that we talk about all the time here in the Legislature, because it is impacting our job creators and our investors in this province, is electricity. The cost of electricity has doubled in the last decade in Ontario. It has been said many times that when this government took office in 2003, Ontario had the lowest electricity prices in North America. Today, we have the highest cost of electricity in North America. If you don't think that that has an impact on business owners right across the province, you're sadly mistaken, because it has cost us hundreds and thousands of jobs across the province already. We're expecting another 42% increase in the cost of electricity in the next four or five years because of what has happened with the Green Energy Act.

This government has also increased the regulatory burden on every small business in the province, to the point where trying to open a business, or even hire a new employee, creates a mountain of red tape and paperwork, and many small business owners simply don't have the time to deal with it. Small business owners are telling me now that, on average, they're spending eight hours a week dealing with red tape, government paperwork, and they just simply don't have the time to do it. If they're hit with high electricity costs and if they're hit with an increase in minimum wage, it's making it even more difficult for them to manage their business. If you're a manufacturer, you have to also factor in the costs of raw materials and transportation, which are going up; and they have gone up because of this government's policies.

As I said, we'll be supporting the bill, but I think we've done a disservice to the actual debate about the minimum wage when it comes to how we've talked about it. Right now, 10% of Ontario's workforce is working in a minimum wage job—10%. One out of every 10 people working today works in a minimum wage job. Our goal should not be to create more minimum wage jobs; our goal as a government should be to create an environment where investors want to come in here and create good-paying jobs. A decade ago, not only did we have the lowest hydro costs in all of North America; we also had, a decade ago, 3.5% of our workforce on minimum wage. Now it's 10%. In 10 years, it has gone up that much.

The idea that increasing the minimum wage will lift anyone out of poverty or create jobs that move people off minimum wage is a myth that our own economic history as a province tells us. I spoke of overhead earlier; it's because I think the basic notion is lost on members of this government. The more it costs you to do business, the more you end up having to sell the product for. If you're stocking shelves at a corner store and you're making minimum wage at that corner store, the shop owner has to pay you a higher wage. But because he still has to make money, he's going to have to sell milk and bread in that same convenience store for more. People earning the minimum wage do deserve to see it increase, but they deserve a lot more from their government.

We've talked about Ontario's economy and the problems that this government has foisted on it. I wanted to take the time to quote a former Ontario Deputy Minister of Finance who had a column recently in the *Globe and Mail*. Here's the quote:

"Ontario's productivity performance has been abysmal for the past 10 years." Again, we go back to the 10 years, and we all know who has been in power for the last 10 years. "Yet most forecasts have it returning to roughly its longer-term historical average. Budget projections count on it.

"Yet why should we believe that? Much depends on the location decisions of global corporations that serve the North American market from multiple plants."

I can tell you that when I meet with my Quinte Manufacturers Association, they are under continuous pressure from their head office—whether it be in the United States

or whether it be somewhere in Europe or wherever it is around the globe—to keep that facility located and opening in this high-cost jurisdiction of Ontario.

Let me tell you a story again about one of the manufacturing facilities in Belleville. Here's one of the anecdotes that I find most telling when it comes to the economic climate that we now have in Ontario. It's about a company in my riding that actually received a government cheque from the Eastern Ontario Development Fund. Two and a half years ago, their hydro bill was \$138,000 a month—138 grand a month for their hydro bill, two and a half years ago. Last December, it was \$325,000, and by the end of the government's long-term energy plan, it's going to be \$465,000 a month. The cheque that they received from the EODF was for \$237,000. Hey, thank you very much. We'll take the \$237,000, but two years from now, that's not even going to cover half of their electricity bill. This isn't creating jobs. This is subsidizing the hydro rate increases that this government has rammed down the throats of the province's manufacturing sector.

1730

Running a business, like running a province, is a complex process that relies on a combination of factors, but there are a few basic underlying principles. One of them is that you don't price yourself out of the market, and Ontario has priced itself out of the market when it comes to foreign investment.

It's apparent that this government is just fine with creating minimum wage jobs. But I can tell you that here on the opposition bench, with the Ontario PC Party, under our leader, Tim Hudak, and our million jobs plan, we're not going to settle for creating more minimum wage jobs in Ontario. We're going to create more good-paying jobs in Ontario. People will get off the welfare rolls, they'll get off the minimum wage and be able to provide a successful life for them and their families.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I rise today on behalf of my constituents in London West to respond to the comments from the member for Prince Edward–Hastings.

One of the things he said in his speech that I think is key to the whole debate that we're having right now is the fact that the number of minimum wage workers in this province more than doubled. It was just over 4% in 2003, when the Liberal government took office, and now we're looking at almost 10% of workers in this province working in minimum wage jobs.

There is definitely a need to create some good jobs in this province, and there is also a need to lift those minimum wage earners out of poverty. They are working as hard as they can at minimum wage jobs and they are still living below the poverty line.

But what's really insightful is when we look at who are the 10% of workers, who are those 10% of Ontarians who are earning minimum wages, working, struggling to get by. The majority of those workers—60%—are women, many of whom are sole-support parents strug-

gling to raise a family. So 60% of minimum wage earners are women, and they experience particular challenges and barriers in the labour market.

We also know that racialized workers and recent immigrants are very overrepresented among minimum wage earners. In particular, about one in five recent immigrants to this province is working at a minimum wage. That's more than double the rate of all Ontarians.

So increasing the minimum wage—this legislation on minimum wage—is important to all Ontarians but to specific groups of Ontarians in particular: women and immigrant workers.

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

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to rise again today in our 10th—are we getting close to our 11th hour of debate? I'm not going to double-count myself as a speaker.

As much as I enjoy being schooled by the party that gave us the 2002 blackout and left us with a \$39-billion stranded debt in hydro, I'm not going to talk about that.

Here's what it comes down to: We all agree that raising the minimum wage is the right thing to do. We all agree the CPI is the right thing to do. There's some other stuff that we don't all agree on. It's not really complicated.

The member from Niagara Falls spoke very well, and from the heart, about how we have to respect people who are earning the minimum wage and in minimum wage jobs, because they find themselves in circumstances that are beyond their control.

I would like to suggest that a sign of respect would be to stop debating something that we all generally agree on and just get it to committee, and then we can discuss it some more. That's simply, I think, a small sign of respect that we can pay to those people who are earning minimum wage.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: To the member from Ottawa South, is that a bell I'm hearing? Because you've just been schooled.

When we take a look at that—

Interjections.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I need new writers? Is that what you're suggesting, that I need new writers?

Mr. Todd Smith: They're on minimum wage.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Yes, they're on minimum wage right now.

Again, when we talk about this whole issue of minimum wage, I think one of the things that we really need to look at too are the stakeholders involved, not just the employees. The stakeholders are the businesses that provide the jobs. Without those businesses that provide jobs, then we don't have employees, and therefore minimum wage can do whatever because we have a decrease in employment figures. Again, we have to take a look at that and take that into consideration.

If we can, in fact, create a healthy environment for businesses to thrive and grow, I think it's important.

Then maybe we don't even have to worry about minimum wage. All of a sudden, we can begin to see how people will begin to thrive, not just survive, in an economy that would then start to turn around.

Of course, Tim Hudak and our PC Party have that million jobs plan. We get mocked about that, but you know what? That plan can work. We have even offered it to the government to help you out, but you don't listen. You never have listened, and you won't listen.

So maybe within a week or two we'll get an opportunity to do a little more schooling. But we'll let the electorate decide that when we take it to the polls of public opinion. We'll give them the opportunity because that's when we can say, "Game on." We'll bring it on.

Interjections.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

Interjection.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Well, no, not at all.

But it's a pleasure having the opportunity to stand here in the Legislature and debate.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I kind of like the comment, "Game on." It's an interesting comment. It's too bad that we won't be seeing a lot of games in the NHL this year out of Toronto, but certainly they're moving in the right direction.

I want to talk about small business because our colleagues are talking about small business. Our plan talks about small business, quite frankly. It's the only one that does. Increases in the minimum wage will be accompanied by a reduction in the effective small corporate business tax rate, as follows—and I'd like my colleagues to listen to this because they've raised it a number of times this afternoon, and they haven't said that the NDP had a plan around small business. So I'd appreciate you taking a couple of minutes here to listen: a reduction from 4.5% to 4% as of June 1, 2014—small business; a reduction from 4% to 3.5% on June 1, 2015; a reduction from 3.5% to 3% on June 1, 2016.

I can tell you that during the by-election in my campaign, I went to small businesses. There was a lot of talk around the minimum wage because we all know the minimum wage was brought up in the second week of the by-elections in Niagara Falls and Thornhill. So I went to the wineries, the tourist sector, the hotel owners and the restaurant owners, and they were very clear: They feel that reducing the small business tax will offset their costs on the minimum wage.

Here's a couple of things that are happening: One, I believe that small businesses are happy with what's going on there. The other part of it, which again has been talked about today, is that if you increase the minimum wage, all of a sudden people are going to throw people out of work. The stats don't show that. They don't show it here in the province of Ontario. The Liberal Party, to your credit, raised the minimum wage, and what happened? One hundred and fifty thousand jobs were still created. Those people who were on minimum wage took

that money and spent it right back into their communities. That's reality. That's what—oh, sorry.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It's okay. Thank you. I return to the member of the Prince Edwards–Hastings, who has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you to the members who have spoken. The member from London West rightly points out that the number of employees on minimum wage has gone up considerably under the Liberal government, from 3.5% to 10% of our workforce in Ontario on minimum wage over the last 10 years.

The member from Ottawa South dutifully read his notes but added a little bit of colour there as well. I appreciate that.

1740

The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex as well, throwing down the gauntlet: "Game on."

To the member from Niagara Falls, who talked about the NDP small business plan but then also congratulated the members of the Liberal government for their work on this—there really isn't a whole lot separating these two parties anymore. We've joked about the fact that there has been a coalition—

Mr. John Yakabuski: An unofficial coalition.

Mr. Todd Smith: —an unofficial coalition. I really look forward to seeing what happens over the coming weeks, because we now know that the budget is going to come down on May 1. The finance minister gave us that little tidbit today, although that was leaked out by the bureaucrats a couple of weeks ago. So we knew that it was going to be May 1.

I am really curious to see what happens on the days following May 1, because as we all know, the NDP have continuously, over the last two and a half years, allowed this Liberal government to live. They've allowed this Liberal government to increase the minimum wage rolls from 3.5% to 10%. They praised them, actually, for what they're doing over there. They continuously support them on their ideas.

What we really need in Ontario is someone with a new plan, someone with a real plan, someone who is going to create a million good-paying jobs in the province of Ontario. That's the PC Party under Tim Hudak.

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

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's an honour to rise this afternoon to discuss Bill 165, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to the minimum wage, on behalf of the residents of Dufferin–Caledon. This bill is but one of many initiatives rolled out by the Liberal government for the lights and cameras at a press conference, only to then lose its appeal, I suppose, when they had their next big idea they want to showcase.

I spoke this morning of how this government has so many priorities, it's starting to seem like, in fact, they have no priorities at all.

I want to get to Bill 165, but I also want to touch on something that I think is very important to Bill 165 as well as all the bills this government has introduced this

session. What I wanted to mention briefly was something that the member for Nickel Belt said this morning when we were debating Bill 162. The member for Nickel Belt pointed out that this morning we were debating a bill the government introduced on February 24, and here we are debating it for the first time on April 15, less than 10 days shy of two months later. That was this morning, and now here we are, this afternoon, debating Bill 165, which was also introduced in February, on the 25th. To illustrate my point: Too many priorities means no priorities. Back in February, the government introduced two completely different pieces of legislation on back-to-back days, the Monday and the Tuesday, both of which they claimed were milestones and very important. Yet here we are, months later, and the bills are still being debated.

I would venture that a large reason why these bills and others like them are still even before this House is because the Liberal government has zero focus and really doesn't have a clue about any of the important issues facing Ontarians. They have so many bills and only so much time for debate, they can't decide what to schedule because they have no overarching mandate, and everything ends up being dragged along.

All the while, they have no plan and no credibility on important issues like job creation, issues like getting overspending and deficits under control, or even affordable transit. On these issues, this government has demonstrated just how grossly out of touch they are. In fact, just last night, the Minister of Transportation was on the radio boasting about how this Liberal government is going to cut funding on everything from health care to education.

Clearly, this government is running out of steam. Nevertheless, here we are today, debating one of the many Liberal priorities, and that is Bill 165, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to the minimum wage. Speaker, as the title suggests, Bill 165 seeks to amend Ontario law with regard to the province's minimum wage. This bill was introduced by the then Minister of Labour, and it amends the Employment Standards Act to adjust the minimum wage annually starting in October 2015—October 2015. Even if we stop debating this bill tomorrow or today, it does not take effect until October 2015.

The way that Bill 165 proposes to adjust the minimum wage annually is by indexing it to the Ontario consumer price index, otherwise known as the CPI. These changes to the minimum wage would be rounded to the nearest five cents, and no adjustments would be made if it would result in a decrease in the minimum wage rate.

As things stand today, the general minimum wage stands at \$10.25. This rate will be increased to \$11 per hour effective June 1 of this year. Bill 165 specifically deals with adjusting the minimum wage annually starting in October 2015. Just as a reminder, we are, of course, in April 2014.

An increase that is known and anticipated is something we've heard about from employers, and this is also something that the Ontario Chamber of Commerce has supported.

My concern, though, is not so much with Bill 165 as it is with what Bill 165 tells us about the Liberal government's approach to the jobs crisis we are seeing here in Ontario. I know the Premier and the minister and the entire Liberal caucus try their hardest to tell everyone they can that there is no jobs crisis in Ontario, but we here in the PC caucus firmly believe that when you have nearly one million people out of work, no term is more accurate than "jobs crisis."

That is the basis for my concern surrounding Bill 165: again, not so much about what the bill is, but rather more about what the bill is not. What this bill is not is a credible jobs plan. That is what is so concerning. We've lost over 300,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs in the last 10 years. This Liberal government's record on job creation is, quite frankly, abysmal.

Our leader, Tim Hudak, introduced a bold, credible plan to create one million good jobs in the province of Ontario. It's called the Million Jobs Act. Unfortunately, the Liberal-NDP team voted down that idea. While, yes, the minimum wage is important, and, yes, we need to be mindful of how incredibly difficult it is to get by on minimum wage, the reality is that more minimum wage jobs are not the answer. The government and the third party are focused on giving the people struggling to get by on minimum wage a 75-cent pay increase. The PC caucus, on the other hand, is focusing on getting our economy growing again so that people aren't forced to count on a 75-cent minimum wage increase but rather have good, reliable jobs that they can build a life around. Growing the economy and igniting private sector job creation will do more for those currently working for the minimum wage, because they will have more opportunities to get jobs that pay more than the minimum wage.

The Liberals and the NDP want to raise taxes on businesses and middle-class families through business tax hikes, which will only make it harder for job creators to hire more people. That's not the way to create jobs, and it's not the way to address the ongoing job crisis in our province.

I'll be honest: I know where the government is coming from with Bill 165. I will give the Premier the benefit of the doubt in that I honestly believe she may think that focusing on minimum wage jobs is a good way to create jobs in Ontario. But the thing is, that's not a belief I share.

We hear over and over from the members opposite about how hard it is to live on the minimum wage. This is not news to me. I doubt it's news to any member in this chamber. The fact that nearly one million people are out of work in Ontario and thousands more have no better option than working for the minimum wage is, in itself, a tragedy. But you know what is equally troubling? What is an equal tragedy is that in the face of such dire times, the best this Liberal government can do is stand up and proclaim that "All will be okay because we're going to give you a 75-cent raise."

You know, this bill should really, if anything, be a schedule or a section in a much larger, comprehensive

jobs plan, but it's not. The idea behind Bill 165 is not without merit, and yes, sure, it will provide some minimal relief to those working on minimum wage. But I still can't believe it when I see ministers standing up in this chamber proclaiming their pride at raising the minimum wage 75 cents, while all the while their government has overseen and watched 300,000 manufacturing jobs exit Ontario. How can any one of those ministers express pride when it has been under their government that the Ontario unemployment rate has been above the national average for dozens and dozens of months? This is a government that has presided over Ontario's slide from have to have-not. This is a government that has presided over skyrocketing energy prices that have gotten so bad that businesses are closing and families are missing bills because they just can't afford power in Ontario.

1750

While, yes, I can see the value in Bill 165, and I absolutely feel for those who have no other choice but to have to scrape by on the minimum wage, I would much rather see a government that will actually do something about helping them get off the minimum wage as opposed to being content to give them a 75-cent raise. I would rather see the provincial government focus on kick-starting our economy and creating good, well-paying jobs by:

- (1) Lowering hydro rates for Ontario families and businesses;
- (2) Lowering tax rates and reining in government overspending that has doubled Ontario's debt over the past 10 years;
- (3) Promoting the skilled trades and lowering apprenticeship ratios—and I might add, abolishing the job-killing Ontario College of Trades;
- (4) Increasing trade with provinces across Canada; and finally
- (5) Eliminating the red tape that forces small and medium-sized business owners to spend time filling out paperwork instead of hiring more employees.

Those are the issues Tim Hudak and the PC caucus are focused on, and that is the plan for more job creation, more economic growth, less minimum wage jobs and more opportunity for all Ontarians.

In closing, I will be supporting Bill 165 and want to see it move to committee.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: Once again, Speaker, I listen to the exchanges, and it really amazes me. Here you have a government that complains about being expedient about pushing this bill through and not talking about it so long, yet it's politically advantageous to them to move it ahead. Yet when I've got a bill, or someone on this side has got a bill, like Bill 71 to protect child actors, it sits on the order paper, because the House leaders are playing games and playing checkers with it, when it's an important thing that should be protecting kids.

Why am I complaining about this? Because I think this party with their Christmas tree and this party with some of the other bills they're bringing in—their priorities are screwed up. Their priorities are not for the people and the working people of this province. All I—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I need to ask the member to exercise caution with respect to his language.

Member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: Okay, sorry; I'll withdraw that one word. I guess it was—it's not so bad.

Interjection: Mixed up.

Mr. Paul Miller: A little mixed up—"mixed up," then. We'll change it to "mixed up," Speaker.

The bottom line is, we talk about people who are struggling on minimum wage, yet one party thinks it's going to ruin business. That's nonsense; we've proven the stats. It doesn't ruin business. It actually improves jobs, and they're worried about raising it.

Then we've got another party that says, "Oh well, you can live on 11 bucks an hour." I challenge anyone in this House—anyone—with their lifestyle, to live on \$400 a week. None of them could do it, Speaker, none of them.

The bottom line is, if this place becomes realistic one day and really deals with the things that people in Ontario need, I'm going to be a very happy member.

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

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate and follow my colleague across the floor, the member from Dufferin–Caledon. I would ask members of the House to allow this bill to move forward.

It's very, very clear that it comes as a result of a consensus that was reached when we asked people from the business community, from the labour community, from the anti-poverty community and youth to come together and give us their best advice after having consulted around the province. They held 10 public consultations around the province. They got more than 400 submissions from around the province as well, Speaker. They came to the conclusion that this would be the best way to move forward to allow the minimum wage in the province of Ontario to become the highest in the land and also to allow it to become fair and to allow it to become predictable for business going into the future.

Interjection: How many times did the Tories raise it?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It seems to me, Speaker, that we have raised it seven times since 2003. I don't believe that the official opposition raised it once during their time.

It's time to move forward. I think that this bill has had good debate. People have expressed their opinions. Surely, it's time to send it on to committee. If it needs to be improved in some way by way of amendment, I think I'd like to see that, but let's move it forward. It's time.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 165 today. I want to thank the member from Caledon for

her address today. She's always very reasoned in the way she goes about speaking about legislation, and today was no exception. In fact, that's the second time I heard her speak to a bill today. She spoke to Bill 162, I believe it was, earlier today.

I have a differing view than my friend from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek on minimum wage legislation. I disagree with his assertion that raising the minimum wage does not cost jobs. Raising the minimum wage is not a trip out of poverty. The people who live on minimum wage are the very people who are affected the most when there's a little increase at the grocery store or a little increase at the convenience store or a little increase at the gas station. They're the ones who are affected most whenever there is an inflationary effect in our economy. Whatever little increase you give them in minimum wage will be eaten up immediately by the rise in the cost of living, so they actually accomplish nothing, other than the politicizing of the wage issue.

The economy and the natural evolution of the needs of the economy are what should drive wages where they need to be, at all levels. However, this government believes that the politically expedient thing to do is to get involved in that sphere. I know they backed off; they were talking about going to \$14 an hour, and even they realized the effect it would have. You can't argue that it would have a bad effect at \$14 but has no effect at a smaller increment. The effect is smaller, but it is still there, and I think that the government just likes to play politics with minimum wage rules.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I wanted to congratulate the member from Dufferin–Caledon on her contributions to the debate on Bill 165.

There are a lot of people in the riding of London–Fanshawe. They're hard-working people, and there are a lot of people who are struggling with minimum wage jobs. There are a lot of single mothers in my riding who are looking forward to having the minimum wage salary amount, per hour, increase. We need to do things like that in this House in order to make sure that people do have some type of relief. It's certainly not the best scenario if you have a full-time minimum wage job and you're trying to support a family, whether you're two parents and a child or one parent and a child. But the fact is that I

don't recall hearing any solutions or suggestions from the Conservative Party with regard to what some of their proposals are for minimum wage.

The NDP has certainly contributed very productively to this debate, and we'll continue to contribute productively in committee. There have been a few things thrown out, and they're kind of fear statements about how it's going to ruin small business. We took that into consideration, and we are going to be lowering corporate tax rates for small businesses by 0.5% over the two years; I think it's three times that we're going to be lowering it. It's going to go from 4.5%; at the end of 2016, it will come down to 3%. That is a reasonable way to gradually get small businesses looking at the higher minimum wage so that they're not going to be crippled and have that job loss. We're doing the responsible thing—

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Sensible.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: There: I just heard a member say that it's called "sensible." We are the sensible party.

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

Ms. Sylvia Jones: The member from London–Fanshawe is looking for some solutions. I'm happy to offer them. Take them, use them, run with them.

(1) Lower hydro rates for Ontario families and businesses.

(2) Lower taxes and rein in government overspending that has doubled Ontario's debt over the past 10 years. That, by the way, is when you guys have been in power.

(3) Promote the skilled trades, lower apprenticeship ratios, and abolish the job-killing Ontario College of Trades.

(4) Increase trade with provinces across Canada.

(5) Eliminate red tape that forces small- and medium-sized business owners to spend time filling out paperwork instead of hiring more employees.

Ultimately, I think we all understand that the job creators in this province are the people who build this province, and they are the private sector.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiles et de l'Immigration
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	
Del Duca, Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	Deputy House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Holyday, Douglas C. (PC)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment / Ministre du Développement économique, du Commerce et de l'Emploi
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	
Jackson, Rod (PC)	Barrie	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Attorney General / Procureure générale Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Milligan, Rob E. (PC)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Orazietti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Piruzza, Hon. / L'hon. Teresa (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Agriculture and Food / Ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Government / Chef du gouvernement Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Vacant	Brampton–Springdale	

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Taras Natyshak
Laura Albanese, Steve Clark
Mike Colle, Joe Dickson
Rob Leone, Amrit Mangat
Taras Natyshak, Jerry J. Ouellette
Michael Prue
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Présidente: Laura Albanese
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Soo Wong
Laura Albanese, Steven Del Duca
Victor Fedeli, Catherine Fife
Douglas C. Holyday, Mitzie Hunter
Monte McNaughton, Michael Prue
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Président: Grant Crack
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Donna H. Cansfield
Sarah Campbell, Donna H. Cansfield
Grant Crack, Dipika Damerla
John Fraser, Michael Harris
Peggy Sattler, Laurie Scott
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Rick Bartolucci
Laura Albanese, Rick Bartolucci
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Percy Hatfield
Mitzie Hunter, Jim McDonell
Randy Pettapiece, Monique Taylor
Lisa M. Thompson
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Phil McNeely
Teresa J. Armstrong, Steven Del Duca
Bob Delaney, Frank Klees
Jack MacLaren, Phil McNeely
Rob E. Milligan, Shafiq Qadri
Jonah Schein
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tamara Pomanski

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

Chair / Président: Garfield Dunlop
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Bas Balkissoon, Grant Crack
Vic Dhillon, Garfield Dunlop
Cindy Forster, Lisa MacLeod
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Todd Smith
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Norm Miller
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Toby Barrett
Toby Barrett, Lorenzo Berardinetti
France Gélinas, Helena Jaczek
Phil McNeely, Norm Miller
John O'Toole, Jagmeet Singh
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

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Catherine Fife, John Fraser
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Rick Nicholls, Peter Tabuns
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Rod Jackson, Helena Jaczek
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Select Committee on Developmental Services / Comité spécial des services aux personnes ayant une déficience intellectuelle

Chair / Présidente: Laura Albanese
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Elliott
Laura Albanese, Bas Balkissoon
Cheri DiNovo, Christine Elliott
Mitzie Hunter, Rod Jackson
Sylvia Jones, Monique Taylor
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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