



Legislative Assembly  
of Ontario

Second Session, 40<sup>th</sup> Parliament

Assemblée législative  
de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 40<sup>e</sup> législature

**Official Report  
of Debates  
(Hansard)**

**Journal  
des débats  
(Hansard)**

**Monday 3 March 2014**

**Lundi 3 mars 2014**

Speaker  
Honourable Dave Levac

Président  
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk  
Deborah Deller

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Deborah Deller

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Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430  
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 3 March 2014

## ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 3 mars 2014

*The House met at 1030.*

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

*Prayers.*

### INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** I'd like to introduce James Crown from the Woodstock General Hospital, who is here today as part of the registered practical nurses.

I would also like to express my apologies. I was to meet with the delegation this morning, but because of some mishap on the Gardiner, I was stuck in traffic for two hours and I was unable to be here. Hopefully, we will get to meet them at a future date.

**Mr. Joe Dickson:** I'd like to welcome several guests from Durham region's economic development team to the Legislature this morning to celebrate Durham Day here at Queen's Park today in rooms 228 and 230, and that includes a scrumptious lunch.

I'm just introducing to you, Mr. Speaker, Kathy Weiss—if you would stand for me—and Kasia Chojecki, both from the region of Durham; Rhonda Keenan, from the city of Oshawa; and Fiaz Jadoon, from the city of Pickering.

I just want to make sure that everyone knows that all members and their staff are welcome, commencing at 11:45. Don't forget, there's a great free lunch.

I'd also like to introduce, from my staff, Cassandra Cruciano. Cassandra is my constituency and outreach assistant—and a recent Ottawa graduate—in my community office.

**Ms. Lisa MacLeod:** It's my pleasure today to introduce Jordan Milks from the great riding of Nepean–Carleton. He lives in Bells Corners; we call it BC. I'm happy that he has joined us here at Queen's Park today.

**M. Gilles Bisson:** J'ai le plaisir d'introduire Carol Dumas, qui originellement vient de Timmins mais est ici à Toronto pour aider son beau ami M. Owen, qui est page ici à l'Assemblée.

**Hon. Mario Sergio:** I'm pleased to have in the House members of the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat liaison committee, whose help and hard work are helping us to guide seniors' issues. Especially, Speaker, they were very much involved in making sure that the community grant program got under way.

We have Arlene Smetaniuk, Mary Hynes, Sarah Park, Bernard Jordaan, Edna Beange, Lilian Wells, Elizabeth Macnab, Stephanie McCleave, Élisabeth Allard, Zul

Kassamali, and from the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat, Mihaela Dumitrascu and Ronit Gordon.

Thank you for coming. I hope you have a good day here at Queen's Park.

**Mrs. Julia Munro:** I'd like all members to help me welcome the students and families of Sir William Osler school of Bond Head, students who have come from both Simcoe–Grey and York–Simcoe to come together to show their support for Madi Vanstone here in the House today. Thank you for coming.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** It is my pleasure to introduce Mr. Bernard Jordaan, who is the president of the United Senior Citizens of Ontario.

Et ça me fait extrêmement plaisir de présenter des gens de Sudbury. Magalie Malette était page, et elle est ici avec son père, Michael, et sa mère, Marie-Josée Bergeron. Bienvenue, monsieur Malette, madame Bergeron et votre fille, Magalie.

**Hon. Michael Coteau:** It is my pleasure to introduce Mary Hynes, a resident of Don Valley East, to the Legislature. Welcome.

**Mrs. Christine Elliott:** I have a number of introductions to make this morning. First, from Lakeridge Health Corp., I'd like to welcome Mr. Kevin Empey, the CEO, and Aaron Lazarus, the senior director of communications.

I'd also like to welcome, from Covanta, Howard Titus, the facility manager, and Jeff Rayner, the client services manager.

Finally, I'd like to recognize Amanda Meek, who used to work with me here at Queen's Park. Welcome.

**Hon. Reza Moridi:** It is my pleasure to introduce Anish Chopra, father of page Meera Chopra, visiting the House today.

**Hon. Charles Sousa:** Please join me in welcoming Cameron Burgess, a Métis leader as well as a businessman from northern Ontario. Welcome to Queen's Park.

**Hon. Ted McMeekin:** It's Social Work Week in Ontario, so it's my pleasure to rise today to welcome representatives from the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers. I'd like to recognize Glenda McDonald, registrar; Lise Betteridge, deputy registrar; and Jolinne Kearns, communications. And, of course, we very much appreciate them joining us today.

**Mr. Frank Klees:** I want to extend a very special welcome to Cale Holmes, who is visiting us with his fellow students from Sir William Osler Public School. Cale is the grandson of my good friend Bob Callow, and I promised Bob that I would extend this very special welcome to his grandson Cale. Welcome.

**Hon. Tracy MacCharles:** I'm very happy to welcome the grade 5 class from St. Brendan Catholic School in the Scarborough part of my riding. Welcome. They're here today with their teacher, and I hope they have a wonderful day at Queen's Park.

I'm also happy to have two of my constituency office staff here: Ghazal Mardmomen and Ryan Pyne. They're here for Durham Day. All MPPs are welcome to Durham Day, starting at 11:30 after question period today.

**Hon. Brad Duguid:** Mr. Speaker, I ask members to take a look back behind you there in the media gallery. I think the media gallery has never looked better. We're joined today by Sheridan College journalism students.

**Mr. Frank Klees:** Speaker, I want all members to join me in welcoming someone with a very special birthday wish today. Our page Michael Sadono is celebrating his 13th birthday.

**Hon. Michael Gravelle:** I'd like to welcome some guests today on behalf of my colleague the MPP for Sault Ste. Marie. Indeed, we have special guests from Sault Ste. Marie. Their daughter and sister is the page captain, Ella Santana. Here to join Ella are Mary-Catherine Glibota and John Santana, her parents—there they are—and her sister Kate Santana. Welcome.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** On behalf of the member from Oakville, who is stuck in that highway situation, for page Shannon McCracken: mother Cheri Riddell, and father Kevin McCracken, are here in the gallery to visit. Welcome.

1040

## ORAL QUESTIONS

### HEALTH CARE

**Mr. Jim Wilson:** My question is for the Premier. Premier, in a letter dated August 15, your health minister told 12-year-old Madi Vanstone that the province will not fund the medication Kalydeco solely due to its high cost. In other words, you and your government callously sent this young lady home to suffer with cystic fibrosis.

Premier, disregard for the well-being of Madi is simply wrong. Your government is willing to squander billions when it comes to gas plant cancellations, Ornge and eHealth—but no money for a sick child.

For seven months, Madi's classmates, teachers, family and friends, many of whom are here today, have helped Madi pay for this medication out of pocket. Thanks to these people, she is now symptom-free. This afternoon, I'll be presenting petitions that they have collected on Madi's behalf.

Premier, is this the Ontario we can expect from your Liberal government, where 12-year-old children have to fundraise to keep their friend alive?

*Interjections.*

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

Premier.

**Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:** I was very pleased to meet with Madi and her mom, Beth, this morning. The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and I had an opportunity to sit down with her in my office. I just want to commend her for her courage and for her very articulate expression of her situation.

The decision on funding drugs, Mr. Speaker, as you will know, is one that has a process. The pan-Canadian alliance is negotiating, but we have been, obviously, pushing behind the scenes. We want to fund Kalydeco. There is no question that the government wants to fund Kalydeco. But we are part of a Canadian process so that children like Madi and people like Madi across the country will have access to this drug.

I'll have more to say in the supplementary.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Supplementary? The member from Whitby—Oshawa.

**Mrs. Christine Elliott:** Premier, you know the facts. You know that Kalydeco is the only medication available that treats the underlying causes of Madi's cystic fibrosis. It allows her to breathe, to play with her friends, to go to school—in short, to have a life. Yet you continue to deny Madi funding for Kalydeco, solely on the basis of costs, and keep hiding behind this pan-Canadian alliance.

Minister, how much is too much to save a child's life? Will you commit today to funding Kalydeco for Madi?

*Interjections.*

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

Premier.

**Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:** Of course we don't put a price on a human being's life, Mr. Speaker.

As the member opposite knows, and as Madi and her mom, Beth, and the minister and I talked about this morning, the negotiations are being led by Alberta. Alberta has made three proposals to the manufacturer, and they have rejected each one. We need Vertex, which is the company, to step up and be a partner in these negotiations, because we need this drug to be available to children and people across the country. It is not responsible for Ontario to undermine other provinces.

We are going to do everything in our power to expedite this process. That's the conversation we had with Madi and her mom this morning. We are going to push very hard and make it very clear that it is inappropriate that Vertex would not engage in this process in a very responsible way. We are going to push on that, Mr. Speaker, and work to expedite this as quickly as possible.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Final supplementary. The member from York—Simcoe.

**Mrs. Julia Munro:** My question is also to the Premier. Premier, Madi's classmates are also from my riding, and I agree with my colleagues. Your single, cold concern seems to be the cost to the system. In fact, you said it in a letter: The drug is too expensive.

What I want to ask you is, have you ever thought of the cost to the system if you don't fund this life-changing medication? Days and days, stretching into months, in

ICU; a lung transplant at some later date, when a donor becomes available; and the recovery that goes with that—thousands and thousands of dollars will be spent. Madi needs this medication now.

Premier, there are very few people who have the power to make a life-saving change for someone else. This is a lifesaver for Madi and a defining moment for you. Are you ready to commit to funding—

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

*Interjections.*

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

Before we start, I've been hearing some very, very quiet people during the question, and I hope to hear the answer as well in the same respect.

Premier?

*Interjection.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Excuse me. The member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex will now come to order.

Carry on.

**Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I and the Minister of Health made it extremely clear to Madi and her mom this morning that we want to fund this drug, that we want this drug to be available to her and to all of the children across this country. And so we are going to push. We are going to push the company. We're going to make it very clear that this process needs to be expedited.

What we know is that the way that the research was funded for this drug was through charitable dollars, and so we believe it is inappropriate for the process to have to drag on. We are going to push to expedite the process. That is what we said to Madi, and we will keep her and her family in the loop. I think it is commendable that the community is taking such an interest in this, and we are going to do everything in our power to make it move more quickly.

#### MINISTER'S COMMENTS

**Mr. Todd Smith:** My question this morning is for the Premier. Premier, last week, disturbing and disgusting comments made by the Minister of Culture were brought to light. Just prior to the Thornhill by-elections, the minister made comments trying to pit Ontario's Jewish community against Ontario's Chinese community for political gain.

Trying to pit communities against one another: Premier, is this the kind of behaviour that you have led your ministers to believe is acceptable?

**Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:** There is not a member in this House who is more committed to inclusion and pluralism and multiculturalism than the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. There just is not one.

My understanding is that the minister offered an apology last week to the members of the Jewish community if there was offence taken. The minister is an unwavering supporter of multiculturalism in this province. What he

believes and what we believe is that every community should be treated equally, that everyone in this society should be treated with respect and with fairness. That is what he believes. That is what guides his behaviour. It's what has guided his public and his private life.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Supplementary?

**Mr. Todd Smith:** Those comments were out there for three weeks. I believe that the Minister of Culture stood behind those comments and the only reason that he apologized is because he got caught.

In his comments, the minister played some of the worst stereotypes applied to the Jewish community. He did all of this while trying to persuade members of Ontario's Chinese-Canadian community to send a message along ethnic, political lines.

This old, Chicago-style ethnic politics doesn't have a place in Ontario. If you don't fire the minister, you're condoning his behaviour. Will you show some character, make the minister answer for his actions, and then demand his resignation, Premier?

*Interjections.*

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

Premier?

**Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:** I'm sorry, but coming from a member of a party that intentionally works to divide people—I really believe that the divisions that the party opposite—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Order. When I stand, you're all out of order when you keep talking.

**Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:** My understanding is that the minister commended Stephen Harper for supporting one of Ontario's strong cultural communities and simply suggested that that support be broadened to support all communities. That is our position, and we are not a party that wants to divide people. We do not want to divide rural and urban. We do not want to divide labour from employers. We do not want to divide northern from—

*Interjections.*

1050

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will come to order. The member from Oxford will come to order.

Carry on, please. Finish.

**Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:** I believe that this minister knows better certainly than I do the importance of a diverse society that includes and supports all communities, Mr. Speaker. That is what motivates him, and that is what motivates us.

*Interjections.*

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

The member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell will come to order. I have these in my mind. I remember, but it takes so long to get attention. The member from Dufferin–Caledon will come to order. The member from Leeds–Grenville will come to order. Don't point at anybody.

Final supplementary. The member for Thornhill.

**Mrs. Gila Martow:** My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. My riding of Thornhill is in the same area as that of the minister. It is one of the most diverse areas in Ontario—

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Stop the clock. The member has to direct the question to the member that it was placed to in the supplementary.

Carry on, please.

**Mrs. Gila Martow:** Sorry. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. My riding of Thornhill is in the same area as that of the minister in question. It is one of the most diverse areas in Ontario. Included in the diversity are significant numbers of Chinese and Jewish residents. As a member of the Jewish community in Thornhill, I was proud to put my name on the ballot and be elected to represent all of our ethnic communities.

You can, of course, imagine my disappointment to hear of the minister's hurtful comments about the Jewish community in the Chinese media, comments that are obviously in direct contrast to the ministry he is tasked with promoting. Is the minister prepared to resign immediately and seek training to better enable him to represent all ethnic groups?

*Interjections.*

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

Premier.

**Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:** Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

**Hon. Michael Chan:** Thank you very much for the question. I'm not resigning.

Along with all Ontarians, I take pride in our reputation as an equal, inclusive and multicultural society. In fact, this is why I chose to immigrate to Canada.

Speaker, I call on the Harper government to recognize the important contributions made by all our cultural communities, including Filipino, South Asian and Chinese Canadian. It is important to extend support equally to all cultural communities in our great province. We are fortunate to have so many of them in Ontario. It is what makes Ontarians so unique.

## HYDRO RATES

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** My question is to the Premier. Does the Premier think that private energy traders should be allowed to siphon off ill-gotten profits and leave Ontarians paying the bills?

**Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:** Minister of Energy.

**Hon. Bob Chiarelli:** Mr. Speaker, we have a mixed system in Ontario: We have public companies participating; we have private companies participating in the energy sector. The investment that the private sector has made in Ontario is in the multi-billions of dollars.

The energy system spends roughly \$18 billion to \$20 billion per year. It's an enormous operation. There's unbelievable expertise and experience in the private sector. We're in partnership with the private sector in operating the system.

I'm waiting for the supplementary, because I have some questions for that member.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Supplementary?

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I look forward to answers, actually, Speaker. It would be novel; it would be welcome.

Ever since Ontario's private energy experiment began, Ontario has been the Wild West for privatized energy trading. The regulator says, "There are presently no market rules" aimed at market gaming. "In not having such a rule, the Ontario market stands alone." The regulator says it's "unrealistic to expect" that private energy traders aren't exploiting those loopholes.

Can the Premier tell us when we will see some action to protect consumers?

**Hon. Bob Chiarelli:** When the NDP last formed government, they signed nine private power generating contracts for natural gas plants in a five-year span.

But I would like to know from the critic from the third party what their plan is for the energy sector. I believe they're opposed to new nuclear. They haven't said yes to new nuclear. They're against refurbishment. They're talking about 50%, plus or minus, of the energy system. How are you going to replace that when you eliminate all nuclear? When will you start, how much will it cost and, most importantly, in a lot of your important ridings, how many jobs will it cost?

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

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Well, Speaker, sometimes I think the Premier is just debating a question, but in this case, I don't think they understand the question. I'll give it another shot.

The Liberal government has had 10 years to address the issue of companies playing games with the private market. For people stuck paying the highest electricity bills in the country, this is just another example of a government that just doesn't seem to care about the mess in Ontario's electricity system.

After years of inaction, the regulator is now consulting on how to solve the problem, but we've seen consultations stretch for years. People looking at their bills, trying to pay them, need to know that their interests are going to be protected.

Can the Premier tell us when, if ever, she plans to take some action on people gaming the system?

**Hon. Bob Chiarelli:** I was fortunate enough to be out of politics for three or four years several years ago, and I was more fortunate to have been on the board of the Independent Electricity System Operator, IESO, which manages the system. Not only do they manage the system, but they work co-operatively with every other jurisdiction in North America to manage the system so that it's secure, safe and so that there's no gaming.

You can find the banking industry, you can find the legal profession, you can find any operation where people are trying to break the rules and try to tighten them up—the IESO is among the most respected in North America in terms of managing the electricity system, in-

cluding the energy market, and you should be aware of that after all of these years.

#### HYDRO RATES

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Yes, and, frankly, they say the rules aren't in place to protect the system.

Another question, with your indulgence, Speaker, to the Premier: That was just another example of a system that's not being run to protect the people of Ontario. Jane from Toronto wrote to us: "Being on a fixed income, every dollar counts, and to have hydro being dumped cheaply to the US is simply unacceptable."

But the Premier has told Ontarians that bills will be going up 42% over the next five years, and her minister has dismissed concerns about subsidizing energy exports to the US. Does the Premier think the status quo is working for Jane?

**Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:** Minister of Energy.

**Hon. Bob Chiarelli:** We initiated a program for price mitigation about 13 or 14 months ago, the industrial electricity incentive, and there are companies that are benefiting from power reduction costs by about 50%, accessing that.

To be clear, the way they are financing those lower prices is by using our own surplus power. We've gone from a deficit to a surplus in power. We're using that surplus of power to reduce prices for industrial consumers. We also have a significant number of mitigations, but I want to talk about our long-term energy plant in the supplementary.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Supplementary?  
1100

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I would appreciate it more if he would answer my question in the supplementary.

People are working harder than ever just to stay afloat. Internal federal government reports say that the middle class is being hollowed out because the cost of living keeps rising. Alex from Ottawa wrote to us: "I agree that the high energy costs in Ontario are not favourable to the hard-working middle class."

Does the Premier understand that skyrocketing hydro prices are making it harder for people to get into the middle class and to stay there when they get there?

**Hon. Bob Chiarelli:** Our government is paying maximum attention to mitigating electricity prices. We spent \$31 billion making the system reliable and clean. That put some pressure on prices. We're moving forward. We are taking costs out of the system, and the same price increase that he's referring to, the same graph, the same data show that over the next 20 years our average increase will be 2.8% and 2.3% for industrial.

They don't have a policy on energy. I want to hear what they are going to do. Their leader, when asked, "Can you lower prices?" said, "No."

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

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** People know that hydro bills are taking a bigger and bigger chunk out of their household

budget. Clare from Burlington knows the effect on her family. She wrote to say, "I make a good living, and the high bills still really hurt our family budget. I can't imagine the strain on workers who make less."

For 10 years hydro has been getting more expensive, and the Liberal government has said those bills will go up 42% in the next five years. What does the Premier have to say to people like Clare?

**Hon. Bob Chiarelli:** I would hope, as a good MPP, he would tell his constituents that first of all we've put the 10% discount on every bill. Secondly, the Ontario energy and property tax credit gives a tax credit of \$963 per year for qualifying individuals—medium- and low-income people. That also gives a benefit of \$1,097 per year for qualifying seniors.

Did that member advise that constituent that those benefits are there, that those privileges are there by tax credit? Did you? Yes or no?

#### PAN AM GAMES

**Mr. Rod Jackson:** My question is to the minister responsible for the Pan Am Games. Minister, you are spending money like it's the Russian Olympics. During my morning coffee this Saturday, I came across a half-page colour ad intended to convince me that temporary construction jobs for Pan Am are a huge win, but the only win here is that the minister of Pan Am job is actually temporary, especially given your recent alienating comments.

Show us that you are the minister responsible for these multicultural games and tell us how much of our money you spent on the temporary Pan Am jobs.

**Hon. Michael Chan:** Thank you very much for the question. Speaker, I'll give you one example. One of the largest items in additional investment is the athletes' village, which is about \$700 million. That makes up about 70% of the \$1 billion. The village has always been the responsibility of the host jurisdiction and outside the \$1.4-billion operating budget.

TO2015 is the organization that runs the games in terms of staging events, in terms of overall planning, and, also, P/PAGS is responsible for transportation and security. We are working very hard. As you know, there is only one year and five months until the games, so at the moment we have a lot to do, but we are sure we are going to complete it, come July 2015.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Supplementary?

**Mr. Rod Jackson:** Minister, I'm really glad after two years you came clean on the Pan Am village, by the way, but that wasn't the question.

Minister, let me tell you how much you blew on these ads. You blew exactly \$41,000 on this one-off Pan Am ad; for colour, it cost you an extra \$15,000. That's way too much. You could have skipped the colour alone and sponsored an athlete yourself.

Your priorities are totally out of line and your peers know it too. In fact, a full-time babysitting team has been put in place requiring the minister to report biweekly to

the Premier's office and to cabinet offices. The truth is, he's a designated ribbon-cutter, and, later, he's going to be the Liberal fall guy.

Minister, save yourself. Step down and allow someone who has their priorities straight to actually lead these games once and for all.

**Hon. Michael Chan:** I'm very pleased to inform that the Pan Am Games are on time, on budget and, perhaps, ahead of time and also under budget.

The member opposite's allegation has zero credibility. Allow me to give you some examples. Speaker, he issued his own press release about the village's cost, but told the public he did not know it wasn't in the \$1.4-billion budget afterwards. He says he's a human resource expert, but has not heard of a completion incentive program. That's new to me. He claims security is going to cost \$1 billion, which is absolutely wrong. He publically claimed our PASO reception in October was five times the actual cost. Those are zero-credibility allegations.

#### HYDRO RATES

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** My question is to the Minister of Energy. Last week, AMPCO issued a report confirming what most of us already know, namely, that Ontario has by far the highest hydro rates for industrial users of any comparable jurisdiction. No one knows this better than the residents of southwestern Ontario, where tens of thousands of good-paying manufacturing jobs have been lost because of this government's high hydro rate policies.

This simply can't go on. When are we going to see an end to the job-killing hydro rate policies that have crippled manufacturing in southwestern Ontario and throughout the rest of the province?

**Hon. Bob Chiarelli:** Mr. Speaker, we meet regularly with AMPCO. We have a very good working relationship with them. We regularly accept their advice. The numbers that were in the Star article referring to that particular survey do not include price mitigation programs such as the industrial electricity incentive, which reduces rates for qualifying companies by up to 50%; the industrial conservation initiative, which reduces prices by 20%—many of the members of AMPCO participate in that particular program; and the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program: The industrial rates in northern Ontario are among the lowest in Canada, and lower than 44 American states.

We're working hard to mitigate prices and we're continuing to do so.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Supplementary?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** It's interesting to hear the Minister of Energy counter the AMPCO report. It's the reality for the rest of the province. Tens of thousands of good-paying manufacturing jobs lost, and now we hear that the government's own long-term energy plan calls for a 30% increase in industrial hydro prices by 2018.

While Ontario still struggles with an unemployment rate of 7.5%, cities in the southwest are even harder hit:

London, 7.9%; Niagara, 8.8%; Sarnia, 10%. Outrageous hydro rates and increases are killing jobs across southwestern Ontario and across the province.

When good Ontario jobs hang in the balance, how can this government possibly justify a 30% increase to the highest industrial hydro prices in North America?

**Hon. Bob Chiarelli:** Mr. Speaker, she is referring to increases that are, yes, referred to in our own long-term energy plan looking forward to the future. But if she looks to the same graph and she looks at the same data, if the numbers that she's giving have any credibility, then the numbers I'm giving now have credibility, because they're in the same graph of the same document.

The price increases for industrial-commercial electricity, moving forward over the next 20 years, are 2.3%. That compares to at least 3.0%, and the five large provinces have higher projections. But she's got to look at the price mitigation programs. Under the Industrial Electricity Incentive Program, last month, Detour Gold was one of the successful proponents in the first round and claims that the program will save them \$20 million in 2014.

I met with one of the Conservative caucus members, with one of his clients, and we went through the details of that company. If they get in touch with their LDC and IESO, they can find ways to reduce their rates.

#### MINING INDUSTRY

**Mr. Steven Del Duca:** My question today is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

As parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, I have spoken on a number of occasions with a variety of northern Ontario organizations and I've had the opportunity to visit municipalities like Timmins, Elk Lake and Espanola. Speaker, I am very proud to be part of a government that understands the importance of the north and the importance of the mining sector for our province.

**1110**

Ontario is among the top 10 mineral investment jurisdictions in the world. As a result, 24 new mines have opened here over the last 10 years, and that's more than anywhere else in Canada. Currently, the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada is holding its 2014 annual convention here in Toronto. Can the Minister of Northern Development and Mines please update the House with respect to this annual convention and explain how it is showcasing Ontario's mining sector?

**Hon. Michael Gravelle:** It's a great opportunity to tell the members of the Legislature about the Prospectors and Developers Association conference, PDAC, which started yesterday. With the Premier, I was able to host our annual Ontario reception welcoming many of the delegates: municipal leaders, industry leaders, First Nation, Métis and a number of my colleagues. It's great to have them here; a wonderful event.

Certainly, PDAC is a tremendous opportunity for us to showcase the many successes of the province's mining sector at our Ontario pavilion, which we are actually opening up this afternoon, officially at 1 o'clock. We ask



you to join us. It's a remarkable convention—well over 25,000 to 30,000 delegates every year.

One thing we want to continue to make clear is that the province remains one of the most attractive destinations for mineral exploration investment in North America. In 2003, explorations were \$193 million; last year, over \$600 million. I look forward to providing more details in my supplementary.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Thank you. I'm sure you will.

Supplementary?

**Mr. Steven Del Duca:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, and through you to the minister, I thank him for not only his response, but the extraordinary work that he's doing on behalf of the people of Ontario.

I want to thank the minister for his update. Frankly, Speaker, those figures that he referenced are impressive. I'm certainly pleased that Ontario is hosting this important international conference. I'm certain that the international delegates who are here will enjoy all that the city of Toronto has to offer. Hopefully, they'll also have a chance to explore other beautiful parts of our province.

As we all know, the mining industry is very important not only for northern Ontario, but for the entire province. I know that our government continues to engage both corporate and First Nations partners to make sure we are creating the dynamic and innovative business climate that we need for this sector.

Speaker, through you to the minister: How is our government showcasing our support for such an important industry at this convention?

**Hon. Michael Gravelle:** I'm very, very grateful to the member from Vaughan for the question because it certainly is important for us to create and to support a dynamic business climate for the mining sector. It really is also about achieving a balance. We are providing tax credits, we're providing grants and geological data that is so crucial to the sector. We are very much demonstrating our leadership, working through, of course, the historic modernization of Ontario's Mining Act. That again is promoting a vibrant, competitive industry, helping to keep Ontario a world leader in the industry.

We need to work with the mining companies, First Nations, Métis nations, other government partners and municipalities to improve our province's competitiveness without compromising our environmental responsibilities. By attending this tremendous annual convention, Speaker, we're able to strengthen our relationship with our key partners in the mining sector and continue to grow the economy.

#### SENIORS' HEALTH SERVICES

**Mr. Frank Klees:** My question is to the Minister of Health. I want to ask the minister about her decision to ration personal support services for Ontario seniors.

Speaker, when the minister announced the government's assisted living for high-risk seniors policy, what the minister did not tell us is that up to 80% of current

applicants would receive no benefits under the current rules. She also didn't tell us that seniors who are now getting essential services on-site in their seniors' buildings would be cut from those services.

Here's an email which many of my colleagues and I'm sure hers are getting from across the province. It reads as follows: "The seniors are devastated because they recently found out the province is de-funding the alternative community living program and CHATS will not be available seven days a week, 24 hours a day." The question from this constituent is, "How is it possible to have these disabled seniors lose their services?"

Speaker, I'd like her to answer.

**Hon. Deborah Matthews:** I'm delighted to talk about how we are strengthening the home care sector and the community care sector. In fact, this is our single most important priority, and our money is where our mouth is on this one. In the last budget, we increased community and home care support by 6%. We were able to achieve that only by holding steady on a number of other elements of our health care system. As a result of our investments, 200,000 more seniors are getting the care they need in their home, in their community.

Speaker, the home care sector is an increasingly important part of our health care system as we shift services to the community, where people get the care they need in the place with the highest quality for them, and that is in their home whenever possible. We are expanding services in the community.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Supplementary?

**Mr. Frank Klees:** Speaker, that rhetoric is not going to go over with the seniors in this province who are losing their services.

In a memorandum dated June 19, 2013, the community and health services department of York region announced that the new Ministry of Health policy would have serious implications for seniors in York region. Not only would the level of personal support services be reduced, but, according to that memo, it warned that more than 80% of current applicants would not receive any services.

The minister said the money is where their mouth is. I'll tell you where their money is: It is in scandals. It is in eHealth—lost precious millions. It is in gas plant losses. It is in her track record of not giving precious medications and prescriptions to the people who need them most. It is in her lack of oversight at Ornge—

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Question?

**Mr. Frank Klees:** That's where the money is, and that's why they're now rationing services for seniors in this province.

I want to know from the minister, will she rescind that policy today—

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

*Interjections.*

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

Minister?

**Hon. Deborah Matthews:** I think it's important that the member opposite actually hear the facts about what is happening. I will be the first to say that we are changing how we are delivering care in this province, and we are changing it for the better. CCACs help over 650,000 people get the care they need in the community. That is 200,000 more people than when you were in office.

We've increased the number of patients who are going home after a hospital visit by 26%. These are people who otherwise would have been destined for long-term care. They are getting more supports in their home, where they can live with a high quality of life where they want to be. Over the past two years alone, we have increased the number of people receiving home care services by 76,000, and we are continuing to expand. In order to do that, we need our PSWs working in home care, and we have plans for that as well.

#### COMMUNITY CARE ACCESS CENTRES

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Ma question est également pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Last week, I asked this government whether they would support an NDP request to bring our troubled CCAC system in front of a legislative committee. I heard a whole lot of messaging and some lukewarm support, but this afternoon I will be tabling a motion that will allow the Legislature to take immediate action on the growing problems at our CCACs.

Can the minister tell Ontarians whether she will support this request to finally take action with CCACs?

**Hon. Deborah Matthews:** As I said to the member from Newmarket–Aurora, community care is where we are investing significant new resources. That community care sector is an increasingly important part of our health care system. We need to continue to get the highest possible quality of care and the best possible value for money from those home care dollars. Speaker, I can assure you that as we invest more in the home care sector, that is taking pressure off hospitals as their ALC rates come down and as the wait-lists for long-term care are actually getting shorter, not longer.

I am committed to home care; I am committed to community care. I am committed to strengthening the home care and community care sectors, and I welcome all advice on how to do that.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Supplementary?

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** I'm not talking about home care; I'm talking about those agencies, the community care access centres, and the number of problems that they are facing. We went on a LHIN review committee, and we heard more complaints against CCACs than we did against the LHINs.

Speaker, this government is fond of repeating the same lines and making promises that have no clear timeline attached. For months, we have heard that legislation will be introduced that could cap CEO salaries, but after years of pushing for executive pay caps, New Democrats

want to see this government take action, not make more promises. I ask again, will the minister support this urgent review of CCACs?

**1120**

**Hon. Deborah Matthews:** I do think it's important, and I know the member opposite does know that CCACs are the body that manage our home and community care sector. So you can't underestimate the value of that coordination.

We are spending \$260 million more this year than last year. That's one year's increase in the home and community care sector. Some \$110 million of that will meet home care growth and service demand. There is \$60 million allocated towards a five-day target for complex patients requiring personal support services. Some \$15 million is allocated to achieving a five-day wait time for nursing services in all LHINs and 75 million additional dollars to community supports, organizations such as Meals on Wheels and adult day programs that help support the people who need the care and their caregivers as well. This is a very important focus of our ministry's strategic plan. It is central to the implementation of our action plan for health care.

#### ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** My question is to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. This government has been investing in people, investing in badly needed infrastructure and supporting an innovative and dynamic business environment in Ontario. We all recognize that a strong and vibrant aboriginal community strengthens Ontario culturally, socially and economically. I know this first-hand. In my own diverse riding of Scarborough–Guildwood, there is a significant off-reserve aboriginal population. While we make progress across many different areas, can you inform this House on how we have been helping to improve and create greater economic opportunities in aboriginal communities in Ontario?

**Hon. David Zimmer:** Thank you for that question. We've been active on many fronts, creating many opportunities for both the private sector and communities to participate in a meaningful way and to help Ontario's economy. One such way that we are doing that is something I recently announced, the continuation of the New Relationship Fund, which is a part of the government's economic plan that is creating jobs for today and tomorrow. This comprehensive plan and its six priorities focus on Ontario's greatest strengths: its people and its strategic partnerships. Through the New Relationship Fund, Ontario is supporting aboriginal organizations as they build consultation capacity and industry partnerships, and engage in sustainable development. That's good for Ontario's economy, and that's good for First Nations, Métis and Inuit.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Supplementary.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Thank you, Speaker, and through you, thank you to the minister for that update on the New Relationship Fund. Obviously, this is a great investment

in helping people, communities and businesses, and helping to create a more robust business environment.

With my colleagues, I've had the opportunity to meet aboriginal and First Nations groups across Ontario. In January, for example, I had the chance to visit Moose Factory, Ontario and meet with representatives from the Moose Cree First Nation, so indeed, I know how important this investment is across Ontario to our aboriginal communities.

Through you, Speaker: Will the minister expand further on just what is happening with this investment and how it is helping our aboriginal communities?

**Hon. David Zimmer:** The fund was originally announced as a four-year commitment in 2008, but it has been so successful that we will continue to invest in the New Relationship Fund on an ongoing basis. Here are some facts about it: We've enhanced the value to better meet the needs of the aboriginal communities by increasing the amount available in core consultation funding from \$80,000 to \$90,000 per year. What does that actually mean? What happens then? Well, over the five years that the fund has been in existence, there have been 540 jobs created across Ontario. This provides skills and training to thousands of aboriginal people. The fund has supported a further 500 projects undertaken by 193 First Nation and Métis communities. The fund projects help aboriginal communities hire staff, host meetings, draft business plans and develop important business tools. This is what helps aboriginal communities create businesses. This is what's good for Ontario and the aboriginal community.

#### POWER PLANTS

**Ms. Lisa MacLeod:** My question is to the Premier. The testimony of the OPP commissioner is very clear. The investigation into the Liberal government over the deleted emails in the gas plants scandal is real, it is ongoing, and it could see jail time of up to 14 years for anybody who has committed a crime.

The time has come for the Premier to follow our lead and call for a judicial inquiry into the \$1-billion gas plants scandal and the role that her party played. So I'm asking the Premier today: Will the Premier show some integrity and announce a judicial inquiry into the \$1.1-billion gas plants scandal?

**Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:** The government House leader.

**Hon. John Milloy:** Mr. Speaker, I'm a little bit disappointed in the member for the question that she has just raised. At the end of the day, we have a situation where the OPP, we are aware, is looking into a matter. I think that members of this House are very aware that we allow the police, we allow law enforcement to do their work. We don't draw conclusions or, as she has done, make insinuations here in the Legislature. Let's allow the police to undertake their work.

What Commissioner Lewis confirmed to the committee is that he is getting excellent co-operation from the

government and those that he is asking questions of. There will be a point when he will report back, and until then, as I said, Mr. Speaker, I think this question is really beneath that member.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Supplementary.

**Ms. Lisa MacLeod:** Well, that answer was actually beneath that minister. That's probably why he's deciding to run away from this place after the next election.

The Premier admitted that the gas plants cancellation was a political decision. We know it wasted \$1.1 billion that could have been used to ensure children across this province get the medication they need for their severe diseases rather than have to take their fight here to Queen's Park.

She has been Premier for over a year. She has lost four MPPs in that time. She has lost her campaign manager. In fact, she's even losing you. Her government is in decline. The OPP is investigating. The OPP was very clear that there could be jail time for any crimes committed by this government. Her priorities are not those of this province.

So I will ask again: If they will not call a judicial inquiry, as our leader, Tim Hudak, has asked, will they at least call an election?

*Interjections.*

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

*Interjection.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Let the member from Renfrew sit down.

Government House leader.

**Hon. John Milloy:** I just want to say on a personal note that I appreciated her warm remarks.

You can't run from it. The fact of the matter is, in the last election it was the leader of her party who was on YouTube saying that if he was Premier of this province, he would—

**Ms. Lisa MacLeod:** It's not my leader who's being investigated.

**Hon. John Milloy:** —cancel the gas plants.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** The member from Nepean—Carlton will come to order.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** I don't need arm-chair quarterbacks. I would wish this to stop while I'm speaking.

Finish, please.

**Hon. John Milloy:** Mr. Speaker, it was her party that had candidates going out knocking on doors, sending out tweets, having robocalls saying the only way to cancel the gas plants was to elect the Progressive Conservative Party as the government. The fact of the matter, which she cannot escape, is that every party in this Legislature had the exact same promise.

The question before us is, how in the future can we ensure that the siting of gas plants is done in a better way? That is what this side of the House wants to deal with.

I think it's time that they came clean.

## HYDRO RATES

**Mr. Percy Hatfield:** My question this morning is for the Premier. Good morning, Premier. Rising hydro costs in this province are threatening the livelihoods of small business people. In Windsor, more than 30 small business owners have complained to Larry Horwitz, chair of the Downtown Windsor Business Improvement Association.

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Percy Hatfield:** Do you know Larry? That's a good thing.

They're worried about the cost of their hydro now, let alone a 40% increase coming over the next five years. This rising cost of hydro may force many of them out of business.

What solutions can the Premier offer to small business owners in Windsor and in the rest of Ontario?

1130

**Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:** Minister of Energy.

**Hon. Bob Chiarelli:** There's a short-term solution, and there are long-term solutions. The medium- and long-term solutions are in our long-term energy plan. We're reducing annual increases for the industrial-commercial sector to 2.3%. The National Energy Board has the 20-year projections for all of the provinces, and Ontario is the lowest moving forward, because we're not going ahead with a \$15-billion investment in new nuclear, we're not going ahead with \$3.7 billion of power purchase contracts with Samsung, and we're running a more efficient service. Those numbers, those calculations, are in the long-term energy plan. When we get to the supplementary, I'll talk about some short-term solutions.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Supplementary?

**Mr. Percy Hatfield:** EnWin, the local provider in Windsor for hydro—they have a real concern, because they're charging the same rates now that they charged customers in 2006, while the increases in hydro rates are on the provincial portion of the bill.

Will this government assure small businesses it has a plan to fix its broken hydro policies before they're forced to close?

**Hon. Bob Chiarelli:** We are addressing issues concerning small business. First of all, very small businesses have access to the 10% discount on their bill, as well as farmers. For those slightly larger businesses—if they work closely with their LDC, there are very significant conservation measures to minimize prices.

In addition, I personally have been consulting with small business groups. We are looking at ways and means to support them moving forward, and we hope that in the foreseeable future we'll have some price mitigation that will be very well received by small business.

## RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

**Mr. Bas Balkissoon:** My question is for the Minister of Research and Innovation. Ontario's capacity to com-

pete in the global economy is partly based on our ability to foster highly talented researchers. Canada is currently ranked sixth in the world in quality and impact of research, with Ontario comprising nearly half of the national research expertise.

In my riding of Scarborough–Rouge River, I'm often asked by constituents if it is a good idea for their children to study science during their post-secondary education. As a parent, the answer is pretty obvious. However, I believe there needs to be more done to encourage students to pursue this path.

**Mr. Speaker,** through you to the minister: What is the government doing to foster and lend support to research and innovation in the province that will encourage more young people to get involved in this field?

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

**Mr. Speaker,** investing in research—in breakthrough research—has always been the priority for this government because it creates jobs. Our government is supporting innovative and dynamic research. These researchers are creating the jobs for tomorrow, and our investment today in research is going to pay tomorrow to create jobs.

Recently, we have announced \$190 million for the Ontario Research Fund. Some \$65 million out of this fund will go to the Ontario Research Fund-Research Excellence Program to support 140 research projects across the province. This fund has led to the recruitment and training of 17,000 highly qualified researchers who are running our research institutions.

Investing in programs such as the Ontario Research Fund ensures that our brightest minds and their innovative ideas remain in the province of Ontario.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Supplementary?

**Mr. Bas Balkissoon:** It is good to hear that our government is committed to supporting researchers through programs like the Ontario Research Fund. Providing the necessary resources and support for researchers is critical to our long-term economic prosperity. However, keeping young, innovative minds in the province is also necessary to create the jobs of tomorrow.

As a parent, I'm always pleased when I speak with students in my riding of Scarborough–Rouge River who have both a keen interest in the sciences and a strong entrepreneurial spirit.

**Mr. Speaker,** through you to the minister: What is the government doing to help take the ideas of young minds to the next level and create jobs for tomorrow?

**Hon. Reza Moridi:** Again, I want to thank the member from Scarborough–Rouge River for that question.

The Ontario government is committed to supporting young entrepreneurs by providing the support they need to grow and succeed in their business. Just recently, our government announced the Ontario Youth Investment Accelerator Fund. This fund is a part of the Ontario government's youth entrepreneurs—to bring their investments into the market. We have invested \$295 million in Ontario's Youth Jobs Strategy, and \$7 million of this

fund goes to the Ontario Youth Investment Accelerator Fund.

Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the importance of youth entrepreneurship in a dynamic economy such as ours.

### WIND TURBINES

**Ms. Laurie Scott:** My question is to the Premier. Premier, yesterday on your radio show, Shellie Correia phoned in to voice her concerns about the negative health effects that wind turbines are having on her son. You failed to answer her question yesterday about the wind turbines, but maybe you will decide that you will answer the question I have for you today. Do you believe that the intent of the Oak Ridges moraine act was to include 50-storey wind turbines?

**Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:** I believe I did take the question from the caller that the member is speaking to, Mr. Speaker, and what I said was—I will paraphrase, because I don't remember exactly what I said. But what I know is that we made a decision about green energy—that is exactly true—and that we want clean, renewable energy. We've shut down all the coal-fired plants. We made that decision, that that was in the best interests of the air quality in this province and people across the province, and the health of children. That is a point I will continue to make, because it underpins the reason that we moved into green energy.

The other issue is the creation of 31,000 jobs. There are contracts in place; there are approvals under way, Mr. Speaker. I know that the member opposite is aware of all of those things.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Supplementary?

**Ms. Laurie Scott:** Premier, your government, through the Ministry of the Environment, approved an industrial wind farm with turbines the size of Toronto skyscrapers. Five of these turbines will be built beside what was supposed to be a natural, serene and tranquil Buddhist temple in my riding. These turbines will impact the Oak Ridges moraine, which is an environmentally sensitive geological landform that is protected under the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

Your government promised better communication with communities in siting these turbines. You did repeat that on your radio show yesterday. You failed to answer the people of Ontario who called in to your radio show. You failed to consult these communities as promised. Will you make things right and call a moratorium on these wind turbines?

*Interjections.*

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

Premier.

**Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:** I was very pleased to be on the radio show and to take calls along with the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure and along with Teresa Di Felice from CAA. There were lots of questions

that came in. We took as many as we could in the time that was available.

I acknowledged that the issues around the siting of wind turbines have been contentious. I also made it clear, and I make it clear again, that we have put new rules in place. We said we were going to change the process, to give communities more input into where those pieces of energy infrastructure would be sited. We have done that, and we will continue to advocate for clean energy.

There was an energy innovation summit here last week. People from across the country and outside of the country were here to share ideas about how we can do more to conserve and create clean energy in Ontario and beyond.

### ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

**Ms. Cheri DiNovo:** My question is to the Premier. Last year the government tried to prevent the release of information on AODA compliance by charging hefty fees to the AODA Alliance. But the FOI that the AODA Alliance was forced to resort to revealed why the government did not want to disclose this information: 70% of Ontario private sector organizations with 20 or more employees had not filed mandatory self-reports on their compliance with the AODA customer service accessibility standard. The government knew that they were failing to effectively enforce their own standards and they didn't want Ontarians to know this disturbing fact.

Why is the Premier withholding information, and will she finally take action to enforce the AODA?

1140

**Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:** I need to challenge the premise of the question. We are working to make sure that Ontario is the most accessible jurisdiction in the world. We have taken leadership in terms of a regulatory regime that mandates accessibility. We're the first in the world to require staff to be trained on accessibility. We're the first in Canada with legislation that sets out a clear goal and a time frame for accessibility by 2025.

I have personally met with David Lepofsky a number of times since I have been in this office, and we have had this discussion about enforcement and how we can increase the compliance by putting more enforcement measures in place.

But the fact is that we are in a transition. There is no doubt about that, and it is going to take some time for all of our institutions and businesses to comply. We are going to encourage and we're going to work with them, and we're going to make this jurisdiction the most accessible in the world.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Supplementary?

**Ms. Cheri DiNovo:** Back to the Premier. I reiterate: 70% of Ontario private sector organizations did not comply with mandatory rules that this government set. The minister responsible for the implementation of the AODA pledged to enforce the law until there was full compliance. He said that it was his "top priority." Yet the

government has taken no concrete actions, according to David Lepofsky, and has no plan in place to enforce its own standards.

The government is failing to make Ontario accessible to those with disabilities, and they only have themselves—that is, the government—to blame. Why should Ontarians believe that accessibility is a priority for this government after months and months of empty promises?

**Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:** I don't know whether the member opposite is aware, but in November of last year, approximately 2,500 enforcement notices were issued to organizations that had failed to comply and submit 2012 accessibility compliance reports. So letters were sent out. Almost half of those organizations that received an enforcement notice responded by filing their overdue reports. The remaining organizations required to file are being issued director's orders with financial penalties. Many of those have already been issued. And these notices were in addition to the approximately 50,000 letters sent in the summer of 2013 to businesses, notifying them of their obligation, as well as offering them supports to help them meet the goal.

It is imperative, now that we have put the regime in place—the standards are in place—that we now work with businesses and we make them aware of what the requirements are. That's what we're doing. We are in communication with them and we will continue to enforce that compliance.

#### VISITORS

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** The member from Kitchener–Waterloo on a point of order, first.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I just wanted to welcome member of Parliament Romeo Saganash from Abitibi–Baie–James–Nunavik–Eeyou and MP Claude Gravelle from the riding of Nickel Belt to the Legislature.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Thank you. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke on a point of order.

**Mr. John Yakubuski:** Earlier today, the Premier, in response to questions directed at her regarding comments made by the Minister of Culture—as we are aware, in this chamber, you cannot say indirectly what you cannot say directly, and I believe that rules 23(h) and (k) were breached. Allow me to explain.

Rule 23(h): I believe that the Premier, in an indirect way, accused every member of this caucus of having racist views and—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** I've heard enough. Thank you. I listened very carefully to question period. I listened to the questions and I listened to the answers. Although I would prefer more temperate exchanges in this place, as many people do, I did not hear anything unparliamentary. So I'll leave it at that. Thank you.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** I'm still standing.

#### MEMBER'S PRIVILEGE

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** The member from Elgin–Middlesex–London has given me notice of his intention to raise a point of privilege. His point relates to the legislation establishing the eastern and southwestern Ontario development funds and a provision in it that states, "If a public announcement is to be made about the provision of financial assistance or incentives within eastern Ontario or southwestern Ontario, as the case may be, the MPP who represents the affected area within the region must be given the opportunity to participate in the announcement."

The member for Elgin–Middlesex–London states that such a public announcement has recently been made in his riding, but that he was given no notice, nor the opportunity to participate as required by the legislation.

I am prepared to rule on this point of privilege without hearing further from the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London, as standing order 21(d) permits me to do.

It is well established in parliamentary procedure that the application of privilege is confined to the proceedings in Parliament and to the activities of members in their parliamentary roles. Speakers of this Legislature and elsewhere have consistently ruled that a member's work outside of the Legislature, and especially constituency-related matters, does not give rise to the protection of privilege.

As stated at page 117 of House of Commons Procedure and Practice, "In instances where members have claimed that they have been obstructed or harassed, not directly in their roles as elected representatives but while being involved in matters of a political or constituency-related nature, Speakers have consistently ruled that this does not constitute privilege."

This position has been taken by Speakers of this Legislature as well. For instance, on April 26, 2001, a ruling by Speaker Carr noted that "Speakers have consistently found—supported by the procedural authorities and a multitude of precedents—that privilege attaches only to a member's parliamentary duties, and not to subsidiary duties away from Parliament."

On May 4, 2010, Speaker Peters noted in a ruling that "According to the procedural authorities and many previous Speakers' rulings, parliamentary privilege protects members in the execution of their strictly parliamentary duties—not the constituency or other duties that may fairly be said to be part of their job descriptions."

On this point, the second edition of Maingot's Parliamentary Privilege in Canada states the following on pages 222 and 223: "The interference, however, must not only obstruct the member in his capacity as a member, it must obstruct or allege to obstruct the member in his parliamentary work."

I appreciate that the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London feels that he has been deprived of his ability to do his job—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Excuse me—but it is that part of the job that is the important consideration in the case at hand. Simply put, parliamentary privilege is not applicable to the constituency-related work of an MPP.

The member may have a valid grievance, however, and I would note that complying with the law is always a good policy. However, I cannot find that a *prima facie* case of privilege has been made out.

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

*The House recessed from 1148 to 1300.*

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### FOOD LITERACY

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** On Saturday, I was pleased to speak at the Building Food Skills for Eating Well conference in London. It was organized by the Ontario Home Economics Association as part of their efforts to address the need for more food education, and I want to commend and congratulate them on that.

Too many students are graduating high school or even university without basic cooking skills, nutritional knowledge and understanding of where their food comes from. At the conference, they talked about new parents who aren't confident in their ability to cook for their children. They talked about how food education leads to healthier people.

We need to increase food literacy. That's why the PC caucus put forward an amendment to the Local Food Act to require food education in all grades to ensure that all students learn the importance of nutrition, how to buy and cook fresh food, and where that food comes from.

At the conference, they announced the results of a study from Western University, which found 94% support for our amendment to require food education in all grades—Mr. Speaker, 94%. Unfortunately, government members blocked that amendment at committee, but I want to assure everyone that the PC caucus will continue to work to increase food education, as will the Ontario Home Economics Association and many other people and organizations.

This week, we are celebrating agriculture literacy week, and I want to challenge the government not just to talk about it but to take concrete action this week to increase both agriculture and food literacy.

### BOWL FOR KIDS SAKE

**Mr. Steven Del Duca:** It's a pleasure for me to rise today and update the House regarding a wonderful event that took place just yesterday in my terrific community of Vaughan.

As I said, just yesterday, Sunday, March 2, marked the annual A&B Courier Bowl for Kids Sake. This event encourages participants to build bowling teams that com-

pete in the spirit of raising money for Big Brothers Big Sisters of York region. Every dollar raised for this event is then used to match a child in my community with a mentor.

It's been proven that children who've been mentored have higher self-esteem and are more likely to stay in school. Big Brothers Big Sisters does an excellent job of facilitating these life-changing mentorship opportunities, empowering our youth to succeed and realize their true potential.

Since 2003, our government has been committed to investing in Ontario's young people. We've invested in schools, making Ontario a world leader in education. In fact, just last Friday, I was pleased to announce the opening of a new school in Kleinburg with Education Minister Liz Sandals. Minister Piruzza also announced the youth-in-transition program last week, which will help those young people leaving the care of children's aid societies.

Organizations like Big Brothers Big Sisters share our commitment to helping Ontario's youth succeed, something that everyone in this House should, and I know does, support.

I want to thank the event organizers and all those who attended this weekend. By working together, we can ensure that Ontario's youth have a bright and prosperous future.

### VIOLENCE AWARENESS AND RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS PROGRAM

**Mr. Todd Smith:** Mr. Speaker, don't be surprised if the driver in front of you pays for your order at a Belleville drive-through this week, a bouquet of flowers ends up on your desk in Quinte West just because, or your neighbour shovels your driveway in Prince Edward county. It's Random Acts of Kindness Week across the Quinte region.

Who would have thought that anything positive could have come from the senseless murders of three Belleville teenagers in three separate incidents in the early months of 1996?

I'll never forget the call I received in the Quinte Broadcasting newsroom telling me that Mark Fyke, a popular teenager, was robbed and then shot and killed while talking to his mom on a payphone while on spring break in Daytona Beach, Florida. Just a few months later, Becky Middleton was horrifically murdered while on vacation with a family friend on the island of Bermuda. And Shawn Keegan was found dead here in Toronto, also a victim of homicide.

It was a torturous time of mourning and grief for family, friends and the Quinte community at large. But from those inexplicable deaths a tradition was born. Mark Fyke's mother, Christine Macdonald, and aunt Pam Smith the very next year started the Violence Awareness and Random Acts of Kindness program in remembrance of Mark and in recognition of other victims of violence like Becky and Shawn.

For the 18th consecutive March, blue ribbons will be pinned on lapels, wrapped around telephone poles and taped on doorways across Quinte. A Kindness Citizen of the Year will be awarded at Quinte Mall tonight. Dozens of school kids will be awarded bursaries as a result of those three random acts of violence.

We shouldn't need a special week to promote kindness, but this week, especially, random acts of kindness will be commonplace across Quinte.

#### WOMEN IN SKILLED TRADES

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Members' statements? The member from Mississauga East–Cooksville—the member from Essex. Rotation is necessary.

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly appreciate it.

It's an honour to acknowledge local efforts by Women's Enterprise Skills Training of Windsor, which is working on initiatives to remove skilled trades employment barriers to make it easier for women to attain careers and financial success.

Women's Enterprise Skills Training of Windsor—WEST—exists to provide training for severely disadvantaged visible-minority women in order to improve their employability in the workforce and to further their education.

According to a needs assessment recently produced by WEST, only 42.4% of women surveyed in the Windsor area were aware of what constituted a skilled trade, and 66% of them said that they wouldn't consider a job in the trades.

Bringing grade schools, high schools, provincial apprenticeship programs, and colleges and universities on board will certainly help in providing young girls and women the support they need to consider the trades as a viable career alternative.

They're also doing some special things around language, replacing “non-traditional” with “under-represented” in the vocabulary, because language alone creates walls and barriers that we want to break down so that all girls and young women can see the trades as an opportunity to become successful.

Speaker, 30 years ago Terry Weymouth became one of the first licensed apprentices in southwestern Ontario. Also, Shelley Harding-Smith, who was from the Windsor area, was one of the first 309A licensed electricians in Ontario. They are inspirations to young women in our region to show that the trades can be a viable career path for young women.

I applaud WEST; I applaud all the women who serve as inspiration. I want to thank them for all the good work that they're doing in our communities.

#### COMMUNITY DESIGN NIGHT

**Ms. Dipika Damerla:** Last Thursday, on February 27, it was my honour to host and organize, in co-operation with the Credit Valley Conservation authority, a com-

munity design night for my constituents in the Rhonda Valley area, alongside Cooksville Creek.

You'll remember, Mr. Speaker, that on July 8, 2013, the GTA was hit hard with an intense storm that saw 126 millimetres of rainfall in three hours. It was after the storm, while knocking on doors, that I met Anne Vidal, a resident of Rhonda Valley and an engaged citizen. During our conversation on the impact of the storm, we began to think of ways that homeowners can protect their properties from stormwater. The initial conversation led to a number of meetings between myself, Ms. Vidal and the CVC, which eventually led to last Thursday's community design night, held at the Mississauga Valley Community Centre.

The staff from Credit Valley Conservation, led by John Kinkead and Christine Zimmer, showed homeowners how they can incorporate low-impact-development storm management technologies, such as rain gardens, soak-aways and swales. Those attending were quite pleasantly surprised, learning these new strategies.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge once more Anne Vidal. Her tireless efforts and research made our community design night possible. She's a perfect model of the engaged citizen that I'm proud lives in the great riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville.

#### EPILEPSY AWARENESS MONTH

**Mrs. Christine Elliott:** I'm pleased to rise to today to recognize and kick off Epilepsy Awareness Month in the House. This month is an important opportunity for us to increase our understanding of what epilepsy is and how it affects people's daily lives.

Epilepsy is a neurological disorder that causes seizures, which affect a wide range of mental and physical functions. But not all individuals with epilepsy experience the convulsions and loss of consciousness that most of us would identify as epileptic. Many experience symptoms that we would likely not recognize as seizures, with blank staring, lip smacking or abrupt movements of the arms or legs. So it is important that we follow the lead set by Epilepsy Canada in order to increase awareness about the range of symptoms that people with epilepsy experience.

Seizures are, by their very nature, very unpredictable. As a result, epilepsy can be very disruptive of people's daily lives at work, school and other activities. As a result, people with epilepsy may experience anxiety and lower self-confidence.

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Unfortunately, epilepsy is often still stigmatized. Sometimes people are reluctant to tell their employers about their epilepsy because they are worried they will face discrimination. Many people are unable to obtain employment in the first place with even modest accommodations. It is essential that we are understanding and flexible about facilitating the full participation of people with epilepsy in all of life's experiences.



I'd like to close by thanking Epilepsy Canada and their chapters across the province for the great work that they do with people each and every day.

#### FULL CIRCLE CHILD CARE CENTRE

**Mr. Michael Prue:** I rise today to talk about the Full Circle daycare, which is located at Westview Presbyterian Church in my riding of Beaches–East York. I had an opportunity to go there last Friday night. I was invited by Denise Boland and the parents and staff of that daycare facility. They had some very real concerns that they wanted me to express in the Legislature, and I promised I would do so at my first opportunity, which of course is today.

The concerns that the daycare parents and the daycare staff had are many. They are worried because, since the advent of all-day kindergarten, it has been very difficult for the parents to deal with both situations. They were hoping that the government would listen and would coordinate the daycares taking the children to and from the schools for after-work or other activities, which is not presently the case and is not allowed by law. They thought that was a good thing.

They were worried about the lack of educational assistants and the funds that are used to pay for them, because they can make much more money, of course, in the schools.

They were worried about government red tape, and they told me many stories about the people who come to look at the daycare centre and how there is so much red tape that they have to undergo. They wonder why they have to do so much as a licensed care facility, when people in unlicensed facilities have virtually nothing imposed upon them at all.

And, of course, last but not least, they were worried about funding in this year's budget. I promised them that I would tell the Minister of Finance that they need more money.

#### EVENTS IN VENEZUELA

**Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn:** It's a pleasure to rise in the House today. As the world obviously is concerned about the situation that is unfolding in the Ukraine and Crimea, we should also be concerned about something that is happening a little bit closer to home, in Venezuela.

We walk into this house of assembly and we take our duly elected seats knowing that the people that we represent elected us through as transparent a process as we could possibly provide in this country. We've got the privilege of peace, order and good government, and they are the norm rather than the exception. Yet, in spite of that, we often take democracy for granted.

In Venezuela today, thousands of citizens have been rallying in the streets in conflict over the leadership and the economic future of their country. Whether it's our right to judge the way in which other jurisdictions conduct themselves is a contentious issue, but we can all see

as clear as day, I think, that democracy, human rights and economic growth are in question on the streets of Caracas today.

I have a number of very skilled and very professional constituents who left Venezuela during turbulent political and economic times. They see very little evidence of change with the current leadership, and now they see images of violence on the streets of their country.

It's interesting that people flock to our country because of the democratic freedoms we have here. We should take pride in that, but we should also remember those in Venezuela and sincerely hope for a positive resolution in the near future to that situation.

#### COMMUNITY CARE ACCESS CENTRES

**Ms. Sylvia Jones:** I rise today to share the serious concerns of Dufferin–Caledon constituents who are outraged that executive salaries at community care access centres have been steadily increasing while services and front-line health care are on the decline.

In my constituency office, residents share with me their personal experiences about service reductions. CCAC clients and their families struggle to maintain their own daily health care needs when necessary services are withdrawn or dramatically cut back. As recently as this morning, I heard from a man who lives alone and who, since returning home 10 days ago from a hip operation, has received absolutely nothing from the CCAC.

Prior to April 2009, the salary of the Central West CCAC CEO was \$145,887, yet in three short years we have seen a 76% increase, the highest reported increase of the 14 CCACs province-wide. The current Central West CEO's salary is now reported at \$243,890.

While many people are losing their jobs, CCAC CEOs continue to receive exorbitant pay increases.

When is this government going to step up and prioritize our health care dollars by not spending on more administration and bureaucracy but rather on front-line health care services?

Speaker, it's unacceptable. That is why I'm proud to stand with my colleague MPP Christine Elliott and call on the Auditor General to review the out-of-control expenses and salary increases at Ontario's CCACs.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Before we move on, I just want to use this as a moment to strengthen our knowledge of how this place works, particularly with members' statements. From time to time, what happens is, a member is stuck in traffic and they're late and no one else stands up for them in that party, or they would try to see if they can get later in the docket. We always do rotation, and it starts with the PCs, goes to the NDP, then the Liberals. It doesn't always have to be that way. But I just want to caution: If there's any kind of thing going on where you want to get the last word and you're not going to get it—if no one stands, we're finished statements, and we move on. So if it's a game of chicken, you just need to know that if you're playing it, you could

lose. We could all lose. So try to get your rotation done, and we can walk away happy—for everybody.

## STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

### SOCIAL WORKERS

**Hon. Ted McMeekin:** I rise today in this assembly to mark Social Work Week in Ontario. Today, we have representatives—I think they're visiting some of the MPP offices—from the governing body of some 16,000 social workers and social service workers. That, of course, would be the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers. They include: Glenda McDonald, the registrar and chief executive officer; Lise Betteridge, the deputy registrar; and Jolinne Kearns, their communications coordinator. I want to thank them for their visit today and for the dialogue that they'll be having with a number of members throughout the day.

The theme of this year's celebration is Social Workers: Champions of Positive Change. I know many of my honourable colleagues would agree that social workers continually support positive change, change that works to improve the lives of so many individuals.

Mr. Speaker, our government invests in a wide range of services to help people in need, but much of that help couldn't get to those people without the dedicated service of professional social workers.

As a member of provincial Parliament—and I'm sure this is true of all of us—I see the positive difference social workers make in the lives of people. As someone who has studied social work at the post-secondary level, along with my colleague from Davenport, Jonah Schein—I think he's a member of the association—I have always been humbled by the personal commitment and caring that professional social workers demonstrate under often intense pressures.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that our province is only as strong as our people. Every day in this province, social workers work hard to restore strength to women and children who are victims of abuse, to people who are homeless and to those who are facing difficult times. Anywhere social workers choose to practise, they help Ontarians make their way through tremendous challenges every single day.

To those who are here today or who may be watching at home, I want to offer a personal thank you. Thank you, social workers, for your continued dedication to Ontario's most vulnerable, and thank you for your commitment to maintaining the highest standards for our valued profession.

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As a government, we support our social workers, and we will continue to work with them to build a successful, compassionate and caring province where everyone has the opportunity to connect, contribute and enjoy a high

quality of life. As the minister responsible, I will continue to seek ways to support social workers in their understandable desire to access the professional development funding they are seeking to enhance their skills and keep their skills fresh.

Mr. Speaker, a favourite poet of mine once offered up this quote: Anyone can slay a dragon, but it's the people who get up every single day and try to love the world all over again who are the real heroes.

Our social workers are the real heroes, and I invite all honourable members to join me in recognizing Social Work Week in Ontario and to salute the thousands of men and women who proudly call themselves Ontario's social workers.

### GREENBELT

**Hon. Linda Jeffrey:** I'm very pleased today to report to this Legislature that this past Friday, February 28, was the ninth anniversary of Ontario's greenbelt.

Created by legislation in 2005, the greenbelt was considered a major step in the prevention of development and urban sprawl on environmentally sensitive land in the province. Our greenbelt is a permanently protected area of green space, farmland, forests, wetlands and watersheds.

I want to acknowledge a guest we have with us today in the visitors' gallery who helped make the greenbelt such a great success: Burkhard Mausberg, the CEO of the Friends of the Greenbelt. I know that Dr. Peter Victor, the chair of the Greenbelt Council, wanted to be with us, and I know he's with us in spirit. Both of these organizations are great partners and leading advocates of this province's green spaces.

I also want to congratulate those municipal leaders who are working in their communities to see the greenbelt expanded. In particular, I want to thank Oakville mayor Rob Burton, who happens to be a member of the Municipal Leaders for the Greenbelt, for his leadership in advocating for the greenbelt. On February 10, the town of Oakville unanimously passed a motion asking Halton region to formally request that land along Fourteen Mile Creek be added to the greenbelt under the urban river valley designation. That request was echoed by Halton region council last week, on February 26.

In addition, I want to thank Toronto councillor Glenn De Baeremaeker, who tabled a motion on February 19 to designate public lands along the Humber River, the Don River and the Etobicoke Creek as part of the greenbelt. It was adopted by Toronto council the next day.

This past Friday, on the greenbelt's anniversary, Mississauga council voted to have its public lands in that city's sensitive river valley systems, including the Credit River and Etobicoke Creek, be designated as part of the greenbelt under the urban river valley designation.

Our government is grateful for the strong support of our municipal partners. It is part of the reason for the greenbelt's great success. Many have worked to support the greenbelt and the greenbelt plan since their inception

on February 28, 2005. The plan laid out the boundaries and the policies for the greenbelt. When our government came to power in 2003, we saw what years of unchecked sprawl had done to the greater Golden Horseshoe. We saw the growing gridlock. We saw the steady loss of farmland, and not just any farmland; the greater Golden Horseshoe has more than half of the best agricultural land in all of Canada. It was clear that without action, we were going to lose this vital piece of land forever.

Besides farmland, we were also losing sensitive environmental lands. Grasslands, woodlands, marshes and other natural heritage features were being lost. Our government had to act to create new protections. We met with municipal leaders, scientists and environmentalists. We met with farmers who worked the land. We met with landowners, developers and other stakeholders. And we met with the public.

The result, Mr. Speaker, was the Greenbelt Act of 2005—an act, I might add, that the official opposition, including the Leader of the Opposition, voted against.

Despite the official opposition's unfortunate and short-sighted opposition, Ontario now has the largest permanently protected greenbelt in the world. We have green spaces and working countrysides that together stretch from Rice Lake in eastern Ontario to Niagara in southwestern Ontario. These protected lands also go north to the tip of the Bruce Peninsula. The greenbelt includes the Niagara Escarpment—a UNESCO world biosphere reserve—and the Oak Ridges moraine, one of Ontario's most significant natural heritage areas. In all, the greenbelt covers nearly two million acres; that's an area bigger than Prince Edward Island.

The greenbelt supports our rural communities that contribute so significantly to the greater Golden Horseshoe's quality of life. The towns, villages and hamlets on the greenbelt provide economic, social and commercial benefits to the whole region. In addition, the greenbelt includes the tender fruit lands of Niagara, the cattle farms of Durham region and the market gardens of Holland Landing. In summer and fall, farmers' markets overflow with the produce, meat and dairy products grown and raised on the greenbelt. In my hometown, we are fortunate to have the Brampton Farmers' Market, and every Saturday from June to October, it's the place to go to buy fresh, local, in-season produce.

Mr. Speaker, I pointed out the ecological, the environmental and the nourishing benefits of the greenbelt, but let's not forget the fun. The ski resorts, the hiking and biking trails, the caves, the campgrounds and the wineries are all just a short trip away for southwestern and south-central Ontario residents.

A year ago, we added 630 acres of provincially owned conservation lands in Oakville to the greenbelt. They are called the Glenorchy lands. That expansion was also initiated by Oakville. I want to thank Oakville council, Halton council and Environmental Defence for their work and for their leadership in making the initial request for these lands to be added. I look forward to future anniversaries when we can create an even bigger greenbelt.

When my colleague—now the Attorney General—Minister Gerretsen introduced the Greenbelt Act in this House in November 2004, he began by asking a simple question: What do you want the Golden Horseshoe to look like in the future? Because of our government's belief in a strong economy, vibrant communities, healthy natural landscapes and thriving farmlands, the greenbelt ensures the very best of planning and growth that preserves Ontario's natural habitat for our children and our grandchildren.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** It is now time for responses.

## SOCIAL WORKERS

**Mr. Rod Jackson:** As the minister mentioned, today is the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers Day. It's an interesting day inasmuch that these people are those in our communities that give so much to them yet don't get a lot in return. They do it, not for the accolades; they certainly don't do it for the money. They do it because it's what's in their hearts. They do it because they believe it's the right thing to do. It's a very challenging job, as many of us know. In fact, many of us have constituency assistants that perform a lot of social work type of tasks. Even if it's just at a smaller level, we get a taste of what it's like.

I have lots of friends and family who have benefited from and actually worked with social workers, or who have been the beneficiary of a social worker's work. For us to be able to stand here today and show our gratitude for them and to let everyone who is listening know that we appreciate the work that they do is truly special. It is certainly an opportunity to recognize the contribution of everybody who, every day, helps to ensure Ontario is a caring and just society.

Social workers and social service workers help individuals, families, groups and communities enhance their well-being; help people develop their skills to make them ready for the working world; and respond to a variety of needs, from unemployment to racism to poverty. These are all things that I think, in the society that we live in here in Ontario, we strive to eradicate. They also implement a variety of social assistance programs and assist members of the community to deal with personal and social problems. Quite simply, they make Ontario a better place to live, and that shouldn't go understated.

This is also an opportunity to recognize the college, which strives to protect the interests of the public by regulating the practice of social workers and social service workers by promoting excellence in practice. This year, the college reached a milestone. It registered 1,680 new social and social service workers, bringing their overall membership to 15,000 qualified members, all ready to help fulfill the college's mandate of excellence in serving the public and ensuring that every individual is treated with dignity and respect, and given the tools and the care they need to help them succeed. They make me really proud to be a part of Ontario and that they help the

people that they do be the best they can and live up to their fullest potential. They really do serve their community and are probably the epitome of what community service and what civil service really mean.

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### GREENBELT

**Mr. Michael Harris:** I am pleased to take the opportunity to respond to the minister's statement on the anniversary of the greenbelt. The Greenbelt Protection Act, which was passed in June 2004, followed a long legacy of PC leadership on land conservation in the province of Ontario.

Starting more than 100 years ago, PC Premier James Whitney recognized the need for a legislative framework to help permanently protect natural heritage features such as unique landforms, ecosystems and animal life. In a bold step, his government passed Ontario's Provincial Parks Act into law on May 6, 1913. From that point on, successive PC governments followed Whitney's lead, creating hundreds of additional provincial parks and passing important environmental legislation, including the Wilderness Areas Act and the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act. Our party has and continues to understand the importance of protecting natural areas to ensure they can be enjoyed by outdoor enthusiasts, hunters and recreational fishermen.

PC leadership on land conservation culminated in 1999 with the creation of Ontario's Living Legacy Land Use Strategy. Under this bold plan, the government of former Premier Mike Harris took steps to expand or create 378 parks and reserves over a 20-year period, a total land area amounting to 2.4 million hectares. Living Legacy was so comprehensive in scope that it provided a strategic direction for the management of 39 million hectares of crown lands and waters. That planning area covers 45% of our province.

We then took a bold step to preserve environmentally sensitive land and ensure clean water for future generations of Ontarians by passing the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, 2001. Indeed, the Oak Ridges moraine and the Niagara Escarpment have provided the foundation for what is now referred to as the greenbelt. The greenbelt expanded the province's protected wetlands, natural areas and farmlands around the Golden Horseshoe, bringing the total land area to 1.8 million acres. That's bigger than Prince Edward Island.

With the greenbelt review coming up in 2015, I think it's important that we all work together to find ways to improve this land use plan. One key way to do that is to listen to the voices of farmers and small municipalities, like Lincoln and Grimsby, which have had their growth almost completely curtailed by the greenbelt. Learning from their experiences and taking into account their concerns will help the province make any needed changes.

### GREENBELT

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Thanks to the minister for the opportunity to speak to this important issue.

Ontario's greenbelt encompasses 1.8 million acres of agricultural and environmentally sensitive land between the Niagara Peninsula and Rice Lake. It's truly an important part of our heritage and our future. As a province, it's essential that we recognize the value of the greenbelt and continue to protect this vital and fertile piece of Ontario while also creating a sustainable development plan for our growing population.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is tasked with ensuring these considerations are top of mind as municipalities proceed with land use planning in the future.

Ontario's land use planning is governed by an array of interconnected pieces of legislation like the Planning Act, provincial policy statements, the Places to Grow Act and many regional policies. As it was created in 2005, it specifically governs planning as it pertains to the greenbelt.

Unfortunately, land use planning in Ontario is not operating with the needed regulation and enforcement, and changes are needed. The Environmental Commissioner, in his report in 2013, stated that Ontario's land use planning is happening in an "information vacuum." The ministry "has neglected its responsibility to ensure that adequate information is collected on the practical functioning of the province's land use plans." Without proper monitoring and evaluation, it's impossible for policy-makers to know if the planning policies are being properly implemented or whether they're even effective. The Environmental Commissioner is very concerned that if we continue to operate without this important information, "Ontario's land use planning system will be blind and unresponsive to the many challenges our province faces in the decades ahead."

So the NDP recommends that the minister review the Environmental Commissioner's annual report so that, when we're reviewing in 2015, appropriate changes are made to make sure that we are making informed and effective land use decisions and that we're monitoring those decisions in the best interests of the future generations of our province.

### SOCIAL WORKERS

**Ms. Cheri DiNovo:** I'm proud to stand on social workers' day on behalf of Andrea Horwath and the New Democratic Party to herald our social workers across the province. But our social workers need more than nice words; they actually need assistance. This is what I'm hearing from my social workers.

I was in Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre, which is a hub of social work in my riding, when one of the social workers said to me, "I've given up on the housing file because there is no housing." I know that others who work with those who suffer poverty are really throwing up their hands; there's not much they can do. They spend

most of their time fundraising or competing with other service agencies for very small pots of money.

In fact, the Social Planning Network, back a few years ago, did a study, and 60% of the social workers they surveyed—and their agencies—said that their workload had gone up massively, and 65% said that they expected their funding to go down. That is the world of social work in our province: overworked, stressed, underpaid, spending valuable hours trying to get the money they need to keep functioning, instead of providing the service they need to be providing to the people who need it desperately.

I heard over and over again from our social workers that no matter what the setting—schools, hospitals, community agencies—all of them said the same thing: “We need less system and more service. We need adequate funding to do the job, and we certainly need attention paid to the social determinants of health”—of course, the major social determinant being poverty, period. I know that the minister knows this, but we need action.

I come bearing that message from all the social workers in my area, and, I believe, across the province, when they say, “Fine words, but action speaks louder than words. That’s why we became social workers in the first place.”

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

## PETITIONS

### CYSTIC FIBROSIS

**Mr. Jim Wilson:** I want to thank Madi Vanstone and her mother, Beth, for sending me this petition. As you know, she was here today to plead for a cystic fibrosis drug that she needs.

“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.... 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....”

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

### OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

**Mr. John Vanthof:** I’m still getting hundreds of signatures.

“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. I affix my signature and give it to page Owen.

### LYME DISEASE

**Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette:** I have a petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

I affix my name in support.

#### OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

**Mr. Percy Hatfield:** I have a petition that’s signed by people from across Ontario.

“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 agree with this petition. I will affix my name and send it up with page Aqil.

#### USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

**Mr. Shafiq Qadri:** I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas virtually all Legislatures in Canada have fully embraced digital technologies;

“Whereas digital communications are now essential for members of Parliament to conduct their business, correspond with constituents, respond to stakeholders, stay in touch with staff, store data and information securely, keep ahead of the news cycle, and to remain current;

“Whereas progressive record keeping relies on cloud technology, remote access, real-time updates, multiple-point data entry, and broadband, wireless and satellite technologies;

“Whereas as there is more to full exploitation of technology than having email;

“Whereas the Legislative Assembly of Ontario has been considering the value, utility and usage of digital devices within the legislative precinct and within the chamber of Parliament itself for several months;

“Whereas this consideration of digital empowerment of members continues to be unresolved, on hold, under consideration and the subject of repeated temporizing correspondence between decision-makers and interested parties;

“We, the undersigned, respectfully request all various decision-makers of the assembly and government to fully embrace digital technologies, empower members, acquire the optimal devices, maximize the many technology offerings and orchestrate a much-needed modernization of the conduct of parliamentary business for the eventual benefit of the people of Ontario....

“In agreement whereof, we affix our signatures”—as do I, Speaker, sending it to you via page Thomas.

#### CYSTIC FIBROSIS

**Mr. Steve Clark:** I want to thank Caroline Rigtutto for getting this petition into my hands. It’s a petition 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 affix my signature and send it to the table with page Shannon.

#### ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

**Mr. Bill Walker:** “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

I strongly support this, will affix my name and send it with page Jessica.

#### OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

**Miss Monique Taylor:** I have more petitions that continue to filter into my office from across the province.

“Whereas the Ontario Ombudsman, who is an officer of the Legislature, is not allowed to provide trusted, independent investigations of complaints against children’s aid societies; and

“Whereas Ontario is the only province in Canada not allowing their Ombudsman to investigate complaints against children’s aid societies; and

“Whereas people who feel they have been wronged by the actions of children’s aid societies are left feeling helpless with nowhere else to turn for help to correct systemic issues;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to grant the Ombudsman the power to investigate children’s aid societies.”

I couldn’t agree with this more. I will give it to page Meera to bring to the Clerk.

#### USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

**Mr. Shafiq Qadri:** “A petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas virtually all Legislatures in Canada have fully embraced digital technologies;

“Whereas digital communications are now essential for members of Parliament to conduct their business, correspond with constituents, respond to stakeholders, stay in touch with staff, store data and information securely, keep ahead of the news cycle, and to remain current;

“Whereas progressive record keeping relies on cloud technology, remote access, real-time updates, multiple-point data entry, and broadband, wireless and satellite technologies;

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“Whereas this consideration of digital empowerment of members continues to be unresolved, on hold, under consideration and the subject of repeated temporizing correspondence between decision-makers and interested parties;

“We, the undersigned, respectfully request all various decision-makers of the assembly and government to fully embrace digital technologies, empower members, acquire the optimal devices, maximize the many technology offerings and orchestrate a much-needed modernization of the conduct of parliamentary business for the eventual benefit of the people of Ontario....

“In agreement whereof, we affix our signatures”—as do I, sending it to you via page Kevin.

#### AIR QUALITY

**Mr. Monte McNaughton:** I have a petition 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; and....

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

“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.”

I support this, and I’ll send it to the desk with my signature affixed.

1350

#### ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** I’m pleased to introduce a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads:

“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.”

Speaker, I’d be pleased to affix my signature and send it to the clerks’ table with page Sarah.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

**Mr. Joe Dickson:** I have a petition from Ajax–Pickering.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the regions of York and Durham are at the final stages of completing an EA for the YD-WPCP (York Durham water pollution control plant’s) outfall; and

“Whereas the regions of York and Durham have chosen as the final solution an alternative which will not address the quantity of total phosphorus (TP) nor soluble reactive phosphorus (SRP) being deposited into Lake Ontario; and

“Whereas Lake Ontario has been identified as the most stressed lake of the Great Lakes in the July/August 2013 issue of Canadian Geographic; and

“Whereas the town of Ajax and PACT POW (Pickering Ajax Citizens Together—Protecting our Water) have documented the excessive algae blooms on the Ajax waterfront with photos and complaints to the region of Durham; and

“Whereas SRP, and indirectly TP, contribute to the growth of algae in Lake Ontario;

“Therefore we undersign this petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and ask that the government of Ontario require the regions of York and Durham to implement an alternative that will reduce the amount of phosphorus ... being deposited into Lake Ontario from the YD-WPCP.”

I will attach my name to that, Mr. Speaker, and pass it to Michael.

#### DIABETES

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

“Whereas the Liberal government implemented cuts to the Ontario health insurance program such that Ontario residents suffering from diabetes saw their annual eligibility for blood sugar test strips reduced to 200 per year, less than one a day; and

“Whereas a blood sugar test strip costs approximately 70 cents; and

“Whereas this latest cut to services to Ontario patients is just another misguided measure to nickel-and-dime Ontarians; and

“Whereas a focus on preventing disease and hospitalization is in the long-term interest of patients, their families and the province;

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

“To immediately reinstate full and unlimited eligibility for blood sugar test strips covered by OHIP for all Ontario residents suffering from diabetes.”

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

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

#### ORDERS OF THE DAY

##### FAIR MINIMUM WAGE ACT, 2014

##### LOI DE 2014 POUR UN SALAIRE MINIMUM ÉQUITABLE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 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):** When we last debated Bill 165 at second reading, the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex had the floor. He still has time. I recognize the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

**Mr. Monte McNaughton:** Thank you very much, Speaker. I was glad to rise to speak last week to this bill, Bill 165, I believe for about almost 11 minutes last week. We’ll continue here for another 49 minutes and talk about some of the concerns we have about Ontario’s economy, about the 300,000 manufacturing jobs we’ve lost under this Liberal government in the last 10 years and, of course, the 30,000 additional manufacturing jobs lost in the last 12 months since this Premier was coronated over 12 months ago.

Bill 165 is An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000, with respect to the minimum wage, introduced by the Minister of Labour last week. It’s a bill that amends the Employment Standards Act to adjust minimum wage annually, starting in October 2015, by indexing it to the Ontario Consumer Price Index. Of course, I was clear in my opening that our caucus will be supporting this piece of legislation, tying it to inflation.

These changes to the minimum wage would be rounded to the nearest five cents and no adjustment would be made if it would result in a decrease in the minimum-wage rate. Of course we know, even though this has nothing to do with the bill, the general minimum wage is currently at \$10.25 per hour and it will be increased to \$11 per hour as of June 1 this year.

The minimum wage was last increased on March 30, 2010. Special minimum wages were also increased by the same percentage with the new changes. These categories



are a general minimum wage, students under 18, liquor services, hunting and fishing guides, and home workers.

Of course, one message I've talked about a number of times when it comes to labour legislation: I think that the Premier or the Premier's office and the Minister of Labour and his office really need to reach out to stakeholders. These are major pieces of legislation that are going to affect in one way or another the economy here in the province, and especially job creation.

The government is required to provide at least six months' notice—and that is in this bill as well—before any wage change takes effect, with a review of the current wage in place to take place every five years beginning in 2020, as well as a regulatory authority to develop different classes of employees and the respective minimum wages that apply to each class. These new special minimum wages would also be indexed.

While the adjustment is seeking to assist low-income workers, it claims to not cause undue negative impacts on business. Members of this House will know that many businesses are scrambling and will continue to do so in preparation for the minimum-wage hike to come on June 1 of this year. In fact, I know I'm hearing from certain industries, associations and businesses that they're actually scaling back on hours, and in some cases even cutting back on jobs.

Speaker, I was honoured yesterday to attend the Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association trade show, which was held at Exhibition Stadium. My wife and I went there yesterday with our six-month-old daughter. These are our family days away, going to sort of political events. I got to talk with a number of people at that trade show, and it was quite a trade show, although we weren't actually able to go in because they wouldn't allow babies into their trade show. We had to hang out outside. It kind of caught us off guard.

**Hon. Deborah Matthews:** Even Annie?

**Mr. Monte McNaughton:** Even Annie, as the Minister of Health was asking. It's true, and I wasn't the only one with my family standing outside the doors to this trade show. For some reason, they wouldn't allow babies to go in. I think they were maybe serving samples of wine and things like that. Anyway, that's neither here nor there.

Having come from a small business background myself, and particularly as former president of the Strathroy and District Chamber of Commerce—and of course I've talked in my riding to the Grand Bend chamber, a lot of their members, and to the Wallaceburg chamber members—I'm just hearing from job creators that they are concerned, and I think some are wondering how they're going to be able to weather this change. They are telling me that costs are going up in Ontario. It's becoming a high-cost jurisdiction to do business, whether it's electricity rates or the cost of dealing with government red tape and paperwork. So I would just raise the caution with this government that they need to get a grasp on affordability of doing business here in Ontario.

Ontario's minimum wage is among the highest in Canada. In fact, I'll read an article shortly saying, I believe, that it will be the highest in the country, and those suggesting it should be significantly increased to make up for three years of freezes have failed to consider the implications that that's going to have. We know that when the Liberals announced they were going to increase the minimum wage, they made it retroactive, I believe, back to 2010.

When this government made the decision to make changes to current legislation, it appointed the Minimum Wage Advisory Panel back in July 2013 to provide advice and an approach on how to develop new legislation. This panel was to consist of an independent chair and representatives in business and labour, and anti-poverty advocates and youth. From this, it had received several recommendations. These four recommendations were as follows:

**1400**

"Minimum wages should be revised annually by a percentage equal to the per cent change in the Ontario Consumer Price Index."

"Minimum wages should be revised annually, and a minimum of four months' notice of any wage change should be provided." Of course, we know this was changed once the legislation was actually introduced. "The effective date of change should be April 1 of the following year," with "notification by December 1 of the previous year."

Next, the "government should undertake a full review of the minimum wage rate and the revision process every five years." These reviews are to be "conducted by a panel of stakeholders and a neutral chair."

Lastly, to "aid the full review process ... the government should establish an ongoing research program" to gather any relevant data and information and with further analysis to address policy-relevant issues on minimum wage.

Speaker, some of the concerns I have heard with any proposals to increase the minimum wage relate to, one, predictability. Employers want a process that is predictable so that they're able to plan, grow and invest for their future. That's really the key reason why the Ontario PCs are supporting this bill. It's around the predictability measure. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce, as I was saying in my opening last week, supports this as well—the predictability measure.

Secondly, transparency: We need a process that is open and easy to understand so that all businesses can operate efficiently.

Fairness: Any new legislation needs to consider the impact it will have on both its workers and employers.

Ontario's competitiveness: We need to promote this province's competitiveness. Employers are the job creators, and changes need to not discourage economic growth, job creation and long-term investment.

Speaker, I just want to read an interesting article from back in—I guess it was January 30 of this year, a column that was written in the Financial Post. It was by William

Watson. The title is “Ontario’s Fact-Free Minimum Wage Policy.” This is just the other side of the minimum wage argument.

“Even Ontario’s own study says higher minimum wages trigger higher unemployment, which results in more poverty.

“The report of Ontario’s Minimum Wage Advisory Panel that led to the Ontario government’s decision Thursday to index its \$10.25 minimum wage retroactively to 2010 and add a few cents to round it up to \$11 even was actually not a bad piece of work.”

Ontario is tied with Nunavut for Canada’s highest minimum wage after a 75-cent hike, and I’m continuing: “Ontario’s Liberal government is raising the minimum wage to \$11 an hour effective June 1, while introducing legislation to tie future increases to the rate of inflation, a key recommendation of an expert panel.

“To begin with, it didn’t recommend what the government decided to do.” That’s important to note, I think, in this debate. “The panel’s chair, ... a professor of human resources at the University of Toronto’s Rotman School of Management, chose to interpret his mandate narrowly and to examine how decisions about the minimum wage are made rather than what the level of the minimum wage should be. The panel’s only recommendations were to: Index the minimum wage to the” CPI, “adjust it every April 1st (which for some reason the government decided to change to October 1st), do an overall review every five years and, as you’d expect from a panel headed by a professor, ‘establish an ongoing research program for data and information gathering,’ not necessarily at the Rotman School, I suppose, but doubtless paying much more than minimum wage.

“It would have been better, of course,” the article goes on to say, “had the panel heeded this page and recommended doing away with the minimum wage altogether. But if you’ve got a minimum wage, as Ontario does, and the government is centre-left and not very imaginative (if that’s not redundant), the chance of that happening is pretty much zero. So on balance, a report that says [to] index the minimum wage to the CPI and change it annually is probably the most jobs-friendly outcome possible....

“The panel report is excellent on that fundamental point, too: ‘In the Canadian context, researchers have generally found an adverse employment effect of raising minimum wages especially for young workers.... More recent studies find larger adverse employment effects.... Typically those studies find that teen employment would drop by 3%-6% if the minimum wage is raised by 10%.... The adverse employment effects were substantially larger when they involved a large minimum wage increase [such as would be involved in providing four years of catch-up indexing, for instance?] compared to a cumulative series of smaller increases of the same magnitude.’”

It goes on to say, “Aha! The rationale for the minimum wage becomes clearer. It helps hasten the disappearance of low-skill jobs.

“The panel also summarized research suggesting that in addition to cutting jobs, businesses may cut the number of hours of work they offer after an increase in the minimum wage.” I think that’s something we all need to consider when government adjusts these types of policies. One thing I’ve heard, so far, during this whole debate is that employers are in some cases cutting hours, so the employee isn’t going to be any further ahead.

It goes on: “That’s right, an increase in poverty. The reason? Higher minimum wages trigger higher unemployment, which results in more poverty as household incomes drop among low-income families. Premier Wynne clearly missed this section of the report. Her news release Thursday pumped the new policy as part of the province’s anti-poverty program.

“Given the emphasis these days on ‘evidence-based policy,’ especially among Liberals, it’s passing strange that Ontario’s Liberal government chose to disregard so much evidence collected by its own ministries for its own advisory panel.

“Unfortunately, one research area the panel did not report on concerns CPI bias. It’s well understood that because consumers can respond to higher prices for one good or service by shifting their spending to others the CPI tends to overstate increases in the cost of living—maybe not by much but by some non-zero amount. Over time, therefore, indexing to the CPI will lead to real increases in the minimum wage and that may end up producing larger disemployment effects than would otherwise be expected.”

“And the panel report ends with a weird final paragraph about ‘a high wage strategy to maintain and foster [Ontario’s] prosperity.’ Never mind that nobody in the policy universe ... is recommending a low-wage strategy. The idea is to improve people’s skills so their productivity rises, thus justifying the higher wage that everyone in Ontario would like to see everyone in Ontario paid. ‘In such a scenario, certain types of low-skill jobs would be lost...’ Aha! The rationale for the minimum wage becomes clearer. It helps hasten the disappearance of low-skill jobs. Which is a great thing for a society unless, for whatever reason, you happen to be a low-skill person. Then what do you do?”

Speaker, again, that was read word for word from the Financial Post. It was a column by William Watson. I think it is food for thought for this government when they’re determining what they’re doing with the minimum wage and other economic policies that could have a negative impact.

One thing I’d like to highlight: The focus for Tim Hudak and our PC caucus is to create well-paying jobs here in Ontario, to repatriate manufacturers back to Ontario, to have job creators here expand and grow, and to hire more people. That’s our plan, as a party.

In fact, we’ve been talking a lot about our leader’s plan to create one million new jobs. The bill, unfortunately, was defeated last week. The government, I think with the help of the New Democrats, defeated the Million Jobs Act. I don’t know how anyone in the province of Ontario

could vote against one million new jobs. It's shameful, after what we have gone through during the last 10 years under this Liberal government.

Right now in Ontario, we have nearly a million unemployed men and women. That is why, as I said, Tim Hudak and our caucus—we've said this a number of times—agreed to clear the decks last September and pass some government bills so that the Premier and her government could table a jobs plan. We've yet to see that, Speaker.

Here we are, six months later, and we have yet to see anything that resembles a jobs plan. Instead, we hear that the Liberals and NDP want to raise taxes on businesses and middle-class families through corporate tax hikes—remember, at some point people have to pay for corporate tax hikes—and increasing the gas tax by 10 cents per litre. That's the one thing I hear about at home more than anything else. I hear a lot about the billion dollars wasted with cancelling gas plants to save a couple of seats. I hear a lot about the Ornge scandal and eHealth. But the one thing I'm hearing about now at home is the plan by the government to increase the gas tax by 10 cents. Yesterday, I believe, the average price of gas was \$1.33 or \$1.32 a litre. Could you imagine, and it would be because of Kathleen Wynne—or the Premier; I'm sorry, Speaker—and if the third party props up the government once again: People in Ontario would have been paying \$1.42 or \$1.43 a litre for gasoline yesterday. That's going to lead to killing jobs. This minimum wage increase wouldn't have made any difference to these people.

1410

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Monte McNaughton:** Yes. It's increasing cross-border shopping; 10 cents a litre will only further do that. It's taking money out of the economy. Listen, this is a warning sign: It will kill even more jobs in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, this is the last thing that Ontario needs. What our province needs is a plan to create jobs and attract businesses to Ontario. Our leader, the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook, has that plan. In fact, as I said, it was debated on Thursday, but unfortunately, the governing Liberals and their accomplices, the NDP, voted that down.

*Interjections.*

**Mr. Monte McNaughton:** No, it's true. I mean, the NDP and Liberals have been working hand in hand to keep this government alive.

*Interjections.*

**Mr. Monte McNaughton:** Listen, this is the truth. In the last 12 months—and I opened today with this—under the Liberal-NDP arrangement, we have lost 30,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs in the province of Ontario. I'll tell you, it's their deliberate decisions, their policy decisions, that are the reason companies and businesses and employers are fleeing this province. We were the leader in Confederation.

What we need is Tim Hudak's million-jobs plan.

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Monte McNaughton:** I knew the Minister of Health would be interested in this because, of course, London and southwestern Ontario have been particularly hard hit under your government.

Our five-point plan is this:

(1) It lowers hydro rates for Ontario families and employers.

(2) It lowers taxes and reins in the government overspending that has doubled Ontario's debt over the past 10 years.

(3) The Million Jobs Act promotes the skilled trades and lowers apprenticeship ratios.

(4) Tim Hudak's Million Jobs Act increases trade with provinces across Canada.

(5) It eliminates the red tape that forces small and medium-sized business owners to eliminate time filling in paperwork instead of hiring more employees.

On the fifth one, it's my understanding that the leader of the NDP was out defending Dalton McGuinty/Kathleen Wynne's College of Trades on Friday. I'll tell you, I've talked to more tradespeople—when we talk about the need to eliminate red tape, that's the first thing that needs to go. This College of Trades is nothing but a trades tax at a time when we need to be encouraging our young people to get into skilled trades. Again, we see the two parties—the governing Liberals and third party NDP—working together to really kill jobs in the province of Ontario.

Getting back to Bill 165, ultimately, any decision relating to increases in the minimum wage must take into account the impact it would have on Ontario's fragile economy. Businesses that are recovering from an economic downturn are also the ones footing the bill for these increases. A sudden drastic change would cost them jobs and potentially weaken otherwise strong sectors.

The big issue is that this bill doesn't do anything to create jobs, and when it comes to changes within the labour file, it doesn't take into account any of the much-needed changes we need to see in Ontario's labour laws, some of the things that we have been calling for here at Queen's Park. As I said, Speaker, we have a million people out of work in Ontario today. We have lost 300,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs in the past 10 years. Again, these changes today that we are debating in Bill 165 aren't going to do anything to change that. When the government has yet to unveil any sort of comprehensive jobs plan, I think it's very telling of where this government is going. I just feel they have run out of steam.

Of course, they are spending more time, whether it's the Pan Am scandal or the gas plants, and the police busting down the door of the Premier's office or taking hard drives out of computer systems—and of course the Ornge scandal. They're putting out fires, or trying to contain a number of fires. I think it's time that this government is replaced, because it just isn't dealing with what needs to be dealt with.

This legislation fails to address the issues affecting Ontario residents and their future long-term prosperity. Ontario workers don't want to be stuck in minimum wage

jobs. They deserve and want jobs with good wages that will allow them to support themselves and their families. I'm sure I'll come to this a little later, but the one stat—and I often forget mentioning this—that I think should be frightening to this Premier is the fact that today, in 2014, almost 10% of Ontario's total workforce is working for minimum wage. When this government got elected in 2003, 3.5% of the workforce worked for minimum wage. So we have a million people out of work today, we've lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs under the Liberals and an additional 30,000 with the Liberal-NDP coalition in the last 12 months, and we have 10% of the workforce working for minimum wage. Speaker, that's no way to build an economy. That's why people are wanting change here in the province of Ontario. To continue, we have to focus—the government needs to focus—on long-term economic security, focus on good, well-paying jobs that people in Ontario can depend on and raise a family with.

This change brings about concerns, as it will have the biggest direct impact on important industries such as food and consumer services, where there are a large number of minimum wage workers. The increase comes at a time when a lot of employers will be getting ready to hire a new wave of seasonal workers, and the challenge will be for them to determine whether they are able to hire at the same rate they did in previous years, with an increase in payroll costs. Again, this is something I see in Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, across southwestern Ontario. There are a lot of businesses, farm-related as well, that hire seasonal workers. I've talked to a number of them that have serious concerns about this.

Businesses will also need to be prepared for additional costs beyond the new minimum wage. This is the one, I think, that often gets lost in the debate. There's going to be additional payroll taxes and costs that businesses have to bear because of higher payroll costs.

We know that minimum wage increases do little to improve the financial situation of low-income workers. In fact, there was a newspaper article in the last couple of weeks that said that Alberta, I believe, has the lowest minimum wage in all of Canada but also has the lowest poverty in all of Canada as well. We know that minimum wage increases do little to improve the financial situation of low-income workers. That's why our plan, to create one million well-paying jobs, is the direction the province needs to go.

While some small businesses understand and often support the government's efforts to reduce poverty amongst its workers, minimum wage hikes are not the most effective option. We're going to get into some stats here, but I mentioned one of them earlier. Ever since 2003, Ontario workers have faced an uphill battle under the current government. The rate of Ontario residents working in minimum wage jobs has gone from 6.3% in 2007 to 8.1% in 2009 and now, in 2014, it's almost 10%. So, as I said, in 2003, 3.5%; 2007, 6.3% of the total workforce worked for minimum wage; 2009, 8.1%; and almost 10% this year.

Speaker, that's not good for families in the province of Ontario. Under the former, previous PC government, we can boast that there were dramatic decreases in the rate of workers in minimum wage jobs: in 2000, 4.6%; in 2001, 4.1%; in 2002, 3.9%; and in 2003, 3.5%. That's a darn good record. That's why Tim Hudak needs to be the Premier of the province, to bring forward his Million Jobs Act.

**1420**

The facts speak for themselves, and it is evident that the current path this government has taken Ontario on has put our economy in a downward spiral. We need to change course and we need to change direction immediately. While I can appreciate that the minister is trying to boost his chances for the government in an upcoming election—well, I guess that all depends on what Deputy Premier Horwath is going to do.

I'm afraid that last week's announcement about Bill 165 and minimum wage will do very little to help those who truly need it, and it's quite surely putting our businesses, entrepreneurs and job creators into yet another state of flux due to government making decisions on the fly and without any proper consultation or communication. With Ontario being in a period of economic transition, the legislation that this government brings forward will be crucial in putting our economy back on track to prosperity. Policy choices we make now will impact our province's competitiveness for many generations to come. Speaker, our caucus and our leader were very concerned with the lack of consultation, particularly with small businesses, during the process of developing this bill and making the announcement last week.

The PCs' plan is focused on getting people more than the minimum wage. That's the big difference between Tim Hudak and the PC caucus, and the Liberals and the NDP. I think they're quite content talking about minimum wage jobs, and they're kind of fighting about who is going to create the most minimum wage jobs in the province of Ontario. Well, our plan is focused on more than minimum wage jobs. This means, specifically, paycheques for people with none at all and full-time employment for those who are settling for part-time. Again, to reiterate, because I just think it's so important, I'm really disappointed that the government and the NDP, surprisingly, would vote against Tim Hudak's plan for a million jobs. In fact, as I said, this legislation—if it had passed—would have begun the task of producing more jobs and increased take-home pay through lower taxes and less debt, and ensuring affordable energy that will help to create jobs, not eliminate them. For sure, every MPP here is hearing from constituents and job creators when it comes to the price of electricity.

We need to train more skilled workers to meet the demands in trade and help younger people find good jobs, and to increase trade with our neighbours and end the bureaucratic runaround that is inhibiting our province's job creation ability. I remember as a young child hearing politicians talk about how Ontario can trade with other countries but we have a hard time trading with our

neighbours within Canada. So I'm glad to see a focus from our leader and our caucus on promoting trade, with western Canada particularly. I think it would be a good thing for Ontario to approach the western provinces and begin negotiations to get Ontario into the western partnership that they've quite nicely set up. Ontario employers are missing out on those economic opportunities.

Ontario has the ideas, the workers and the resources to succeed. Our PC plan will create the kind of environment where job creators will be able to ensure ongoing economic competitiveness and one where businesses can work, an environment created for economic growth, not one in which additional legislation is constantly being added. That has, a lot of times, the reverse impact on businesses. We are the only ones truly committed to supporting our province's employers. This bill directly, obviously, affects employers and, as I said, some not in a positive way. Our PC plan will get our economy growing and help create jobs, and it's changes like these that people in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex and all across Ontario have told me they want to see implemented. The current path this government is taking is clearly not working, and we need a new approach.

Speaker, in speaking of a new approach, I want to highlight some of the things—as I said earlier, we keep seeing the Liberals and the NDP trying to create more minimum wage jobs in the province of Ontario, and obviously that's why we are here talking about Bill 165, but we put out a plan in the summer specifically around manufacturing. Of course, manufacturing jobs are especially important where I come from in southwestern Ontario. There was a stat out—if the Minister of Health was here, she probably has heard it too—from a professor, an economist actually, at the Ivey School of Business who was saying that in the last number of years the city of London has lost 7,000 men and women between the ages of 25 and 44. A lot of that is due to the hollowing out of the manufacturing sector here in Ontario. I think that is really, really important to deal with—Ontario's manufacturing.

I hear the member from Windsor advocating that the government needs to keep running around handing out cheques to companies that hold us at ransom. I can tell you, that's no way to build an economy. In fact, it has never worked. I know the NDP think they can spend their way to prosperity, but those of us who have been in business know that businesses grow when the right economic climate is in place. Again, we need to get the economic fundamentals right. Having the right fundamentals would avoid the NDP and Liberals from supporting corporate welfare and supporting running around handing out cheques.

The Million Jobs Act was a way to level the playing field for all businesses across the province to be competitive. Again, it's lower hydro rates for Ontario families and employers; it's lower taxes; we would rein in government overspending—I know the NDP and Liberals probably don't like that; that's maybe why they voted against it. We remember—I was a page here, Speaker, in

1991, when we had the last NDP government. In fact, my group of pages delivered the first NDP budget. I know PCs remember this well. I think it was either a \$10-billion or \$13-billion deficit—I forget. It was high; it was staggering. It was 1991, in April or May, the first NDP Bob Rae government. So God help us in Ontario; we cannot afford Andrea Horwath and the NDP again.

What we need is lower taxes, and we need to rein in government overspending, which has doubled Ontario's debt over the past 10 years. If we thought Bob Rae was bad, Dalton McGuinty and Premier Wynne are actually 10 times worse than that NDP government was. We need to promote the skilled trades and lower apprenticeship ratios; we need to increase trade again, as I said, with provinces across Canada; and we need to eliminate the red tape, such as the College of Trades. I know the minister is here, and we probably have a difference of opinion there.

What I'm saying is that Ontario manufacturers require a champion who will ensure power rates are competitive, that the provincial transportation system works well, that our schools and colleges educate people for the workforce of the 21st century and that the regulations government imposes encourage competition, not deter it. Right now, we don't have those conditions in Ontario, and our towns and cities are paying the price. Since 2003, Ontario has lost—we all know—well over 300,000 manufacturing jobs. We can't afford to simply give up and pretend that Ontario can thrive without a strong, advanced manufacturing sector, because we know it can't.

There is, however, some room for optimism. Major Ontario companies like Magna are innovative market leaders, and there are a number of them. Smaller Ontario companies lead in their own sectors in areas as diverse as cranes, health care devices, liquid rubber and office floor tiles. The current government has erected a number of barriers to new jobs, including layers of unnecessary red tape and one of the highest minimum wages in the country—this was written, actually, before this last announcement, so I believe Ontario will have the highest minimum wage in Canada. Other governments have been more rational and have vigorously fought for jobs by encouraging such things as crowdfunding—we don't hear much talk about that—creating entrepreneurial visas and by developing a training wage for young employees to get the experience they need. With these three things, I'm encouraging the government to look outside the box, look to other jurisdictions and what they're doing—even in Canada. I know British Columbia has some pretty innovative things happening there to really grow that knowledge-based economy and advance manufacturing.

In the United States, we are seeing major corporations bring home production from abroad because they need highly skilled workers and because they want to produce closer to their customers. Even Chinese companies are starting to make their products in North America. We need a dedicated effort to repatriate companies back to Ontario, to seek out and to help facilitate companies to relocate and return home.

## 1430

Our leader has said this, and I just think it's a vivid way to look at it: We need to hang an "open for business" sign above the province of Ontario. I've only been on the job as an elected MPP for two and a half years, but I've talked to hundreds of employers now, and they're looking elsewhere, a lot of them. They're looking to northern US states. It's not so much China and India now; it's Michigan, it's Ohio, it's Indiana and places in the northern US.

The big one, of course, I think we all know, is electricity costs. We hear that time and time again. In fact, Ontario has the highest electricity costs in all of North America. Ontario has just become an expensive place to do business. I think that the government is asleep at the switch, quite frankly, whether they're putting out fires or, as I said, whether it's the eHealth scandal, Ornge, gas plants. They've taken their eye off the ball.

We know that there is great opportunity here in the province of Ontario, but we are competing directly with other provinces and US states, many of which already have the flexible labour markets, lower power rates and streamlined business regulations that we have put ideas out on. I think, especially on the affordable power issue, that's how we can get a lot of these companies to come back home, and we should.

With only 11 minutes left, I just want to go back through some of the points on this bill, Bill 165, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to the minimum wage, introduced by the Minister of Labour. It's a bill that amends the Employment Standards Act to adjust minimum wage annually, starting in October 2015, by indexing it to the Ontario consumer price index. These changes to the minimum wage would be rounded to the nearest five cents, and no adjustment would be made if it resulted in a decrease in the minimum wage.

I will say thanks to the Minister of Labour. We've worked on a number of bills now that he has introduced into his team. I see some of them in the Legislature today. They've been very good at briefing the opposition critics and providing us with the information needed. I let the minister know a number of times that we will be supporting Bill 165. I forget where the NDP are at on this issue, but I'm sure we'll be hearing soon.

**Interjection:** They're against it, aren't they?

**Mr. Monte McNaughton:** If they are opposed to this, it will be the first time in two and a half years that the NDP have actually opposed anything that the Liberals have brought forward. No, we know, quite frankly, that the leader of the NDP is the Deputy Premier in Ontario now. I know that's what folks at home often tell us, especially down in southwestern Ontario, where I know the member from Sarnia-Lambton and I spend a lot of time talking to people.

I just want to close and spend a few minutes I guess just reiterating what the president and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce said about the minimum wage issue. I think Allan O'Dette and his team have been

leaders. They put out a document called *Emerging Stronger*, I believe a year or two ago, and really tackled some of the big issues that governments, in particular the Ontario government, need to be focusing on—a balanced budget, lower taxes, apprenticeship ratio reform, things like this. But on the minimum wage issue, I'm just going to read verbatim what Allan has said:

"Ontario is in a period of economic transition. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce and its 60,000 members firmly believe that the policy choices made today will impact our province's competitiveness for generations to come.

"The government of Ontario is currently consulting on how to set the minimum wage. This issue is important. There is broad consensus that the current process—or lack thereof—governing the minimum wage does not work for employers and workers.

"We"—the Ontario Chamber of Commerce—"have consulted widely with our membership through surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews. Our consultations have revealed that OCC members want a process for setting the minimum wage that is based on four principles:

"Predictability: Employers want a process that provides predictability so that they can plan, grow, and invest with confidence.

"Transparency: Employers need a process that is open and depoliticized.

"Fairness: Employers also want a process that considers the impact on both employers and workers.

"Promotes Ontario's competitiveness: Employers are job creators. Decisions around minimum wage should not discourage investment, job creation, and economic growth.

"As such, we recommend that the minimum wage be pegged to the consumer price index (inflation). Of the options considered, this approach is most consistent with all four principles outlined above.

"We also urge members of the panel to consider the impacts that significant and one-off hikes in the minimum wage have on businesses and employment. For many employers—particularly those in the retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors—a decision to 'make up for lost time' would exacerbate the challenges they face and hinder Ontario's economic recovery.

"We are pleased to submit our views on this matter. We look forward to participating in the continued discussion."

Of course, the minister has reviewed this as well—this submission from the OCC. While they agree with the predictability mechanism in Bill 165, they weren't in favour of the significant one-off hikes. I would relate that to the retroactivity of the minimum wage increase.

Speaker, one thing: The president of the Ontario chamber was accurate when he said that Ontario is in a period of economic transition. Losing 30,000 manufacturing jobs in the last 12 months certainly is.

To continue with the options that the OCC actually put forward:

“The OCC completed an extensive jurisdictional scan of the various processes that other provinces and countries have employed to determine their minimum wage rates. We surveyed Canadian provinces and territories as well as many international jurisdictions including Australia, European Union states, Mexico, New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

“Our research identified the four methods most commonly used to determine the minimum wage”—and I found this very interesting, to see what other jurisdictions around the world are doing when determining what their minimum wage would be. Their research identified four methods:

“(1) The minimum wage is determined by the government on an ad-hoc basis,” so that would be the status quo prior to Bill 165.

“(2) The minimum wage is determined by an independent body of experts.

“(3) The minimum wage is determined by the government on the advice of an independent body of experts.

“(4) The minimum wage is tied to an economic indicator, such as a consumer price index.

“Through our consultation process, businesses and organizations identified and debated the pros and cons of each option. Consulted members were asked to assess each option based on its potential: high, medium, low, or non-starter.

“It is worth noting that our consultations were characterized by an exceptionally high level of consensus on the merits and shortcomings of each process option.”

They went on to talk about each option. They interviewed people such as Bruce Fraser from Nestlé Waters Canada. His quote in the report: “The way minimum wage is being set today does not work. It’s unpredictable. Businesses cannot plan for increases. It’s those unplanned changes that impact us the most.”

Of course, that’s exactly why we’re supporting Bill 165.

Gerry Macartney, the executive director or general manager of the London Chamber of Commerce: “I can’t imagine a scenario where the government would actually allow a third party to make the final decision on an issue as contentious as the minimum wage. This option just doesn’t seem feasible.” That was on one of the other options, Speaker.

Then we have Debbi Nicholson from the Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce talking about option 3, where the minimum wage is determined by the government on the advice of an independent body of experts. Debbi Nicholson from Sudbury says, “This option has potential but it also has a lot of unknowns: who’s on the panel and how are they appointed? Do they have to make decisions based on a mandated set of criteria? If so, what is that criteria and how is it determined?”

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So, of course, a large amount of input that the chamber heard from their members.

Option 4, again, was the minimum wage being tied to an economic indicator such as CPI. Nancy Stern from the

Marco Corp. says, “Many of my contracts have price increases attached to an adjusted CPI. It’s an indicator that businesses use often and are comfortable with.” I think that’s generally the consensus. Businesses aren’t happy with the retroactivity of the pay hike from \$10.25 to \$11 from 2010 until now, but they’re satisfied with, and I think they actually like, the predictability of what’s happening in Bill 165.

I think I’ve been clear on our party’s position. We want to focus on more than minimum wage jobs. We’ll allow the governing Liberals and their—

**Mr. Robert Bailey:** Enablers.

**Mr. Monte McNaughton:** —enablers—I like that one—in the NDP to continue focusing on minimum wage jobs. I don’t think that builds a strong economy.

The one statistic that I think says it all: Almost 10% of today’s workforce is working for minimum wage. In 2003, 3.5% of the total workforce was working for minimum wage.

In the previous 10 years, we’ve lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs. In the eight years before that, Ontario had a net increase in manufacturing jobs of well over 200,000.

This relates to the Liberal policies under, of course, Dalton McGuinty, first: more debt, more expensive electricity, 300,000 more government workers. This leads to an unsustainable future for the province of Ontario, and that scares off investors.

With that, I was proud to stand on Bill 165 to talk about tying the minimum wage to the Ontario consumer price index. As always, it’s good to put our concerns on the table and to debate important issues of the day, Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** Before I ask for questions and comments, I’ll remind all members that it would be preferable and in the tradition of the House if members referred to other members by their riding name or cabinet position, if they hold a cabinet position, as opposed to using their surname.

Questions and comments.

**Mr. Percy Hatfield:** I’ll gladly stand to represent my riding of Windsor–Tecumseh and speak for a couple of minutes on what I just heard from the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

He seems to take great delight in speaking to this government bill but spending more time talking about his party’s so-called Million Jobs Act or plan that was turned down in the House last week by a majority vote.

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Percy Hatfield:** It was close—yes, hello.

What I find interesting is—he talked about corporate welfare. When one of the largest employers in this province is thinking about spending \$1 billion or \$2 billion on expansion and says to the governments of the day, provincially and federally, “We’d like to have a conversation with you about what you may be able to do to help us out, should we proceed in your jurisdiction in expanding our manufacturing business,” instead of saying, “Yes, I’ll come to the table. I’ll sit down, and we’ll have this conversation,” the leader of the official opposition and the

labour critic from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex say, “Not involved. Not interested. Don’t want to be there. Don’t want to talk about it because it’s corporate welfare.” At the same time, he’ll rant and rave and talk about the loss of 300,000 manufacturing jobs. You’re going to lose another 25,000 or 30,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs if you don’t have a conversation with the biggest employers in the province when they want to sit down with you, maybe have a cup of coffee, and talk about what we can do together to build the economy in this province. Instead of that, you turn your back on them, you close the door on them, and you say, “We don’t want to have that conversation.”

I’ll tell you what, Speaker: We in this party do.

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

**Mr. Shafiq Qadri:** First of all, I’d like to echo some of the comments made by my honourable colleague from the third party from Windsor–Tecumseh.

I think there seems to be a little bit of, perhaps, disarray, or perhaps non-direction coming from the Tory party. Are they for right-to-work? Are they for right-to-work-for-less? I appreciate his grudging support of Bill 165, the Fair Minimum Wage Act.

I would, perhaps, like to cite the remarks of the former MPP for Thornhill. The Tories relied on his economic financial analysis, direction and guidance for years. Yet, very, very recently, his characterization of the Leader of the Opposition’s plan, the Hudak plan, was that it was a nightmare, something to the effect that it was—in fact, repeating essentially what I’m saying, that it was a kind of a plan without a vision, without any direction.

I’d like to just first of all apologize and take some indulgence from the newly elected MPP from Thornhill. You’re new to this Legislature, so I welcome you. You deserve a little bit of immunity and a grace period. But during the campaign itself, she essentially said, “Well, this whole issue of the minimum wage doesn’t really apply to my riding, because I don’t think really anybody in my riding works at minimum wage.” That, of course, is quite distinct from my own riding of Etobicoke North. I think, if I might, with apologies to the MPP from Thornhill, just take that as a kind of—a non-kind of concern, or maybe being slightly blasé about 500,000 in Ontario who still do work at the minimum wage. I’ll have more to say about that, Speaker—so, with due apologies to the MPP for Thornhill, and saluting the previous MPP for Thornhill and his characterization of the general Tory economic plan.

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

**Mr. Bill Walker:** It’s my pleasure to follow my colleague from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. He’s been doing a great job as our labour critic. I took away from one of his comments that he was a former page here, and I think he shared with us that he delivered the first NDP budget under Bob Rae. It’s kind of sad that we’re actually still paying for that. I’m not certain we’ve ever got beyond that, and now we’ve got the McGuinty–Wynne Liberals

who have jumped on that and made us even worse than that, which we didn’t think was possible.

At first, I didn’t know, when I met Mr. McNaughton, my great colleague, whether he was a brute for punishment, coming back after an experience like that, but over time I actually believe what he’s done is—he’s a man of great courage and character for actually coming back and wanting to turn this province around so that his wonderful daughter, Annie, will have an opportunity in this province and be able to thrive and flourish in this province; she won’t have to leave.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, it’s an absolute nightmare that we’re facing under this McGuinty–Wynne Liberal government, that has the accomplice NDP stepping up and helping them every time to form budgets and then criticizing them later on. At the end of the day, you can’t support through Andrea and her colleagues and then chastise them—

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** Once again, I’d like to remind all members of the House, because, in fairness, I’ve heard it from all sides, and the Speaker has tried to enforce this, too—the fact is, we are asking members of the Legislature, when they’re speaking of another member in the third person, to speak in terms of their ministry name or their riding name. Everybody has maps on their desk, and they can check it out and they can determine what the riding name is, if they need it.

I’ve gone on a little too long, so I’ll give you a little extra time, member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. But again, I would ask all members to keep that in mind when they’re participating in debates and questions and comments.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My sincere apologies. The member from Hamilton Centre, who happens to lead the third party, is who I was referring to. You know, they’ve been propping up—they’ve been doing this.

What we’re trying to say is that you can’t tweak around the edges. This is not something that everyday people are coming to me about every day. What they’re saying is, “I need a job. I want a job. I don’t want my son, my nephew or my grandson to have to leave this great province.”

What we’re trying to do in our party is to bring in a platform that would create a million jobs, that would lower the cost of energy, which is driving companies out of this province at an electrifying rate, you might say. We need to ensure that those people have the opportunity, that there are great skilled trades jobs out there, if we could actually get our apprenticeship ratios in perspective.

The minimum wage is going to help a very small group of people and certainly will be helpful, but at the end of the day we need to be doing much more than that to create jobs.

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



**Mr. John Vanthof:** It's once again a pleasure to be able to rise in this House and make a few remarks on the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex—I'm not going to concentrate much on the Fair Minimum Wage Act itself because our member from Essex, the labour critic, is going to take that, but I'd like to make a few comments.

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We have often accused the Liberal Party of coming up with fancy names for small bills that were meant more for a press conference. But in this case, the Fair Minimum Wage Act basically describes what the bill is trying to do, as opposed to the Million Jobs Act.

*Interjections.*

**Mr. John Vanthof:** No, come on. Who wouldn't want to vote for the Million Jobs Act?

The member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex remembers Bob Rae; well, I remember Mike Harris. I remember. When did we start going down the road of high hydro prices? Do you remember that? It was when we started to privatize hydro. You know who has cheaper hydro than we do? Manitoba—public hydro. Quebec—public hydro.

You know something else I remember—I was a municipal councillor—about Mike Harris? I remember when he downloaded roads to the municipalities, highways to the municipalities. That was his idea. The member said something about predictability, transparency and fairness. Those are none of the things that I remember from the Mike Harris government.

He brought forward a lot of good issues, he brought forward a lot of good points, but there were a lot of things he brought forward that were more politically driven than fact-driven.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** The member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex now has two minutes to reply.

**Mr. Monte McNaughton:** It was a lot of fun debating Bill 165. I like the two-minute hits we get to do.

I'd like to thank the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. Of course, he and I come from different political stripes. I disagree with the Liberals running around and handing out cheques for \$3 billion per year in corporate welfare. That's no way to build a sustainable economy.

I'd like to thank the member from Etobicoke North, my colleague and good friend from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and, of course, my colleague from the NDP from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

I will say, just before I close, that I do thank the NDP—I really do—for making me a Conservative. It was that experience back in 1991, in delivering that first NDP budget, whatever the heck the deficit amount was—I forget; it was at least \$12 billion or \$13 billion, as far as I can remember. I knew, from that point on, that I was a Progressive Conservative in the province of Ontario.

I'm really proud to be a Progressive Conservative in Ontario today, and it is because we have a leader who's putting forward a plan to change the course, to change the path that we're on today. Speaker, he was part of a government that created over 200,000 net new manufac-

turing jobs. We've lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs in the last 10 years under the former Premier and under this current Premier and, of course, 30,000 additional manufacturing jobs since the NDP-Liberal coalition came in a year ago.

Speaker, our PC plan is to create well-paying jobs in Ontario, lower hydro rates for Ontario families and businesses, lower taxes, balance the books, promote skilled trades, lower apprenticeship ratios, increase trade with other provinces within Canada and eliminate red tape such as the College of Trades.

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

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** As always, it is an enormous honour to rise in this place to say anything, but of course to contribute to such an important debate as the minimum wage in the province of Ontario. I want to thank my colleagues who are in the House today, who are giving, certainly, some good thought and attention to the debate as we all put our ideas on the table.

It has been interesting so far, just in the last 45 minutes, to hear the PCs' non-plan on the minimum wage, such a vital component of our overall economy. They have various white papers; they have released them throughout the last two years. They are, as far as I'm concerned, a regurgitation of Conservative doctrine that we've have heard for the last 20 or 30 years. There's nothing really new there except, potentially, the ink and the paper they are written on. However, when it comes to specifically their concept or ideas around the minimum wage, and specifically around pegging it at a certain cost, they are quite interestingly mute on the subject. Nevertheless, it is interesting to hear how they would push the province, I guess, forward. As I see it, they would certainly push us backwards with regressive policies in all regards.

Nevertheless, specifically on the minimum wage, I will say from the outset that New Democrats will be supporting this bill, Bill 165, and its implementation and the mechanisms in which it will ultimately peg the rate of inflation to the consumer price index, starting October 1, 2015. However, we've gone further in our analysis of the minimum wage debate, we've gone further in our consultation around the minimum wage, and we've gone further in terms of proposing concrete policy initiatives and potentially legislation that might balance the scales when it comes to the minimum wage in the province. New Democrats have what we feel is a practical, pragmatic and reasonable plan on the minimum wage. We certainly agree that we need to increase it. It definitely needs to increase. That will be a welcome message particularly to women who find themselves in minimum wage jobs and also visible minorities, who are also more highly represented in minimum wage jobs, as well as temporary workers, migrant workers and new immigrants to Canada, who find themselves over-represented in minimum wage working conditions.

What we have said is that \$11 an hour, going forward today, is a good starting point, but subsequent increases

should be at the 50-cent mark. So New Democrats are proposing that in 2015 the minimum wage increase by 50 cents to \$11.50, and a further 50 cents on June 1, 2016, to ultimately the \$12-an-hour mark. What this does is that it's a recognition on our behalf that those workers who find themselves in minimum-wage-paying jobs are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. Certainly we know that the argument around affordability and poverty and the income inequality that we so much find ourselves, find classes of our economies in these days—that question around income inequality cannot solely be addressed through the minimum wage. There are certainly other aspects that need to be addressed that make minimum wage an affordable wage.

Many will argue that \$12 an hour doesn't go far enough, and we've certainly heard those arguments. I want to commend those activists, many of whom are from my community and are my friends, who are pushing for a \$14 minimum wage. At this point, that's not possible. It's a massive burden that would hit our small business communities especially hard. In acknowledging our small business community, who, again, by and large are the ones who have workers that are under minimum wage regimes, we have to be cognizant of those pressures. I think about those small business owners in my community of Essex, down the main streets of Belle River in Essex and LaSalle and Amherstburg and Kingsville, and Ruthven, and St. Clair Beach, and Stoney Point and Lighthouse Cove. I think of those small business owners who are indeed themselves under constraints and finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. Many of them actually pay themselves minimum wage or even less. I have had discussions with them, and they are concerned. They want to pay a decent living wage to their employees. They want to be contributors to their local economic development and their communities. However, in this time and day in the province of Ontario, they are finding it absolutely impossible to keep their heads above water, given the considerations of high unemployment rates in our communities, high hydro rates— aspects where they absolutely can't find an economic foothold. One of them is simply the fact that people aren't spending money. People don't have that disposable income any longer because there has been such a massive exodus of good-paying jobs in our communities.

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In recognizing the pressures that have been put on small businesses in particular, New Democrats are offering the government some solutions to address that issue. What we have proposed is quite simply an offset for our small business community in addressing the minimum wage. If that increase—or potential increase, if the government decides to adopt it—were to happen on June 1, 2015, then the small business tax rate in the province of Ontario would drop at the same time by 0.5%. So it would go from 4.5% to 4%—an absolute acknowledgment, a balance there. And subsequently, when the minimum wage rises again the following year, you would see another half per cent.

I would also say that we are proposing that the small business tax rate be lowered today, in line with the June 1, 2014, proposal that the government is making on the \$11-an-hour mark, and that we immediately start to offer that offset to small businesses.

I've had some discussions with those members in my community, and they understand. They believe that this could be a practical and reasonable approach to, at the same time, raising the minimum wage and also acknowledging that the pressures will be on our small businesses to pay that raise.

It's interesting, because to us as New Democrats, it seems like a practical, reasonable approach, but when I listened intently to the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, who is the labour critic for the PCs, he mentioned no reprieve, no balance, no offset and no acknowledgement of small businesses in terms of their plan. He has talked about lower taxes in general, but we know, by reading their white papers, exactly what that means. It means lowering the corporate tax rate for the largest corporations in the province—the banks, the insurance companies, the pharmaceutical companies, those who are making record profits year after year, those Fortune 500 companies that are in our province; actually, the ones that they want to chase out of the province. I'll get to that, though. But they are offering absolutely no reprieve to our small business community, which bewilders me.

**Mr. Rob E. Milligan:** Now, now, now.

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** Well, there's nothing in your plan—I apologize. I've looked. I've thoroughly investigated your plan. You say nothing about small businesses in our community, which is just bewildering to me, because this is the party that is the self-proclaimed champion of all things business. That's interesting in and of itself, because I would think that they would appreciate that label, being the business-minded folks that they are.

When Chrysler corporation, the CEO of Fiat, Sergio Marchionne, acknowledged, as my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh mentioned, that they are ready as a company—a company that has an over 30-year history in the province of Ontario as a tier 1 manufacturer. When Sergio Marchionne says, “We would like to invest up to \$3 billion in the province of Ontario. We would like to bring in advanced manufacturing, research and development, and ensure that we have good-paying jobs in our communities. The spinoff effects for a community like Windsor and Essex county and, by extension, southwestern Ontario, could be generational in their impacts,” and when Sergio Marchionne says, “We would like to discuss some of the tools that might be at our disposal through the federal and provincial taxation regime or the types of investments that might be available,” do you know what the leader of the PC Party says? He calls them extortionists. Again, one of the most respected businesspeople on the planet, someone who's brought Chrysler and Fiat to prominence in not only the product but in their manufacturing regime, and he calls them extortionists. This is the guy that we want speaking to businesses on our behalf as the Premier? I don't believe he has the

capability to actually represent this province when it comes to speaking with small business. He labels them as extortionists. He told them that they were trying to bribe our communities.

In fact, the response at the federal level—and I'll give it to our federal government. They're actually saying that potentially, we can do this. We've done it before; we can do it again.

But no. The PC leader has absolutely no ability, no recognition and no desire to at least sit down at the table and see what tools are at our disposal. What he has said is that he just simply wants to cut red tape, which means regulations, which means health and safety regulations, which means environmental regulations. He wants to get back to an era that we had under their guru, Mike Harris, where we saw a degradation of our health and safety regime and our environmental regimes and saw issues like Walkerton pop up, where we couldn't rely on the drinking water. It got that bad. Our roads and infrastructure suffered because they were, without consultation, downloaded to our municipalities. There was an enormous amount of pressure placed on our province—not to mention the sell-off of our hydro system and other regimes that could have eventually paid for themselves, had they still been within the grasp of the province.

I digress, Speaker. I half expected you to get me back on to the original focus of the bill. It is the minimum wage.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** You're quite correct, and yes, I look forward to hearing your comments on the minimum wage issue.

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** I think that's what you call self-regulation. Right? That's one of the components of the various PC platforms, and it doesn't always work. As you know, Speaker, we need someone in this House to regulate, and I certainly appreciate the role that you play.

I'm pleased to put our position on the record here and to relay to those in our small business community that we understand those pressures and we're here to actually support you in lifting the minimum wage.

Mr. Speaker, my wife is a fourth-generation business owner in Windsor. Her family has owned a car dealership for 83 or 84 years. They've been selling Chevys in Essex county for a long time.

**Mr. Rob E. Milligan:** Isn't it a Chrysler dealership?

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** No, it's a Chevy dealership. Good vehicles.

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** No. She runs it, and she will take over that dealership. I speak with her about policy and issues all the time. Certainly, the discussion around minimum wage came up most recently, as we knew that we were going to be discussing it. She said, "Of course we need to raise the minimum wage." I don't think there are too many people in her operation who don't make above the minimum wage, because it's quite an intensive operation and there are lots of skilled workers there. But she, as a small business owner, understands that it helps her business when those around her in her community

have disposable income to be able to buy a vehicle, afford a new home, afford groceries and have a little bit left over to save for retirement or their child's education. More and more, Speaker, we aren't seeing those types of jobs in this province.

The member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex referred many times to the 300,000 manufacturing jobs that have been lost in this province without giving the real reasons as to why they're gone. Although I'm not an expert on why they're gone, because it's very complex, you could talk about the nature of the global economic collapse in 2008 that put enormous pressures on all jurisdictions in the province and the fact that that was actually born out of a deregulated banking sector and home sector—again, another Conservative mantra, where they don't think any rules should apply and free market economics should reign without any checks and balances. I would say there are various complex reasons why 300,000 manufacturing jobs have left.

As the son of an auto worker—my mother worked for GM for 35 years, at the GM trim plant. I watched, sadly, when that plant got torn down a couple of years ago. I certainly watched as those jobs in that plant left for cheap-wage jurisdictions and ultimately left for Mexico. That certainly has been the story of manufacturing post-free trade, post the original free trade agreement between Canada and the United States signed under Brian Mulroney and then the North America Free Trade Agreement signed under Jean Chrétien, who actually won an election by saying he wasn't going to ratify NAFTA but then went ahead and did it. So we know the Liberals' record on selling out and hollowing out our manufacturing base.

The North American Free Trade Agreement has been one of the most detrimental aspects of our manufacturing base that there has ever been. Any metrics that you want to examine or study can show you that there are pressures from tier 1 suppliers on our tier 2 suppliers to actually have a low-cost jurisdiction built into their business plan, and that then forces those tier 2 suppliers to find cheap labour sources in Ciudad Juárez in Mexico—it's the murder capital of the planet—where their social infrastructure certainly is not anywhere near what we have put in to build a civil and cohesive society in Canada.

1510

If the plan, I guess, under the PCs is to bring us closer in line with what they have in Mexico, where the average worker in a tier-1 plant makes \$7 an hour and the average worker in an automobile plant in Essex county, or in Ontario, makes about \$38 an hour—if they want to bring us down to that level, then the economics on that don't work at all. But I don't hear them arguing against bringing us down to that level. In fact, I hear that as a major plank, explicitly expressed by the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, where he said we need deeper trade—

**Mr. Steve Clark:** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I just think the member for Essex needs some clarification. Our critic indicated that we were supporting this bill, so I

think it's very important, given some of his previous comments, that we should reiterate that fact.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** Okay. It's not a point of order, but interesting information. I return to the member for Essex. Again I would remind all members of the House that—I would ask them to speak to the bill, to speak to the legislation we are debating, which is the minimum wage legislation.

The member for Essex.

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, the critic for the PC caucus identified that one of the components to their plan on addressing the wage gap is to integrate deeper in trade relationships. I'm simply expressing what has historically happened and what have been the results of deeper trade integration with other jurisdictions that don't have the same social capacity or social outlook as we do, or have not invested so much. So, we can go backwards or we can go forwards.

Certainly, as New Democrats, we've always proposed that we go forwards. That's evident in some of our most foundational policy initiatives. I would simply say that, you know, the universality of health care was born out of the CCF under Tommy Douglas. It's something that Canadians feel as though it is our crowning achievement. It is a strategic asset. It makes us who we are, in the sense that we decide to invest in each other. We decide to acknowledge that we each have something to contribute and that, at the very least, we should ensure that if your health degrades to any capacity, we should be there for you, to lift you up. That's a principle, again, that I think is lost on the Conservative mindset, but one that not only makes social sense but makes economic sense. It's one of the reasons why you have tier 1 suppliers and auto manufacturers that have set up in Ontario and Canada, because they know that the cost of their health care is actually affordable. It's actually a cost benefit to them when they do their analysis.

So, yes, our wages might seem higher on paper, but actually, when you take in the benefits, the fact that we invest in good infrastructure, the fact that we invest in modern transportation and the fact that we acknowledge that our regulatory regime is actually quite streamlined, it makes us look, certainly, appealing—and it has been.

There are certain aspects that have led to good-paying jobs leaving our country and our jurisdiction. I've talked about, definitely, the trade agreements that almost force corporations to take that initiative. I don't know if they really wanted to, but they actually have to. What's interesting, though, is that there are other jurisdictions that have implemented some of the policies that have been bantered around today in terms of raising the wage—

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** Banded about? Yes. One just happened recently in South Carolina: Volkswagen. Volkswagen decided that, for any new potential investment, they're going to want some structure. They're going to want a partner at the table, and they're actually demanding that that plant infuse some unionization into the

structure. They need a partner at the table on the labour side. It's interesting that we're hearing the absolute opposite of that argument coming from the PCs.

There are pressures on employers and employees that make any wage a difficult wage. It doesn't matter whether you're making minimum wage or whether you are making \$50,000 an hour or a good—actually, the wage that we all make in this place, which is quite a substantial wage. There are pressures put upon our labour that are outside of our control, and it's incumbent upon us, as members of this Legislature, to do absolutely everything that we can to make each dollar stretch as far as we can. And that certainly makes sense when we talk about industrial hydro rates, but it makes sense when we talk about consumer rates as well.

We have seen a hybrid, a bastardization of our electricity system, whether it be distribution or production, in this province, to the effect that it is so fragmented that even Ontario Hydro has not been able to get a grasp on their billing, and we're seeing massive discrepancies for people who are getting bills in excess of \$1,000 a month.

We need to examine and do everything that we can to streamline that regulatory regime, to put the proper oversight into place, so that we can start to make sure that people can gain a foothold and that we can ensure that \$11 an hour or \$12 an hour or \$14 an hour allows people to live a good, decent-quality life. Unfortunately, at this very moment, I think the pressures on everyday people are getting harder and harder, and we have a government that is not cognizant of those pressures.

In terms of our relationship or where we will be at an \$11 minimum wage—I believe it will bring us to the highest minimum wage in Confederation. I think it was mentioned that Alberta has the lowest minimum wage. I was speaking to my colleague the member from Hamilton Mountain, whose daughter is out in Alberta right now. She just moved to—

**Miss Monique Taylor:** Grande Prairie.

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** Grande Prairie, where she has said, texting her mom, that there are jobs everywhere—

**Miss Monique Taylor:** Some \$18 to \$20 an hour.

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** Some \$18 to \$20 an hour. So there are employment opportunities in Alberta; there's no question about that. It is booming, due to unmitigated expansion of the Athabasca tar sands. We know that. But there is a causal effect on our economy in Ontario, and that has to be recognized.

When we are pegging our dollar, our dollar is pegged at, typically, oil prices, and the massive expansion of exports in oil has raised the value of our dollar, artificially inflated the value of our dollar. That immediately makes all of our manufacturing exports twice as expensive as they normally would be. So when we're talking about the good old days in the early 1990s and the late 1990s in terms of manufacturing in the province of Ontario, let's also remember where the dollar was at. It was at around 68 cents, 73 cents at a high. Let's also remember where the price of gas was at that time: It wasn't even at \$1. So the costs for the inputs on businesses, especially in the

manufacturing sector, were half as much as they are today, and that unmitigated expansion of our resource economy at the expense of our manufacturing economy is a direct contributor to the loss of good-paying manufacturing jobs.

And nobody's done anything about it. In fact, when they talk about good-paying manufacturing jobs, they don't acknowledge that simple fact that we've all had the misfortune to observe. How do we do that? How do we fix that issue? It's certainly one that requires us to dialogue with members of our community and to speak with small businesses, large businesses, and put our minds together to at least acknowledge that we shouldn't be pitting one resource or one industry against another. They should be working symbiotically, and no one, to this point, whether in the federal government or provincial government, has actually gotten a hold on that. It's a real abdication of our responsibility and priorities, at least in this province, to not make mention of it or to not make an effort to remedy that.

Again, this is a debate that I think happens probably every time any jurisdiction talks about addressing that minimum wage. There's a funny quote from an American comedian.

1520

**Interjection:** Jon Stewart?

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** No, it's not Jon Stewart. You know, I forget his name. But he says, when talking about the minimum wage, "You know, why do we have a minimum wage? Because if they allowed you to pay me any less, you would." You know, people would pay less than they absolutely had to. There's no question. It's a grown-up debate that we always have to have in here. It's one that requires us to be clear and true about our ideals; it's one that is not without its contentious aspects, and it's certainly one that we welcome having with all stakeholders. That's why you see us being really reflective and thoughtful about the nature of the minimum wage going forward in that, yes, we acknowledge it has to rise, and pegging it eventually at the rate of inflation or the consumer price index will be a good metric to allow some stability for small businesses to be able to plan ahead. Also, informing them four months ahead of time as to what that increase will be is another practical, prudent component to this overall bill.

But we have to acknowledge that there are going to be some pressures on small businesses to pay the increased minimum wage. That will mean that the government will have to re-evaluate its priorities. New Democrats have also identified some other ways that this government could save a little bit of money. We've said this many times, to no large effect on the government, and certainly the opposition—they don't seem to be able to absorb this rationale. At the same time as addressing the cost of the minimum wage and the rise in the minimum-wage rate, New Democrats are calling for an immediate public sector CEO salary freeze and bonus freeze. That means that we—

**Mr. Rob E. Milligan:** We asked for it too.

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** No. See, here's the thing, and I will acknowledge the interjections by my colleague from Quinte—Northumberland—Quinte West. My goodness, he leaves the third floor and I forget his riding, even.

*Interjections.*

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** See, here's the difference: When we're talking about priorities as a province, the Conservatives would like to pin all our hopes and fortunes—actually what they're saying is that they're pinning all the problems, all of our economic woes on public sector workers, the teachers, the cops, the ambulance drivers, the paramedics that were in this building on Thursday asking for post-traumatic stress acknowledgement through the WSIB. To their credit, they are going to support it, but those are the people that they want to freeze wages on. We're saying, "You know what? They're a vital component to our overall economy." The health of our public sector is actually something that got us through the economic collapse of 2008, because there were some good-paying jobs that actually couldn't be outsourced to the lowest-wage jurisdictions on the planet, and they are our teachers, our cops and our municipal workers, people who actually have binding collective agreements that have benefits and insurance. Those are good-paying jobs. That's what we qualify as good-paying jobs.

What we're saying is that we need to maintain them. We need to negotiate and keep the frameworks of negotiation open so that we're getting good value for our dollar in our public sector. We certainly know that. But when it comes to CEO salaries, folks are getting rich as CEOs of crown corporations in this province, and that just doesn't mesh with the reality of everyday Ontarians. So we try to impress upon the government and the opposition that, if you're going to start somewhere in the public sector, start at the top. They say, "Whoa, no. We can't start at the top, because we are the top. We are the 1%. We've got to protect our buddies at the top."

It's trickle-down economics. It's a fundamental mantra, in principle, of capitalism and the right-wing ideology. It doesn't work, Speaker, because the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. What we're saying is, let's start at the top. Maybe those CEOs could survive on twice the rate of the Premier's salary, which roughly would come out to about \$444,000 a year, somewhere around there. If you can't survive on \$445,000 a year, we've got bigger problems. I would say that that would be a good area for us to start.

Secondly, again, something we don't hear about—definitely from the Conservatives, and there has been mild response from the government—is the closure of new corporate tax loopholes that will be worth about \$1.1 billion annually. New Democrats and our leader, Andrea Horwath, have called on the government, and the Premier specifically, to put a stop to proposed and planned new corporate tax loopholes that will see the luxury boxes at Maple Leaf Gardens—not Maple Leaf Gardens, rather—

**Mr. Michael Prue:** SkyDome.

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** —SkyDome or anywhere else, any other sporting venue, be able to be a write-off for corporate Ontario and corporate Canada, where lavish expenses would be seen as a normal, everyday business operation here for our friends in the 1%. We're saying, "You know what? Times are all right for those guys. Actually, margins are not too bad, and the TSE has had some record highs. Let's put a freeze on that." Let's say there are different priorities where, on an annual basis, we could put \$1.1 billion back into infrastructure, for instance. Maybe we could put \$1.1 billion into public transportation. Maybe we could put half a billion dollars into our health care, our front-line workers in long-term care.

But there's more, Mr. Speaker. What we're also seeing is that, in 2010, the Auditor General, in his findings, indicated that this provincial government had left over \$2.4 billion in corporate taxes that are owing to us, owing to the province in corporate taxes alone—they left \$2.4 billion in corporate taxes uncollected. So we've got a \$13.3-billion budgetary deficit—around there, roughly—and we've got \$2.4 billion out on the table still. We left \$2.4 billion on the table. We don't hear the Leader of the Opposition ever talk about the fact that they're just recovering the money that's owed to us. We talk about prompt payment in the infrastructure sector and contract-or sector; let's get some prompt payment from those who owe us taxes.

At the same time, Speaker, get the irony of this: They were laying off tax enforcement agents. At least they gave themselves an excuse to not be able to collect that \$2.4 billion because, unfortunately, in times of austerity we have to lay off the tax collectors. They are an unfortunate victim of the austerity measures of the days of Dalton McGuinty and Dwight Duncan.

Speaker, there are lots of ways that we've identified for us to be able to prioritize the needs of small business—and to be able to pay for them as well, because that's important. People in the public want to know not only what your concepts are, what your ideas are, but they want to know how we're going to pay for it. So when we say that we will be offsetting the minimum wage and offsetting it by reducing corporate taxes or small business taxes by 0.5%, we're also saying that these are other initiatives that we've identified to pay for that plan.

It's prudent, it's practical and it's pragmatic. It's the P3s that New Democrats believe in, not public-private partnerships—prudent, practical, pragmatic. And I think it's where, by and large, members of our province want us to go: something reasonable, something that makes sense, something that acknowledges that we have issues that we have to address, but something that also acknowledges that there are challenges on the other end that we have to balance out. We've taken that approach to a whole host of issues.

Again, I can't help but think about the argument proposed by members of the official opposition in that they have this one-million-jobs plan—a million jobs; imagine

that. It sounds like a late-night infomercial. It sounds like when you wake up and open your eyes, you turn on the TV at about one in the morning and then, oh, my God, you see one million jobs. It's almost as if, if you buy it right now, he's going to throw in an extra set of steak knives. You think, "This can't be true. How can this be true?" You're saying there has been a plan all along, that they've got a one-million-jobs plan in their back pocket and all you've got to do is vote for Tim Hudak? To me, that's not practical. People don't buy into that—well, some people do; a very small minority. And do you know what they find out? The steak knives don't work too well; you can barely cut through an orange. The whole thing was just a little bit of a ruse.

**1530**

These are things that people, I think, are tired of. I think it adds to the cynicism that the general public feels in regards to politics in general. They see unaffordable plans or unaccountable plans, or they see people saying anything, really, to get elected, or saying anything to gain a headline. What they really want to see is something that is reasonable, something that makes sense to them. And my goodness, if our proposals to the government don't seem reasonable and balanced, then I don't know how much further we could go, because it certainly, I think, will make life easier for them in implementing an \$11-an-hour minimum wage plan. It will make life easier for our small business community, who are the economic generators of jobs in our province. And we believe wholeheartedly as New Democrats that it will make life better for more people in the province of Ontario.

So, Speaker, with that, I give my endorsement to the initial steps of this bill in that it will only prescribe us pegging the minimum wage to the CPI. But I urge the government to adopt our ideas in going further.

Did I talk about the one-million-jobs thing yet? Maybe I should go back to that. It's an interesting topic, a million jobs. Speaker, one of the components—the million jobs plan was released a couple of different months ago and through a different—

**Interjection:** A couple of segments.

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** Segments. Thank you. Merci, monsieur.

Peut-être je peux le dire en français. Il y avait un autre aspect au plan pour un million d'emplois—un million.

It sounds unbelievable even in French. It doesn't matter which language; it's bilingually unbelievable. And they asked us why we voted against it. Well, why wasn't it two million or three million or a billion jobs? Pick a number out of the air—

*Interjection.*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** Point of order, the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Mr. Speaker, I just wonder if you would maybe redirect the honourable member from Essex—we're wondering whether he's talking about our bill from last week, the Million Jobs Act, or whether he's actually talking about the Fair Minimum Wage Act. So if we could just clarify that.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** Well, I think the members know that we're supposed to be talking about Bill 165 today, and I would ask all members of the House to bring their remarks back to the topic at hand and the bill that's being debated, Bill 165, the minimum wage legislation.

I return to the member for Essex, who has the floor.

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for his intervention. You know you've hit a nerve when they don't even want you to talk about their plan. I wonder how many of those million jobs actually are eventually minimum wage jobs, because they don't talk about a plan to help workers fight for their rights, to help them increase their working conditions. They don't talk about affordable housing attached to the need for good-paying jobs. They don't talk about affordable child care. They don't even talk about our health care. These are all components to making any job more value-added. It's interesting, Speaker. They don't want me to talk about their plan. I guess I will stay away from it, because any more time spent on it, I guess, is a waste of time.

Speaker, I believe I've quite clearly presented our party's position on the minimum wage. I know that it was met with great anticipation on behalf of the members of the Liberal caucus, because they kept asking us for months and months, "Where's your plan on minimum wage? Where's your plan on minimum wage?" Well, now that we have appeased them—because we always need to help them out with their ideas; they seem to subscribe to the vast majority of them, anyhow, to make up the bulk of their legislative initiatives—they now are asking us what our plan is on health care and home care and child care and infrastructure and public housing and public transportation and the environment. They want our ideas; they need our ideas, and we certainly are ready to give them in little digestible bits, because we don't want to overwhelm them.

Specifically, on the minimum wage: It's very practical, very pragmatic, very doable and balanced. I think it will be a welcome reflection of the concerns of our small business community and the need to address the income inequality gap that we find in our country. It's something that New Democrats put a lot of thought into, a lot of consultation, and one that has been met, by and large, with good acknowledgement from all sides that it's the way forward in this province; something that could spark a little bit of a renaissance throughout the rest of the provinces, in that we acknowledge.

Folks in Essex feel okay about it. They certainly want us to address the issue of high hydro rates. They need us to address the issues of unaccountable government and priorities in terms of the spending, where this government puts its priorities, because they want to see their communities benefiting and their neighbours benefiting and not solely those who are closely associated with any particular party. They want to see a balanced approach,

and here's one real, basic aspect where we can start to do that.

Speaker, that will end my comments in this wonderful debate. I look forward to the interjections and commentary from my colleagues. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

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

**Mr. Toby Barrett:** The member from Essex did present the NDP case in support of the \$11 minimum wage increase that the Liberal government brought in. As he stated, it's now the highest in Confederation, and I do point out that that's a problem.

The Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association testified before finance and they indicated, "The horticulture sector is still struggling to absorb the last minimum wage increase to \$10.25 an hour."

The Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers came before finance—another major employer, not only in Essex but in Haldimand–Norfolk—and indicated that their profitability is very sensitive to changes in the minimum wage, since they compete against jurisdictions with much lower wages, and describe it as an ill-advised way to deal with poverty.

OFA, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, indicated before finance, "Jumps in minimum wage reduce seasonal and youth employment...."

These organizations seem to have consensus. They do lean towards any future increases to the consumer price index, if we take into consideration the general health of business at that time, but they certainly did not want to see this \$11 increase that we got from the Liberals. They didn't want to see an \$11 hike and then negotiations around linking it to CPI.

I also give these organizations credit. They put forward an idea that perhaps it is time, in the province of Ontario, to have a separate job category, a separate agricultural manual labourer category, for issues around government setting wages.

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

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh:** Mr. Speaker, it's always a pleasure to provide my commentary when my colleague from Essex speaks. He always speaks with great passion and conviction and belief in our responsibility to stand up for the people of Ontario, to improve their condition in whatever way we can. I like the way he framed the support that we have. We think this is a good initial step but it can go further, and the member from Essex has laid out our plan.

**1540**

What's really surprising is that the government is supposed to propose ideas and plans, and as the opposition, historically, we then, in response to their plans, provide our input. But it's very troubling and concerning when the government, which is supposed to lead, says, "We need to hear your plans. We need to hear your ideas." It's troubling that they need that, because, ideally, the government should propose their plan, should propose what

they have to do, and then we can provide our input. The fact that they needed it, that they were struggling to exist without the response from the NDP, was, to me, somewhat troubling. I think it lacks genuinity, because if you genuinely want to hear someone's ideas, you don't propose that you need them and that you can't move forward and you attack a party because they're not giving you any ideas. That does not seem to me to be a genuine request for ideas. That's a ploy to somehow undermine a party. So anyway, I question that in terms of a genuine response.

But what I am presenting and what I do encourage the party to do now is to look at going a step further and tying in reductions to small business taxes and an increase to the minimum wage, because we know that people are struggling in this province. We know that people are having a hard time making ends meet, and we need to do whatever we can to make sure we uplift them out of poverty.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** Questions and comments? The member for—Mississauga—Streetsville.

**Mr. Bob Delaney:** Mr. Speaker, I would have thought that by now you would have had that one memorized.

This is a bill on which all of the parties agree. It's time to review the minimum wage, and I think in the end we're all going to support this move to move the minimum wage to \$11 an hour. It's worth noting that when the government took office some 10 years ago, minimum wage had been frozen for eight very long years at \$6.85 an hour. After having taken office, the government had a staged, responsible means of moving minimum wage up by a small increment each year, enough to bring minimum wage up to where it's competitive. Most importantly, after gaining \$10.25 an hour in 2010, the introduction of the harmonized sales tax immediately provided a sales tax credit, mostly to low-income people. The following year, it was the child tax credit and then the energy and property tax credit, and now it's time to go back to that base minimum wage and bring the minimum wage up again.

Among the things this government has done over the past decade is to find ways to ensure that if someone of moderate means or someone who's earning the minimum wage spends money, we have every opportunity to rebate the costs of living in the form of tax credits, such as sales tax and energy and property tax. I think these things are responsible, and the move to an \$11 minimum wage is just one step on that continuing journey to ensure that people of low or moderate incomes have a chance to live a life with dignity.

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

**Mr. Jim McDonell:** It was good, I guess, to endure the talk from the member from Essex when he talked about discrediting the possibility of a million jobs. We don't have to go back very long in history—just, actually, the government before this government was placed—to when we created over a million jobs under the previous Mike Harris government. So I think it's important to

know that those are realities. I think it's something we have to get back to to get our people back working.

We are sitting now at a minimum wage that's the highest in the country, and again, it's just another expense a business has that's the highest in the country. We're not disagreeing that we should be indexing and getting it out of political hands, but you look at that and you add small business or big business—I mean, this government has the habit of taking big business and making it small.

You're looking at the highest energy rates, the highest property taxes, which are a result of the charges that have been put down to municipalities, and the highest payroll taxes, and they still expect that, at the end of the day, businesses will want to come here. If you're an entrepreneur or you're a big company that's trying to review where you're going to build your next car, would you come to Ontario? Actually, we've seen our province go from the number-one vehicle-producing jurisdiction in this continent—now we're number three. We're behind Mexico, and we're behind Michigan. This is something that's increasing in rate, so we'll soon be further down the totem pole than that.

I think that what we need to do is look at, what are we going to have to do to get good-paying jobs? We're talking minimum wage jobs here, because this government has doubled the number of people on minimum wage, and our goal should be good-paying jobs, making the economy so we have people who are making higher and making enough wages to make a good living—

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Jim McDonell:** So, thank you, Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** We return to the member for Essex for his reply.

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** Thanks to the members for Haldimand—Norfolk, Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Mississauga—Streetsville and Stormont—Dundas—South Gengarry.

It's interesting, as always, to hear, again, the rebuttal to what I believe is a practical, pragmatic plan, something that has a balanced approach. It's interesting to hear the Conservatives not acknowledge that built into our plan would be some reprieve and an equalizer, a little bit of a benefit for our small business community.

Again, these are supposedly the champions of all things business, the purveyors of all capital transactions in the province, or in the world, and they don't seem to think that it's important for us to support our small businesses in the province, whereas here in New Democratic territory, we are seeing that the pressures put on our small businesses today and moving forward are ones that we have to be cognizant of, and actually use our ability to provide some relief there.

So there's a mechanism that we're proposing to the government—we hope they adopt it—that would see the small business tax rate decrease at the same rate that the minimum wage increases. It's balanced; it's affordable, given that the government restructures their priorities. It is fair. It's something that resonates in my communities.



But, lo and behold, the Conservatives want to talk about, again, giving the 1% the biggest breaks in the province. Well, let's give the small mom-and-pop shops in our communities a little bit of a break as well. We can do that. We have the ability to do that in this bill. But they seem focused on bringing in right-to-work legislation similar to what they have in Wisconsin, Alabama, Tennessee and Michigan, where we've seen a massive exodus of good-paying jobs. They have absolutely no plan to address the need for good-paying jobs. They don't even know what good-paying jobs are, unless you're the CEO of a bank or an insurance company.

We're talking about real people in real communities, on the main streets, not in the boardrooms. This is a bill that will support them, and we're certainly ready to influence it.

ROYAL ASSENT  
SANCTION ROYALE

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to certain bills in his office.

**The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum):** The following is the title of the bill to which His Honour did assent:

An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2014 / Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2014.

FAIR MINIMUM WAGE ACT, 2014  
LOI DE 2014 POUR UN SALAIRE  
MINIMUM ÉQUITABLE

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** Further debate? The member for Etobicoke North.

**Mr. Shafiq Qaadri:** Thank you, Speaker, for the recognition in support of Bill 165, the Fair Minimum Wage Act. I will, of course, salute my colleague from the NDP, the MPP for Essex, for his remarks and his, really, passion on this subject of minimum wage for Ontario workers.

I think it's important for us to put on the table that we have wholehearted support from the NDP on this particular bill. We even have somewhat, perhaps extracted with some difficulty—sort of like a bit of a dental appointment, but still—support from the PC side on this Fair Minimum Wage Act.

My colleague from Essex remarked, why were the Liberals demanding their position on the minimum wage for so long? Well, I have to just, with respect, cite for you—because for months, you didn't have one. You were stickhandling whether you would be more champions of the working class and perhaps people with more modest incomes, or perhaps rechristen yourselves as the party of small business.

Let's hear, for example, what the Toronto Star actually had to say. In fact, I sent a nice complimentary email to Martin Regg Cohn, who wrote, "When did the party of the working poor lose its voice? Listen to the sound of Horwath clearing her throat when she finally emerged from the NDP's witness protection program"—to finally come forthrightly out in support of minimum wage. I call to your attention, Speaker, that the NDP's 2011 campaign called for a minimum wage of \$11.20. We are now not only raising it to \$11 currently but also, as you know very well, having a built-in issue for inflation, essentially tying it, pegging it, to the consumer price index.

1550

I would, Speaker, first of all, with your permission, like to cite the esteemed remarks of the former MPP for Thornhill, the honourable Peter Shurman, who served as finance critic for the PC Party from October 26, 2011, to September 8, 2013. He very recently, having first of all been the spearhead, the leader—let's put it, the brain trust—behind the Tory economic vision, once he retired from this place, when the shackles of the evil whips were removed from him, said that the Tory plan was a nightmare, that it was a plan without a vision. Unfortunately, I have to say that I don't see too many of the remarks coming from the Tory side today that really make me want to change that particular viewpoint.

Again, when I'm explaining to my kids or to classes what some of the differences are, say, between the Tory mindset and the Liberal mindset—even though we're not supposed to talk about the Million Jobs Act or their previous plan, from which they just climbed down, the right-to-work-for-less program—I have to say that, ultimately, it looks like what they're trying to do is Americanize Ontario. They are trying to create the United States of Ontario.

Whether you're looking at minimum wage or layoffs, sell-offs, liquidate our assets, cut, slash, burn, deregulate, weaken the tax structure, weaken environmental laws—ultimately, what all of this is about is called arbitrage, which, Speaker, as you may recall, originally meant, you buy gold at a certain value in Paris and you sell it at a higher value in London. That's called arbitrage. That's kind of the original meaning of it. But what's going on now, in the corporate world and, I guess, in the boardrooms, is an arbitrage of tax structure, environmental laws, minimum wage laws—basically what seems to be a characterization of what's going on with the Tory side on the whole issue of union-busting.

If you look at the political-industrial complex and the history attached thereof—whether it's from the early combines and cartels of the Rockefellers all the way to this day—union-busting, the diminishment of union laws, has been part and parcel of that attempt for a very, very long time. I have to say, with respect, that the PC side is really just yet another manifestation of an echo of it. Whether we're talking about minimum wage, whether we're talking about corporate taxes or this "cut the deficit at all costs," whether it's firing nurses or laying off health care workers, closing hospitals and so on—I have to say

with respect to my honourable colleagues, who continue to shout—

*Interjections.*

**Mr. Shafiq Qaadri:** By the way I might just say, if Valium is required, I am licensed to prescribe it. Having said that, I will just continue, Speaker.

We are a country, not a corporation. We are citizens, not merely taxpayers. This issue, this attempt of divide-and-conquer, us and them, this Tea Party Republicanization, privatizing the gains and socializing the losses, this hard right turn, this scorched-earth policy, the Newt Gingrichization of Ontario is not something that I want.

For example, when the Million Jobs Act was proposed just recently in the House, again with reference to the minimum wage, I said to the honourable Leader of the Opposition that I would invite him to have a look at the book and the documentary that has just most recently been made about Mitt Romney. If he actually listens to the documentary, some of the speeches that they've collated, you will see a remarkable—and I would say, by the way, perhaps embarrassing—concordance between the remarks of the Leader of the Opposition and the expired remarks of Mitt Romney. Again, whether we're talking about the minimum wage, about union-busting, about this sloganeering Million Jobs Act, the kind of dismantling of the superstructure that has built Ontario and made it what it is, whether it's health care or education or our universities, this is really, I would say, the PC outlook, essentially looking at everyone as merely a taxpayer or a ratepayer and not as a citizen, part of a country and not merely a corporation.

I have to say as well, in closing, that of course the increase to the minimum wage with the built-in inflation protection is something that for my own constituents in the great riding of Etobicoke North—which, yes, has its share of modest-income folk, whether it's young women or single moms or new immigrants, transitory workers and so on—will be much-welcomed news.

For that reason, I would first of all do a shout-out to the former MPP from Thornhill, Peter Shurman, for his remarks calling the Tory plan a “nightmare”—I think perhaps we might even invite him to run for us next time in Niagara Falls, where I understand he's now set up shop—and simply say that this is a much-needed initiative for the province of Ontario.

By the way, just to make it clear to all the folks who are listening, I'd just ask my colleagues in the House, could you remind me, during the eight lost years of the Harris-Eves Tory reign, the reign of error, as it were, how many times in those dark days, along with the riot police showing up to the steps of Queen's Park, was minimum wage raised? Does anyone recall? Was it three, two, one? No, Speaker. It was zero, and that shows you in a very small, little factoid the mindset, the outlook. God help us should they ever get the reins of power. That's what the Tory mentality is all about. And as I say, the offer of prescriptions of mild, medium or severe characteristics is available to you at any time.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**Mr. Jim McDonell:** It's interesting to hear the member from Etobicoke North. I heard him mention not about this bill, but about union-busting. But what they're doing is so effective—they are killing the jobs—there is no need for unions because they are going somewhere else.

Our party and certainly our history have been about creating good jobs. Many, if not most, of them are unionized. People today are not worried about whether they're in a union or not. They are worried about whether their job is going to be here tomorrow. We have to see some changes here if we're going to expect that somebody in this province can actually start a business and turn a profit so that they can pay somebody other than minimum wage.

We're arguing here about making sure people make an adequate minimum wage. We've heard a lot of experts. Actually, the panel came back and did not recommend this \$11 an hour. This is something that this government did. The panel did not recommend that we should have the highest rates in North America, or in Canada. But, you know, when you slip out in North America—because that's the problem: We're the highest of all of our neighbours, and you can't have the highest of everything and expect people are going to want to come and start a business here.

It's embarrassing. We'll be sitting here, and we've already slipped from first to number three in the number of cars built in this province. As far as I know, those are good unionized jobs, and all we've seen is these jobs disappear by the scores or the hundreds. Heinz: good unionized jobs, gone. Caterpillar: good unionized jobs, gone.

This is not a matter of union-busting, but actually, when you look at their effect, it is union-busting, because they are getting rid of good unionized jobs. Hopefully, this government is smart enough to see what's happening and try to reverse the trend, but until some of these 20- or 30-some panels start to reply back—

**Mr. Rob E. Milligan:** Thirty-seven panels.

**Mr. Jim McDonell:** Until those 37 panels start to tell them, “Wake up, folks,” there will be nobody left here: nobody to pay the jobs of the public servants that we're trying to contain. It's all a system that has to be looked at. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh:** I must admit my colleague from the Liberal Party gave a great speech. It was actually quite enjoyable, and I thank you for that, but I have a couple of assertions that I'd like to make.

I appreciate that the member indicated that in 2011—that's maybe three years ago—the NDP was leading and led on this issue, and thank you very much for following us. I appreciate that. We spoke about the minimum wage for years. We were the champions of this issue and we don't have anything to prove on this; we have nothing to prove on this.

1600

In addition, we have for years championed the idea of increasing minimum wage in relation to inflation. That's another NDP idea. So thank you very much for implementing our idea. That's a great sign of leadership, when you are able to take great ideas from across the floor. Thank you for doing so.

The other issue I want to raise, though, is that the government seems to be a little bit insecure. If the government is so concerned about what the third party is saying on a position, if they're so preoccupied with that, to me, it speaks to their own insecurity. I implore you, you need to look inside yourself and build your own confidence, and not resort to attacks based on insecurity. It belittles your position. It belittles your stature. You should do more than that. I expect more than that from the government and the people of this province expect more than that. I implore you to search deeper within yourself for some confidence.

But we ask you to look at our proposal very seriously. We know that in this province people are struggling and that the minimum wage is still keeping people in poverty, and we need to uplift them. So we ask you to consider our increase and tying it into a small business tax decrease.

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

**Mr. Bill Mauro:** I want to thank the member from Etobicoke North for his comments. Contained with his comments were a couple points that I'll just address that I think are irrefutable. Number one is that from 1995 to 2003, under the Conservative government, the minimum wage did not go up. It was at \$6.85 when they were elected, and when we came into government as the Liberals in 2003, it was still at \$6.85. It hadn't moved. In response to the comments that were just made and the suggestion that there was leadership there, this is not our first move on minimum wage. We took it from \$6.85 to \$10.25, a 50% increase before this last move. So we've been active on the minimum wage file for quite some time.

Now, the Conservatives may have their own reasons for why they didn't move it. I'm not sure what they are, but as mentioned by the member from Etobicoke North, that is absolutely irrefutable. It was \$6.85 and eight years later it was still there.

With regard to the comments from the member from Essex—I just heard the last 10 minutes or so when I came into the House—about us asking for a position from the NDP on minimum wage, well, of course we would expect that a party that likes to portray itself as the social conscience of the province would have a position on the minimum wage. I predicted in caucus two or three weeks ago that whatever we say, Andrea Horwath and the NDP will come out and say something a little bit more. She didn't have a policy because she didn't want to have one. She was just going to wait to see what the Liberals said. We said 11 bucks an hour; Andrea Horwath comes out and says \$12 an hour. If we had said \$12 an hour, Andrea Horwath would have said \$13 an hour. If

we had said \$13 an hour, Andrea Horwath would have said \$14 an hour—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** I've raised this several times this afternoon and asked members, when they're talking about other members of the House—you know what I'm talking about—to refer to other members by their riding name or their title in some way and not to personalize it. So I would ask all members to remember that. I think this is the fourth time I've raised it this afternoon.

There's time for one last question or comment.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** It's my pleasure to speak to the comments made by the member from Etobicoke North. He seemed very proud of what his government's done. He talked a little wee bit about the actual minimum wage, then he went on a verbal barrage about all the bad things other parties have done. But he seemed to be quite resplendent in what he thinks his Liberals have done.

I'll just tell you, he talked about increases; and the last speaker as well, from Thunder Bay, talked about increases. I'll tell you this: They've doubled the deficit from virtually nothing to \$12 billion, and it's going to go to \$15 billion. That's going in the wrong direction. That's an increase we're not looking forward to. They've taken the debt, roughly \$135 billion when they took power, and when they're done, it will be \$270 billion—probably higher because they're overachieving when it comes to spending. It scares the daylight out of me. They took energy rates from about 2.3 cents a kilowatt to now 12.2 cents on average. That's a great increase that's really helping our economy. They took energy rates that used to be the lowest in Canada and North America and they're soon going to be the highest in North America, another increase that I'm sure the people—

*Interjections.*

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

The member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** I don't know how they can be proud. The numbers we're talking about are 600,000 to a million men and women every day getting up without a job. Now, where's the hope of their great party in that, Mr. Speaker? And another thing they can be proud of: a \$1.1-billion boondoggle on the gas plants that could be going to health care, which—we keep hearing in this House daily that people can't have their medicines. They can't have hip surgeries in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound because they boondoggled and wasted so much money. EHealth: another boondoggle and nightmare. Ornge: the fiasco there—Chris Mazza and his things are going. You can't even hope to get good health care.

Mr. Speaker, what other Premier—McGuinty and Wynne have had two criminal investigations going on simultaneously with all of these other nightmares. They're overachieving, Mr. Speaker. We can't handle much more of their overachieving. It's time for an election. We need to go now.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** That concludes our questions and comments. I return to the member for Etobicoke North.

**Mr. Shafiq Qaadri:** I thank my honourable PC colleagues from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, because I have to. I’d also like to congratulate the remarks of my colleague from Thunder Bay–Atikokan, from the Liberal side, and of course my honourable colleague, always outfitted with sartorial splendour, from Bramalea–Gore–Malton.

I was struck by how he mentioned—kind of in the past tense—that they were the champions of the minimum wage. I’d like to perhaps, first of all, suggest simply that we are in a minority government and, perhaps even more so than otherwise, we are not only prone but also required to listen to all parties and to formulate policy. Whether, sir, you have great ideas to help move the ball down the field, I think we as a government are obligated to listen.

I would simply say, though, that once the leader of the third party emerged out of the clouds of darkness and her vows of silence and came out and spoke about the minimum wage, we were certainly happy to have her support, because ultimately this is going to benefit many, many Ontarians, something in the order of about 500,000-plus Ontarians, who continue to work at minimum wage.

I would just remind my colleagues and those who are listening that, under the Tory party for eight long, dark years, the minimum wage was not increased even one time. And that, Speaker, is perhaps, in a nutshell, as I said earlier, the factoid about the Americanization of Ontario, creating what I would call a United States of Ontario, which we want to prevent. And as some of the colleagues internally in the PC Party suggested, it inspired them to climb down from their right-to-work-for-less, or this million-jobs sloganeering, bill.

So, Speaker, let’s get this minimum wage act passed.

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

**Mr. Steve Clark:** It’s a pleasure to rise this afternoon and have an opportunity to contribute to the debate regarding the minimum wage in Ontario. I’ve got about 20 minutes, and I want to bring a perspective to the debate on Bill 165—I’ll use the long title—An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to the minimum wage, from the people that I represent in the great riding of Leeds–Grenville.

At the start, Mr. Speaker, I want to commend our labour critic, the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, for his excellent leadoff. I think he did 10 or 11 minutes the other day, and followed it up with 49 minutes this afternoon. I think he really did an excellent job in explaining some of our caucus’s position. In his remarks, he also showed very clearly how this bill isn’t the jobs plan that Ontario so desperately needs now. So while this bill does represent some good news for those lowest-paid Ontarians, it really does not offer any hope to the one million of our fellow citizens of this great province that woke up this morning without a job.

Hope for them, I’d say, was found in our leader Tim Hudak’s Million Jobs Act, which the government and its

enablers in the NDP voted against last week. How a government that has absolutely no ideas on kick-starting private sector job creation could in good conscience vote against our reasonable plan to get people back to work is really beyond me.

Whether I was at the Grenville Federation of Agriculture banquet or the annual palliative care telethon or any of the events that I attended over the weekend, people were very shocked to hear about the NDP–Liberal coalition opposing that bill.

**1610**

When you look at the five components of the bill, people were confused on how two parties that claim to be interested in creating good-paying jobs for Ontarians wouldn’t be on board with that bill. It’s true. With the votes last Thursday, the coalition of the NDP and the Liberals showed us that they’re against a number of things, and essentially the five things that were in the bill. They’re against lower hydro rates for businesses and families. They’re against lower taxes and controlling government spending. They’re against reducing apprenticeship ratios and getting more young people into the skilled trades, increasing trade with our provinces from coast to coast and cutting red tape for businesses.

I’m extremely disappointed that the Million Jobs Act was defeated last week. At least Ontarians now know where the other two parties stand, and when Ontarians see very clearly that the NDP—you know, I was at the Manning conference briefly on the weekend, and I heard someone refer to you guys as the “spend-DP,” so it was interesting. It really decided, for me, that they don’t understand how to set the conditions for the private sector to start hiring. I’m confident that Ontario PCs—if we can get into government, I’m positive that the Million Jobs Act will be a government bill under a Tim Hudak government, and I look forward to that day.

I guess I should be fair to the NDP, though, about some of the comments about the Million Jobs Act. I know that according to the member from Kenora–Rainy River, she thought it was too ambitious for us to put this bill forward. I really couldn’t believe, when I heard her leadoff to the debate on Thursday, that she indicated that we don’t need a million jobs. In fact, I think she used a figure that we only need 588,000, so that we were being too greedy to try to create too many jobs in Ontario.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** She didn’t really say that, did she?

**Mr. Steve Clark:** Yes, she did. She was against our plan to create an economic climate where private sector investment would create one million jobs because, well, that’s more than we need. That’s what she said.

So to the NDP’s way of thinking, we should settle for 588,000 jobs and leave those 412,000 additional good-paying jobs—we should leave those to the other provinces. I think that was indirectly what she was saying. I think the NDP think Ontarians who have a job don’t deserve an opportunity to get a better one, and I certainly don’t agree with that. I can’t wait for—maybe when they take that plan to the people, maybe they’ll name it the “just barely enough jobs and not a single one more act.”

Maybe that's what they'll name that bill that they were proposing, or at least I thought that they were proposing, last Thursday.

But, Speaker, I want to make sure that I give ample time to the debate on Bill 165. As we've heard, the bill doesn't actually increase the minimum wage, and I think that's a bit of a misconception that's out in the communities. In fact, there was no debate or vote in the Legislature earlier this year when the Premier did announce that Ontario's minimum wage was rising to \$11 an hour starting on June 1. I can tell you that I had a number of people, mostly owners of small businesses, I would say, who contacted me to express some level of surprise, indicating that there wasn't a role for individual MPPs in that debate regarding that announcement. They were surprised, Speaker. I think some of them were also disappointed—

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Steve Clark:** Not because, Minister, they were against Ontario minimum wage earners receiving an increase. More than anyone, I think, these employers have a very keen understanding of the struggles that their employees who are working at the minimum wage are going through. They see it every day and hear every day from their employees who are trying to balance their family's budget at a time when the cost of living just keeps going up and up and up in Ontario. I think the business owners were disappointed in the process because they wanted an opportunity for their MPP—in the case of Leeds–Grenville, myself—to come here and to speak about how that increase in the minimum wage would affect their businesses.

They also wanted me to talk about the incredible pressure that small business owners are facing in Ontario today, unprecedented pressures that I have to say go well beyond any concern about the minimum wage. That's why I wanted to begin this afternoon by just sharing some of those comments that I've heard.

One of the best letters I've received was from a small business owner named Cheryl Wykes. She owns Main St. Pizza in the village of Athens. If you ever take a drive into Leeds–Grenville and you manage to get to the beautiful village of Athens, I highly recommend coming in and seeing Cheryl and meeting her employees. Like many hard-working small business owners, Cheryl is facing a lot of pressure in keeping her restaurant going. The talk of increasing the minimum wage was adding to that stress. I just wanted to quote some excerpts from something that she wrote to me. She said, "If you want to give the lower income a break, let them spend their money they do earn by cutting the taxes they pay. This will help the economy and take the burden off the small business owner.

"I opened this store 15 years ago and it is just getting harder and harder to pay the bills. Hydro sucks up any extra money there is."

She mentions the skyrocketing cost of hydro; I just want to stop for a second to make that point. It doesn't matter what issue I'm talking about to the people in my

riding of Leeds–Grenville, the subject of electricity costs and the fact that they're spiralling out of control always comes up in the conversation. The government's utter mismanagement of the electricity sector and what that has done to people's hydro bills—whether they own a business or are just trying to keep a roof over their head—is something that you guys over there are ignoring, really, at your own peril. People out there are hurting like never before, and the Minister of Energy's response is to stand up and announce a long-term energy plan that's going to increase rates even more. It's unbelievable to me that that's what the—

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Steve Clark:** But back to Cheryl's letter—thank you very much for that—which focused not only on what these threats to her business future would do to her if she was forced to close, but also to her employees. I think that's a very important aspect. In the letter, she goes on to write, "If the doors close, one family will lose their home and the other who has a young family will be on unemployment—which will not pay rent and feed a family.

"The small business owners should not have to deal with this kind of stress."

Those are some of the comments that I received from small business owners like Cheryl when this was first proposed. I think people like Cheryl understand that Ontario is a better place for business owners, employees and their families when Queen's Park is taking less out of their pockets. That's a concept that I don't think Premier Wynne and the Liberals are able to grasp. To her government, people and businesses are just revenue streams to feed this insatiable appetite for more and more spending.

If you want to talk to some small business people, I'd be more than happy to connect you with some folks like Cheryl in my riding. Go ask Cheryl's customers; go down to Athens, sit with those customers and ask them what they think of your plan to increase the gas tax by 10 cents a litre to pay for transit in Toronto. I can tell you, Speaker, I could go all across my riding—to Athens, to Westport, to Lansdowne and Spencerville, but I'm not particularly sure you'd allow me to say what they've been telling me; I think, in some cases, it might be contravening some of the standing orders. But they're very, very concerned about the reckless policies that this government has continued to advance under this Premier's watch over the last year.

Now we know that the government has announced the minimum wage increase. It happened without any particular debate in the chamber. The question people are now asking me is, just how does Bill 165 fit into that process? The answer, to many folks who are wondering, is that it amends the Employment Standards Act, 2000. It creates a provision to adjust the minimum wage every year.

What we've got here essentially is a process bill. It's an important issue; I'm not going to say it isn't. It is a very important issue, but this is essentially a process bill. As most people who have read the bill know, starting in October 2015 the minimum wage would be indexed to

the Ontario consumer price index, or CPI. The adjustments would be rounded to the nearest five cents. It's also important to note that there would be no adjustment if it would result in a decrease to the minimum wage. So the process is going to apply to all minimum wage classes, whether it's students under 18, liquor servers, hunting and fishing guides or homeworkers.

1620

As Mr. McNaughton, our labour critic, outlined, in finishing off his remarks, our caucus is supporting it. I know there were a number of other speakers today who have reaffirmed that. Certainly, we've seen that business groups like the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and the Ontario Convenience Stores Association are also onside with the process established in Bill 165.

The chamber has been particularly vocal on establishing a new way to handle future minimum wage increases. Here's what they had to say just prior to the legislation being introduced: "This issue is important. There is broad consensus that the current process—or lack thereof—governing the minimum wage does not work for employers and workers."

At the conclusion of the particular report I read, the Ontario chamber recommended using CPI for the basis of future increases. With some time I have left, I'm going to quote the Ontario chamber document, just to be able to read it into the record. This is from the Ontario chamber:

"Ontario businesses want a process for determining the minimum wage that is predictable, transparent, and fair. They also want a process that ensures that Ontario remains competitive. Tying the minimum wage to an economic indicator like the CPI makes good business sense.

"By tying the minimum wage to the CPI, both employers and employees will be able to reasonably predict the increases in their labour costs and salaries, respectively. Everyone will benefit. Workers won't be subject to long freezes and deterioration of their purchasing power. Employers won't be subject to sudden and unforeseen increases in the cost of doing business.

"Tying the wage to an economic indicator removes political interference from the process—something that the other three options we considered could not guarantee. This option is also the most transparent of all the options considered and is one that can be easily understood by employers and employees."

So that's the Ontario chamber document. That was their endorsement.

I also had an opportunity to visit a number of my chambers in the break from December to when we returned last month. In fact, I had a chance to make a presentation at three of them: the 1000 Islands Gananoque, Brockville and also the North Grenville chamber in Kemptonville. I had the pleasure of hosting our finance critic, the member for Nipissing. All three events were very good events because they gave us an opportunity to talk to small businesses and to hear their concerns.

The things that I heard they were worried about were the high taxes in Ontario, the high energy costs, and red

tape and overregulation. Certainly for those who have read the bill, those aspects that I've heard from our business community aren't addressed in Bill 165.

In fact, just before I had the chance to speak at the Brockville event, which was quite a large event—it was quite a large breakfast that they had—I did have a chance to look at the Ontario Chamber of Commerce's document called *Emerging Stronger 2014*.

That report was quite interesting. It showed me that less than half of Ontario businesses feel confident about Ontario's economy, yet among the same group, 74% felt good about their own company's future. I commented at the meeting on what a disturbing disconnect that was for me. While the business community, like those who were there to hear me speak, felt confident about their own ability to succeed, they lacked the confidence in this government to get their house in order. That, to me, is not a good combination, because we know very well that when businesses don't feel confident about Ontario and its economy, they won't invest here.

We've had examples here in the chamber—places like Kellogg's and Heinz, or, in my own home community of Brockville, Abbott labs, where they chose to invest elsewhere. The companies didn't go bankrupt. They're still making those same products, but the cost of doing business here and their overall unease with our economy made them make a very conscious decision to make those products in another jurisdiction.

I'm worried, I'm very worried, because I see that the confidence in our economy is so low, especially from a group of business people who normally are extremely upbeat, and still remain upbeat about their own ability to succeed in the market. So, you know, Speaker, we've all had a discussion about the mess that Ontario is in, the fact that our debt is approximately \$278 billion. In just five hours that we're here for this afternoon's debate, our debt is going to increase by slightly more than \$6.7 million. It's going to grow by \$32 million today, \$225 million by the end of the week and \$978 million by the end of this month. That's the bad news, but here's what makes it really, really bad: We've doubled the debt in a period where our provincial revenues grew from \$65 billion 10 years ago to \$114 billion today. It's a 75% increase in revenue. So we've got extra revenue, but we're still having this \$11.7-billion hole in the budget that leaves even more debt to be passed on to our children and grandchildren. What's really shocking is that that \$11.7-billion debt is, in fact, higher than the previous year's deficit of \$9.2 billion.

So when I was at that chamber event, I asked the men and women who were there what would happen if they did that in their own business. How many of them would have a job to go back to if that was the playbook that ran their particular small business? We all know that no one—no one—would be able to run a business the way that this government runs their operation. It's just not sustainable.

I also want to look at the issue of the number of minimum wage—I know I only have about a minute left

before we have questions and comments, but there was a study by the Wellesley Institute that was released last October that showed that between 2003 and 2011 the portion of Ontario's workforce earning the minimum wage has more than doubled. So when Dalton McGuinty was elected in 2003, 4.3% of Ontarians were minimum wage earners, and just eight years later, that figure was 9%.

Again, it's just sad that we're in that situation. We had a plan that I thought was an exceptional one, that was reasonable. The other two parties banded together yet again and defeated it. This is a process bill; we're going to support it. But I really believe, and my colleagues agree, that we really have to sit down in a minority Parliament and talk about a jobs plan. This bill is not a jobs plan. Our constituents need relief. They need government to act in their best interests. This bill, while it is a process bill, while all three parties support it, isn't going to fix that fundamental issue with Ontario and the bad management that the Liberal Party has had so far.

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

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I listened intently to the member from Leeds–Grenville, and while he mentioned that, of course, this bill is a process bill—definitely, it is. Good that they are going to support it, I guess. It's really interesting to sometimes hear the members from the PC caucus stand up in this House and talk about what needs to be done when they have essentially allowed two significant opportunities for them to do something about the state of the economy or the health care system—and there are good people in this party who have good, creative ideas. I mean, there are good people in all parties, right? It's just a fact. But what the member from Leeds–Grenville could have said or could have done, actually, in the last budget process was address the hydro rates, which he says is a major barrier to those small businesses, and yet he did nothing. This party has essentially rendered themselves irrelevant in the province of Ontario. All that they do each time when they stand up in this House is they highlight all the problems, and yet they missed two significant opportunities to leverage what power they have in this minority government to actually help the people that they say they care about.

To the million jobs plan—which he talked at length about, not necessarily the bill—we could not support that million jobs plan, because if we supported it just as they did, then two parties would be wrong. Quite honestly, the million jobs plan is essentially following the same path and the same model that the Liberals have been operating on for 11 years, and it has not proven to be successful. So why should we stand up and support it?

1630

It's going to be an interesting debate today. There are a lot of misconceptions around the minimum wage that have been propagated in this House, and I look forward to addressing those at length later on.

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

**Hon. Madeleine Meilleur:** I'm very pleased to speak about Bill 165 and the comments from my esteemed colleague from Leeds–Grenville. I heard about him talking to his community about their concerns.

I'm going to tell you what the concerns are of the workers in my community. There are a lot of civil servants in my community, and do you know what their concern is right now? Losing their job—because their cousins at the federal level are there to clean up. They terminate people left, right and centre. That's the concern in my community.

So I hope they will change their goal. Instead of talking about creating jobs, they are doing away with jobs. The million jobs plan—they are probably going to hire those who were let go by the federal government, and then they will cut their salary in half, so that will help them to create a million jobs.

I think workers and small business want predictability. They want to know how much they will have to pay their workers next year, and they will know in advance because it's going to be according to the cost of living.

I think that we should all be supporting this bill—and we will live in a community.

My family are small business—and do you know what? They wanted to share the wealth. They just don't want them to succeed—but all around them to succeed too.

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

**Mr. Bill Walker:** It's always a pleasure to follow my colleague from Leeds–Grenville. I listened intently, and everything he said I have to concur with.

Just before I get going, I'm going to have to offer a response to the “spend-DP” colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo who went on record saying that we missed two significant opportunities. I would be remiss, Mr. Speaker, if I didn't clarify for the House and for those people listening at home. Two significant opportunities would have been sitting on their hands in the first budget that enabled the Liberals to stay in power—then, the second time, they all rose unanimously, with their hands in the air, and supported them unanimously. Those prop-up parties—“spend-DPers” have no ability to talk to us about significant opportunities to put this government where they need to be.

Mr. Speaker, as my great colleague said, this is a process bill. What we need to be talking more about is less taxes. We're supportive of this bill. We believe in it. But at the end of the day, what we need is less taxes so those people who are on minimum wage have more money to spend on the things they probably care about.

We need lower energy rates. Right now, I have colleagues in my community who are coming to me and saying, “It's great that I'm going to get a few more shekels a week, but at the end of the day, if my energy rates keep doubling and tripling under this current Liberal-NDP government, it doesn't really matter if you give me five bucks more an hour because I'm still not going to be able to keep up.”

Mr. Speaker, less red tape: The small business owners, again, are saying to me, “If we had less red tape, lower energy costs and less taxes, we’d actually have more money to give our employees”—and they’d gladly do that. But at this point, they’re barely keeping up, keeping their businesses afloat.

I think what my colleague was trying to get back to is, there is a million jobs plan that our leader, Tim Hudak, has put on the table, and that we believe we are able to do. Mike Harris’s former government did it. They created more than a million.

It’s interesting that one of the NDP said, “You shouldn’t try to create 1,588,000.” Well, you should talk to the people in my riding. I hope they actually heard that. There are lots of people in my riding still looking for work because this government has run us into the worst deficit and the worst debt situation we’ve ever been in. There are people leaving by the multitudes.

Mr. Speaker, we need to turn the province around, we need to ensure there’s a jobs plan, and we need to lower energy costs, lower taxes and cut the red tape.

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

**Mr. Michael Prue:** I listened intently, as I always do, to my good friend from Leeds–Grenville. We share much in common, being both former mayors. When he speaks, I try to listen. When he speaks and he talks about my colleague from Kenora–Rainy River not understanding the Conservative plan on a million jobs, I can only comment—I wish he was here for me to comment on this—that I’m not surprised she doesn’t understand. Nobody else understands it either, including all of the editorial opinion across this entire province. Everybody has said that this is a plan that is not focused. It is pie in the sky; it’s up in the air. If you don’t understand it, perhaps you do misspeak; I don’t know.

But I’ll tell you who does understand your plans, and that’s your own members. The member from Lanark–Frontenac understands only too well this plan and the right to work for less. He has spoken against it. The member for Durham understands this plan only too well, and the right to work for less. He is on tape speaking against it in front of his fellow Conservatives. The former member from Thornhill understands it only too well, in his parting shots to his own party when he left—that this party does not understand it, and the right to work for less is a really wrong thing to do. Last but not least, that poor guy from Essex who wanted to be a candidate for your party, who had the temerity, the unmitigated gall, to question the leader and say, “This is not a good plan,” the million jobs plan and the right to work for less which is enmeshed in it, got turfed before he even had a chance to run.

Do people understand what you’re talking about? If the member from Kenora–Rainy River doesn’t understand it, that’s one thing. But when your own party members and your own party wannabes don’t understand it, that’s quite another.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** That concludes our questions and comments for this round. I return to the member for Leeds–Grenville.

**Mr. Steve Clark:** I want to thank all my colleagues for their responses and their comments and their questions.

I also want to go back to a comment that I made earlier in my address, and that’s regarding the fact that the number of minimum wage earners in the workforce has doubled under the Liberals in the last eight years. Speaker, that means 464,000 people now earn the minimum wage. One of the disturbing trends beyond the sheer increase is the fact that in 2011, nearly 40% of those minimum wage earners were over the age of 25.

So let’s look at those workers. I’m afraid the prospect of an increase to \$11 an hour this year and the new process that’s going to deal with future increases isn’t going to give cause for great celebration from those 464,000 workers, because, let’s face it, the government is going to cancel out that increase in the increased fees, the increased taxes—heck, just the increase every month in your hydro bill will soon eat up any increase that is given on the minimum wage.

I hear it every day in my constituency office. People are more concerned about the increased fees, taxes, the fact that they’re wondering how they are going to pay that propane bill that has doubled from the time they filled their tank at the start of the winter to now. They’re concerned at how they are going to be able to do home renovations, to fix that roof, to be able to pay that hydro bill consistently, to deal with some of the issues that this government continues to throw at them. That’s the concern.

So let’s hurry up. Let’s get this process bill passed. Let’s move forward with something far more substantive. We really need a jobs plan. These people need some hope that we’re going to be able to provide that relief that they so desperately deserve.

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

**Mr. Michael Prue:** It’s a privilege, again, and always a privilege to stand here and speak about bills being put forward by this government.

This Bill 165—and I’m going to try my very best in 20 minutes to not deviate from discussing this very bill. This bill sets out inflationary increases. It does not set out what constitutes a living wage. It does not mention \$11 an hour. It does not state anything other than that once a year, the wage—whatever it is set at—will rise by that of inflation or CPI.

What it does say, as well, though, which is very troubling to me—and I think all members should read what is contained within the content of this bill—is that if this bill passes, and if we have inflationary increases on whatever the amount is set—and the government has announced that will likely be \$11—if that, in fact, happens, I invite the members to review what is contained here in the bill—it’s a very small bill—on page 3, paragraph 10: “Before October 1, 2020, and every five years



thereafter, the minister shall cause a review of the minimum wage and the process for adjusting the minimum wage to be commenced.”

**1640**

So, if this bill passes, and the government sets the amount of the minimum wage at \$11, which is not contained in the bill, and then there are CPI increases to that \$11, the next time the amount will be considered is 2020—six years from now. Six years from now, we will be looking at whether the \$11 increased by the CPI is sufficient for the people of Ontario.

I start with that because many people in Ontario, quite rightly, have been clamouring for a living wage. Some many months ago, I was one of a lot of MPPs who was approached by people who were advocates, and who were strong, and who felt that it was unfair for ordinary people, who were working, to work 37.5 or 40 hours a week and still find themselves in poverty. In fact, I can think of nothing that anyone could say to justify having someone have a full-time job in this province, work to the best of their abilities, go to work every day, strive to build this community and this province, and come home living under the poverty line. If anybody here thinks that that's a good thing, please stand up and say it. Because it makes no economic or moral sense at all that people should have a full-time job and find themselves living under the poverty line.

When they stuck a piece of paper under my nose and said, “Would you support \$14 an hour?”—I'm not going to hide away, in spite of all of the things that have been said and happened in this House—I signed it, because I think that anyone who works hard should live above the poverty line. What is the poverty line in Ontario? In Ontario, the poverty line is about \$23,000 for a single person living in a major metropolitan area. Everybody in Ontario doesn't live in a major metropolitan area, but the majority of people who are employed do. That \$23,000 is not a lot of money on which to live. If you live in a place like Toronto, you know that you're going to need at least \$1,000 a month for rent, even for a small one-bedroom apartment. If you live in a smaller city, it might only be \$800 or \$900, but you're still going to need that money. You're going to need money for clothing, transportation, food, and everything else, and that amount makes it up to about \$23,000 a year. That's the absolute minimum, or else you are living in poverty.

What does this bill do? The bill does not set out how much the minimum wage is going to be. That is contained in another body. The other body of information, which I got off the website—because it's not contained in the bill—sets out how much money a person will earn in Ontario. We've heard a lot about \$11 over the last few days, but what we haven't heard about is all of the other monies that other people are going to make. The general minimum wage is going, according to this, from \$10.25 to \$11 an hour. The student minimum wage is going from \$9.60 an hour to \$10.30 an hour. The liquor server's minimum wage is going from \$8.90 an hour to \$9.55 an hour. The hunting and fishing guide's minimum wage is

going from \$51.25 for the first five hours worked, or less, to—excuse me; from \$51.25 to \$55, and if you work all day, consecutive—for more than five hours, it's going from \$102.50 to \$110.

Last but not least, the homemaker's wage is going from \$11.28 an hour to \$12.10 an hour.

Now, I don't want people to think that a homemaker is a homemaker, because a homemaker is anyone who works in their home. A lot of these people answer calls for companies. If somebody phones up and wants to hire a plumber, it rings over to the house of someone else, who answers it, and that's what a homemaker does. Or it's women, primarily women, who work in—it's not sweatshop labour, because they're working in their own house, but they sew clothes for manufacturers, so that the manufacturer doesn't have to pay the costs of having a factory. That's what a homemaker is.

These wages are all pretty poor; they're all pretty poor. All of those wages under this bill are going to go up by the huge sum of the CPI. This year, the CPI will be approximately 1%. That means when the CPI comes into effect, as a result of this bill, if the government's motion is to have \$11, they'll go up to \$11.10. The next year, if it remains at 1%, and there's every indication that inflation is not increasing at all, it will go up to \$11.21.

Now, when you take these factors and you look at this amount of money that, again, is not in the bill, you will see that people who earn this wage will continue to live in poverty. Do some calculations—and I'm glad that the minister is here. Do some calculations: At a 37.5-hour week, which is the industry average in Ontario—most people work plus or minus an hour or two, one side or the other of that—at \$10.25 today, people on a 52-week year, if they work 37.5 hours for all 52 weeks of the year, earn \$19,987.76. That's how much they make, which brings them \$4,000 under the poverty line.

The government's largesse, raising it up to \$11 an hour, takes it up to \$412.50 a week. For 52 weeks, it's \$21,450 a year, about \$2,000 under the poverty line.

If it were to be \$12—which some people on the other side are very critical of the NDP for saying we'd like to move to, over a two-year period—that amount of money will result, in two more years, in \$23,400, which is about \$400 over the poverty line. That's the escape. That's the place at which you escape poverty: not at \$11 and not with a CPI of 1% a year. You escape poverty when you reach over \$23,000 if you are a single individual.

Now, you're still going to be in poverty if you're a single mother with one or two kids—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** No child care.

**Mr. Michael Prue:** —with no child care, and all of the inherent difficulties that come with that. You're still going to be in poverty. You're going to be in worse poverty at \$10.25, and maybe slightly better poverty at \$11. Even at \$12, it's going to be very hard to escape, but at least we can say that a single individual with no children has a gleam and a hope if they can somehow get to that \$12 range and escape poverty in the province of Ontario.

Why is poverty such a big thing to me? It's a big thing to me because—you've heard this before, and I probably will say this until the day I die—I'm from Regent Park. I saw enough poverty in my young life to last a lifetime. I saw enough poverty, not necessarily from my family, but in all the people who lived around us who had menial jobs or no jobs, who struggled daily. They weren't all on some kind of assistance. Most of them were working poor, and they worked as hard as they could with the skills and abilities that they had, and they never seemed to be able to get ahead.

1650

To me, it is absolutely essential that we take the time to determine how to help people escape that. Most of these people can work. Most of these people would die to have a job that paid \$12 an hour so that they could pay their own way and they could make it. The NDP welcomes indexing, but you cannot index at a poverty level, because all that is going to happen if you index poverty is you are going to continue poverty, and that's the reality. If you index \$11 till the year 2020, as this bill will allow, people will be in the same poverty circumstance in 2020 as they are today, and nothing, but nothing, will change.

That's why we had a struggle with this. We wanted to find a solution. We wanted to have people escape from poverty. We have suggested—and some would say it's timid; some would say the NDP could have said some more. But I will tell you that if you raise it from \$11 to \$11.50 next year, and raise it the year after to \$12 and then cap it at the CPI, you will have people until 2020 who do not live in poverty. If you do it the way the government is suggesting it, then you are entrenching and enshrining poverty for the next six years.

What can we do? Can we support a bill that's going to do that? I think not very easily. Can we say it's a slight improvement upon \$10.25 an hour? Yes, we can. But are we going to be able to stand there and hold our heads high and say, "We did something to eradicate poverty in Ontario"? I don't think that this bill is the tool to do that.

Mr. Speaker, we are mindful in the NDP of the effects that raising the minimum wage too fast may have on small business. That's why we talked specifically about offsetting the cost to small business by a reduction in the small business tax in 2014 from 4.5% down to 4%, in 2015 from 4% down to 3.5% and in 2016 from 3.5% down to 3%. This is not a radical idea. The province of Manitoba and its NDP government have gotten rid of the small business tax altogether and totally. It is an amount of money that will save small business about \$90 million with which to pay their employees a better wage.

We know that small businesses, by and large, try to pay their employees more than the minimum wage. In fact, some of the very best employers in this province are small business people. But they need some help. On the other hand, does big business need this? Does big business need to pay poverty wages? I ask you, when you go in to shop at a place like Walmart, when you go in to have a hamburger at McDonald's, where the people working behind those counters earn minimum wage—do

they need any kind of financial assistance from us? I think not. I'm not worried about those, but I am worried about the people who work there. I am worried about the people who, when they get a job, are also given a list of the nearest food banks, because those corporations know that the wages they pay cannot sustain the individual, particularly, often, when they do not work 37.5 or 40 hours a week. Those businesses often do that.

I'm also mindful of the farmers of Ontario, and I consider them to be small business. I'm mindful of the fact that we have in this province a policy and a belief that Ontarians should eat Ontario food that is grown here. Not only is it safer, not only is it more nutritious, not only do we know how it is grown, not only does it provide jobs, not only is it what we need to do for our own food security, but it is simply the right thing to do.

Now, when the farmers came before the budget deliberations to the finance committee, they were very, very clear that a rise in the minimum wage needed to be offset in order for them to afford it. I heard them loud and clear—loud and clear. They compete, not with other farmers in Ontario, but with the foodstuffs that the people of Ontario buy from all over the world, primarily from California, Arizona, Mexico, Chile and South Africa. Go to your food shelves in your store and you'll see where these come from. The wage that is paid in California, Arizona and New Mexico, where a lot of our food comes from, is about \$7 an hour. It is very difficult for the farmers of Ontario to pay increased wages and still be able to be competitive with the farmers south of the border. So I understand, and the NDP understands, that as small business people, the farmers need some kind of offset if they are to pay a living and decent wage here in Ontario.

I'm also mindful of the fact, in this government's own wage bill, that farm workers pay up to \$100 or more a week to live in the farmers' barracks, eating the farmers' food, so it's a pretty hard life. It's a pretty hard life they have, and it would be a lot better for many of them if they had sufficient money for themselves and to send home to their families or, if their families are with them, to make sure that those kids actually had a chance.

The NDP also believes that—and part of what we put forward was—there are monies that could be offset from other places. Maybe I'm going to deviate just a fraction here. There are monies that can come from other places: the salaries of management and bonuses. My God, CEOs' salaries are horrendous in this province, and we keep waiting and asking how something can be done to offset that. Surely, some of the monies the government saves can be put towards helping small business people. The tax avoidance of \$2.4 billion that is outstanding from the last tax year that has not been paid to the province of Ontario because there aren't the people to collect it anymore—we sent them all to Ottawa, and then Ottawa laid them off—or the people who send their money offshore: We need as a government to start looking at how to collect that money.

We need also to close up the planned loopholes that will come back in 2017 so that corporations don't pay HST on luxury items like skybox tickets or gasoline or restaurant meals. You know, when I fill up my car, I pay HST. When I go to the restaurant, I pay HST. If I'm ever lucky enough to get a ticket to a major league professional game, which run into the hundreds of dollars per ticket in this city, then I pay the HST. And if I as an individual have to pay it, why don't the corporations have to pay it? That amounts to \$1.2 billion that can go to help small business people, to help the poor.

To close up, I think that we need to do much more. We can do much more. We can help people. We can help the servers in this province as well by passing Bill 49, because the servers should be allowed to keep their tips, because even under this bill, they're still going to be making 75 cents less than the general minimum wage. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Bill Mauro:** I want to thank the member from Beaches–East York for his comments. I thought they were fair and balanced, as is usually his approach. But there was a piece there that I would like to comment on, and that was the part of his remarks that referred to the minimum wage in connection to poverty and the minimum wage in terms of bringing people beyond the poverty level. When I talk to people in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan about this issue, and it's about minimum wage and poverty, I remind them that the minimum wage and the action that we've taken as a government, from \$6.85 to \$10.25 to \$11, is not the only thing that we've done when it comes to poverty reduction in the province of Ontario.

1700

So I think that if we're going to link these two—and they are inextricably linked, poverty and minimum wage—it would be important in our conversations if we included for people the working poor, the totality of what's been brought into the Legislature over the last 10 years when it comes to supporting people, the working poor, and those living in poverty.

There are a long series of tax credits that have been put in place, many of which are focused on the working poor in Ontario, which provide significant relief for them when it comes to their household family income. There are at least four or five, off the top of my head: the Northern Ontario Energy Credit, the Ontario Clean Energy Benefit, the Ontario Energy and Property Tax Credit, and the child tax benefit that's going up by, I think, \$100 this year, I believe.

There are issues like full-day kindergarten that provide daycare for people who maybe didn't have it before. We reduced the personal income tax by 1% on the first \$37,000 of income years ago, and we removed 90,000 people off the tax rolls completely.

So I thought his comments were fair and balanced, but I would only say that there is a lot more that needs to be

brought to the discussion when we're talking about poverty and minimum wage.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** It's always a privilege to follow my colleague from Beaches–East York. I always find him a very entertaining speaker, normally. He brings up lots of good points, normally fairly balanced.

In this case, he kind of confused me. Maybe I misheard some of his points, but I'll try to offer what I thought I heard him saying. At one point he made a comment, although he was talking about those who are under the poverty level, that big businesses do not need support. But my understanding is that the NDP are pushing very hard for Chrysler to get an \$800-million grant—incentive, subsidy, whatever you want to call it. So I'm not certain how that really balances out with those people who are in the lower incomes or the middle incomes, particularly. I'm not certain how you expect those low- and middle-income earners to subsidize this, especially after enabling the Liberal government, with those votes that they made in the past in the budgets, to triple our energy sector costs in the last four, five or six years. So I'm getting a little struggling there.

He talked about how farmers can't afford increased wages, and yet the farmers, the fruit growers and the nursery industries, particularly in the southern part of the province, are going to be hardest hit by some of these measures. We've, again, stood on principle and said, "Why don't you cut some of the other things, those direct costs to those manufacturers, to those farmers, to those fruit growers, such as energy and taxes and red tape? That would actually give people a lot more money. They'd be able to provide more in their wages if they so chose, rather than being forced."

There are significant increases coming to all of these small business people because of the Liberal government's mismanagement, the boondoggles we've had, the billion-dollar waste of the gas plants. They've doubled the deficit. They've doubled the debt. And this "spend-DP" party has actually enabled them to do all of that. So I was just a little concerned when I heard some of those.

You can't have it both ways. You can't continually talk and say, "Bad big business, but we'd like to give you \$800 million. We want to reach out and help the poor, but we keep voting to actually add on to your tax burden and to your energy costs, those significant energy costs, and to your red tape burden."

These small businesses are relenting—I have small business people in my riding. They're basically at the breaking point and can't handle any more of this NDP-Liberal government.

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

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** It's always a pleasure, actually, to comment on the member from Beaches–East York. He brings certainly a new level of understanding and, of course, some facts, and facts are always good for a debate, I think. The stats that he actually brought to this

discussion are very helpful, and he clearly outlined what our strategy is as a party. Some people may have thought it took us a little while to get there, but considering that we were already at \$11 in 2011, I think we landed in the right place and I think it's a good balance.

I like the fact that he brought the farmers into this debate, because they are small business men and women and they made a very compelling case for a balanced approach when we talk about the minimum wage. We have certainly, I think, come to the table in a respectful dialogue with the farmers of this province.

I like the fact that he mentioned child care as a factor in the entire equation on poverty reduction, but child care is also an economic development driver. For every \$1 you invest in child care, the return on investment is anywhere from \$3 to \$7, depending on the model. A preferred model for me, personally, is the not-for-profit, because those funds then directly go towards quality and also to wages.

You won't hear any of these comments coming from the Conservative caucus.

The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound started off his comments by saying that he was confused by this debate. It must be frustrating to be a member of the PC caucus, to be so squarely on the sidelines, screeching. Honestly, it must be frustrating, because having not participated in this Legislature, they sort of absconded their responsibility as a whole. So not only are they confused; they're almost entirely irrelevant.

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

**Hon. Yasir Naqvi:** I want to thank the member from Beaches–East York. I listened intently to the points he was making. I'll talk about three points. One is a point of clarification on a point he raised—and two, where I found his comments a little perplexing because his words do not match the actions of his party and his caucus, and I wanted to highlight that for him as well.

As to his point about review, I think Bill 165 is very clear that every five years there will be a review of the minimum wage and the manner in which the minimum wage is determined. I see the wording as fairly clear, so I'm not sure where his confusion is coming from, and I'll be more than happy to speak with him in that regard.

The second point I want to make, Speaker, is that at \$11 an hour—which will be starting June 1, and it will go up every year as the cost of living goes up—a single mom or a single person working full-time will be living above the minimum wage, after taxes. What the honourable member forgot to mention is that we have a lot of tax credits, not to mention a very low income tax rate, for those who are on low income, that helps them move off the poverty line. So you cannot just look at the whole number, as you did the math, and not look at all the tax implications and the tax benefits that are in place for those who are on low income.

The last point I will raise is, he talked about corporate tax for large companies, but it was his party, last Wednesday, that voted, along with the Conservatives, to

keep corporate tax rates as is. I find that very confusing. It was his party's position that corporate tax rates are competitive in Ontario. In fact, the member from Kitchener–Waterloo tweeted as such, which came as a surprise to me—to be the NDP's official policy. So there is a divide in the words the members speak and the actions of the caucus, and clarification would be nice in that regard.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** We now return to the member for Beaches–East York for his reply.

**Mr. Michael Prue:** I thank my colleagues from Thunder Bay, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, Kitchener–Waterloo and the Minister of Labour for the comments that they have brought to this debate.

To my friend from Thunder Bay–Atikokan: I would agree, there are benefits out there, within the tax system and within government programs. Unfortunately, they don't hit every single individual. For some of them, you must have children. For some of them, you must live in the north. For some of them, you must be over 65. For some of them, you must be disabled. Not everybody hits this category. That's why a minimum wage for the general, broad group is the surest way of taking them out of poverty.

To the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound: I don't know what he's talking about—\$800 to Chrysler—and those were his exact words.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Eight hundred million.

**Mr. Michael Prue:** Now he's saying \$800 million. But he did say \$800. I think I better understand what he's trying to say now. I don't know whether anything has come of that. I know that there are some discussions, and perhaps there need to be some discussions on the issue.

He calls us the "Spend-DP." I would remind him that the party with the best record in Canada of sustained and long-term balanced budgets is not the Conservatives; it is the NDP. The NDP has shown the way across this country, be it in Saskatchewan, in Manitoba, or British Columbia, of doing precisely that, and maybe he just doesn't like that fact.

To the member from Kitchener–Waterloo: Thank you, as always, for your kindness. Yes, I do try to include farmers in small business because they are the backbone.

Finally, to the Minister of Labour: I see very clearly what 2020 says in that legislation. Six years until this is going to be reviewed, whether it's good, bad or indifferent—six years.

He said "above the minimum wage." I think he was trying to say "above the poverty line." I'm not sure. But he did say "above the minimum wage."

Last but not least, I speak for the people of Beaches–East York, I speak in caucus as I see fit, and I make the caucus move.

1710

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

**Mr. Bill Walker:** It's my pleasure today, Mr. Speaker, to speak to Bill 165, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to the minimum wage.

I think, again, our critic started off today by saying we will be supporting it. I think at least those businesses who are in favour want to know predictability. Tying it to the consumer price index will certainly at least give them some sense of what's coming, unlike the doubling and tripling of energy rates that we've experienced under this Liberal regime that no one saw coming—they certainly didn't advertise that very well—or the doubling of the debt and the costs that we're carrying there.

I wonder if the people at home understand that we're actually spending \$10.3 billion per year to service our debt. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine how much we could impact the minimum wage levels if we weren't spending \$10.3 billion just servicing the debt? Can you imagine how many people we could help out in long-term-care homes, how many people could actually get their hip surgeries and their cataract surgeries and physiotherapy? That young lady, Madi, who was in here today: We could probably be paying for that—well, we should be paying for that drug anyway, Mr. Speaker. It was reprehensible this morning, the Premier saying that they cannot do it. Other provinces are doing it. They've been able to negotiate the Green Energy Act with the stroke of a pen, they've been able to wipe out gas plants at the cost of \$1.1 billion with the stroke of a pen, but they can't find money for a little girl, to be able to give her the health that she deserves? Mr. Speaker, it's reprehensible.

But I'll get back to the bill at this point. What we believe is that we need to change the whole economic channel so there is vibrancy in our province, there are lots of jobs, and people will be able to provide more jobs, and beyond those minimum wage levels. If we set that table well, Mr. Speaker, we'll have businesses that actually want to come to Ontario. We'll have businesses that want to stay in Ontario, and, God forbid, we'll have some entrepreneurs who actually might want to start a business in Ontario rather than going to Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta, BC or even the eastern provinces.

We need to, as government, set the confines. We need to set the framework, through policy, to engage people and to allow them to run businesses. We don't need to run business, like some of the other parties, the spend-DPers and the Liberals, who think that every job created should be a government job. We believe that free enterprise is where we need to be going. We can set the stage. Like this bill, we can set some of the parameters that allow businesses to actually want to move to that.

We need a resurgence of good-paying jobs in this province. We need people to actually want to stay here. My fear right now is that a lot of the young people, those pages sitting in front of you who are serving us so greatly here in the House every day, are not going to have opportunities here, so they may have to leave, whether they want to or not. Again, that comes back to creating that opportunity.

This increase is not going to lift people out of poverty, and again, this bill doesn't even really allow the job dollar value to change. What it's really saying is we'll set

the process in motion. I believe my colleague from Leeds–Grenville very explicitly pointed that out and clarified it. This bill is only saying this is what we will do process-wise. It's actually not even giving them the increase that lots of people are already thinking.

At \$11 per hour, your take-home wages will be no more than what they were in 2010 after inflation. If you compound that by the increased hydro fees, you increase that by the income taxes, you increase that by all the red tape and bureaucracy that people have to do, the filling out of forms, people are really falling backwards. It's a sad, sad state when we are the laggards, that we're sitting there with our hand out to the federal government. We used to be the proud engine of Confederation. Under this Liberal-NDP regime over the last eight to 10 years, we're now at the back of the bus. We're at the back of the train with our hand out, saying, "Please give us more." That's not who we want to be. We're very proud in this province and we want to be the leader again, and we will be the leader again at some point down the road.

This government—again, I can't get over it. Every day in my constituency office, as with my colleagues here, people are phoning, emailing, dropping in to my office. They're pleading with us to turn around this energy sector; they're pleading with us to get the cost—because that isn't something that's willy-nilly. You can't just put on a sweater, you can't just go out and have a cup of coffee, and expect all of your ills of coldness, particularly in the extreme cold weather we've had over the last month, really, to just lay down and say, "Oh, that's okay; it's all good." There are people out there who are actually making decisions like, "Do I put the heat on or do I feed my family?" Totally unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. We need to get back to the basics. We need to understand what we're doing as a government in setting that up.

We now hear that there's a gas tax potentially of 10 cents a litre coming at us. Again, those people who are most challenged, those people who are less fortunate than most, how are they going to do that? How are they going to put more 10-cents-per-litre increased costs into their gas to get to their job, Mr. Speaker? So there are lots of things that we're doing.

Close to home, in my great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, people are very, very wary. They're still in a critical phase of our economic recovery. I have a colleague—in fact, a dear family friend—Leanne from Hepworth, proprietor of Allan's convenience store. She's the proprietor there. She employs a small number of people. What she said to me when she heard about this legislation coming out was, "You know what, Bill? I'm probably going to have to give all of my staff less hours per week now. I'm already working 60 to 70 hours. My workload's going to go up to 80, 90, maybe 100 hours a week." Now, why would you ever want to do that? Who could continue to sustain that, Mr. Speaker?

It's not, again, that we're necessarily opposed to a level of living, but there are other ways that we can skin this cat. There are other ways that we can do better policy to allow those people out there that are at the lower

fringes in the economic ability to earn wages to be helped.

Again, I come back a number of times to lowering those things that people don't have control over: things like your energy bill, things like your gas tax—10 cents on a litre of gas. People fume over that out there.

The Retail Council of Canada is recommending the same predictable, transparent and fair process for determining Ontario's minimum wage. To do otherwise would have adverse effects on employment levels, particularly among youth and in Ontario's retail, hospitality and leisure sectors.

So, yes, we do support the bill from that perspective, but we can't lose sight. What this government is very good at doing is introducing legislation that just shifts the thought process from the public. They play this spin-and-run game, and they get people thinking about other things. They get people off the topic of: How are you feeling today versus 10 years ago? Do you have more money in your back pocket? Are you able to actually spend on the things you wish, or are you going backwards? Is our health care system in better shape than it was 10 years ago? I think not.

Just a couple of weeks ago, I had two people—seniors in my riding—who were scheduled to have hip surgery. They got a call all of a sudden that the hospital was out of money. They were out of money, so your surgery that you've now been waiting six, eight, 10 months for—maybe a year or more, in some cases—has been cancelled.

I believe my colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry—his Winchester hospital just took a huge hit. How many people are going to be out of work there, Mr. Jimmy McDonell?

**Mr. Jim McDonell:** Well, we lost 3,600 jobs—

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Some 3,600 jobs. But in your hospital alone, you're having another big hit.

**Mr. Jim McDonell:** Another nine people.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Another nine nurse front-line workers.

My colleague Deputy Leader Christine Elliott brought in a thought that we want to challenge the government again on CCACs. Forty cents on every dollar there, we're told, goes to administration and wages, not anywhere close to the front line of care.

This minimum wage is just one way for them to change the channel. They're trying to move people's thought process from what's really happening. They're taking them away from the doubling and tripling of energy rates. They're taking them away from the debt financing that we're paying. They're taking them away from a deficit that this year alone is going to be \$12 billion, and next year they're already predicting it will be \$15 billion. That's \$15 billion in times when we've had record revenues coming into our province.

We're still collecting more, partly because the Liberal government, over their 10-year tenure, has said, "We will not raise your taxes," but the first thing they did is they brought in the health tax, as I recall. I hope the people of

Ontario remember that when it comes back to whenever we get to that election ballot box. That certainly was one of those things—you can do a lot of things, but, at the end of the day, you have to go home, and you have to be able to look in the mirror and say, "Did I do what I said I would do?"

I believe there was a Premier on that side of the House who said in the election, very blatantly, "I will not raise your taxes." The first piece of legislation was the health tax. We will not do that; it's reprehensible. At the very least, that money should have been going back into the health care system to allow it to expand and grow and provide the services to the people paying the freight, not taking it away from them. There are a number of ills under this government that, again, we have major concern with.

In 2003, under the PC government, 3.5% of Ontario workers were on minimum wage. Under the McGuinty-Wynne Liberals, propped up by the spend-DP party, the percentage almost tripled to 9% in 2013. Now, one of the honourable members across the hall was talking about all the wonderful increases. There's an increase that I hope they're not proud of. Similarly, they shouldn't be proud of their increase in doubling the debt, Mr. Speaker. They shouldn't be proud of increasing the cost of hydro two and three and four times. They shouldn't be proud of increasing the debt load—double—in their eight- to 10-year term.

Our economy has barely grown since the Liberals first came into office. They're going to blame it on the recession. They're going to blame it on, probably, Stephen Harper. They definitely will go back to Mike Harris—and who knows beyond that what they'll try to find?—rather than stepping up and saying, "We've made a boondoggle of this. We wasted a billion dollars on gas plants. We wasted a billion dollars on eHealth. We have the Ornge fiasco."

**1720**

There are a lot of things here that we need to be looking at, and this bill, while it serves a purpose, is certainly not going to be doing a lot of that.

Electricity rates, just in their tenure alone, have gone from 4.3 cents per hour to 12.9 cents per hour. That's basically tripled. Now, how are these people that are on minimum wage and expect more minimum wage going to ever comprehend how they are going to keep up with an energy bill when they are going up within the modest increase that has been proposed? It's a great step, and I'm sure it gives them at least a glimmer that they're going to have a few more shekels in their back pocket, but not with things like energy, which you have no control over, which you have to use in temperatures like this or in our summertime.

The debt-to-GDP, when the Liberals came to power, was 27%; it's now 37%. There's another increase. If you're getting my drift here, I think there's a lot of increases. They are not going into customer service as far as patients in a hospital. They're not giving more people low-income housing that they need. They are not al-

lowing more kids to get into college. In fact, I believe there was a group here last week lobbying against the Liberals because, again, a promise was made: “We will give you your tuition back, 30%.” They’re telling us, again, “No cheque in the mail.” So there’s a lot of things here that we really need to be getting the focus of people in Ontario back to.

Talking about minimum wage, and particularly this bill, which really only sets the table to allow minimum-wage increases to come in—it’s not saying that a new minimum wage is coming in tomorrow. It’s a process bill. It’s saying that every couple of years, we’ll review it. We’ll go through the CPI and we’ll appoint, probably, another panel, I would guess. At some point, they’ll have some special panel, they’ll create some big report to spend \$60,000, \$80,000 or \$100,000 to not listen to, and then they’ll come back and tell us that they may review it again. I think we’ve seen that with the Drummond report. Don Drummond, a very impressive, credentialed man who they hand-picked, I think, brought us a report called—

**Mrs. Gila Martow:** The Drummond report.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Yeah, that’s it: the Drummond report. But they pecked away at all the little weaselly things that they could do there, the tweaking-on-the-fringes type of thing.

**Hon. Ted McMeekin:** Have you read it?

**Mr. Bill Walker:** The minister—I’d like to talk about social services. I know it’s your week, but could you just allow me to have my time? Thank you.

Just think of the social services that we could be providing if we weren’t spending \$10.3 billion on the deficit, Mr. Minister of Social Services. Think of the people under your direction, how many more people could be being helped, Mr. Minister, if you weren’t over there spending more money than you bring in every year, if you actually put plans into action that would give more money back to the people who actually pay the freight.

Mr. Speaker, as I say, we’re going to support this bill. My critic from Middlesex has already said that. He’s done a good job of this bill. But there are just so many pressing things. I mean, I look at my notes, and there’s just so many things on here, I don’t even know if I can get into them unless you give me another 20 minutes. There’s so many things that need to be repaired.

Not a chance of that, eh, Mr. Speaker? Well, I tried.

Bill 19, the WSIB, the tax on businesses—I talked to a contractor the other day. I was at a benefit, bowling for Big Brothers Big Sisters, and this gentleman said to me that that \$2-an-hour impact to him, he had to eat for six months. And the insurance didn’t even cover him fully.

They’ve once again done that. They brought in the College of Trades. They’ve taken a fee there that was \$60 for three years, and they have increased that now to \$120 per year plus HST. They’ve gone out to a multitude of people and they are actually threatening to take their licence away if they don’t pay this fee. Most of them are saying to me, “What value do I get for it, MPP Walker?

What am I getting for all that increased taxation? I’m getting less and less and less.”

It has to stop at some point. The businesses, when I’m out talking to them—and this is virtually every business person that I talk to—are telling me exactly what I’ve been trying to say, Mr. Speaker, through you to the House and to those at home listening. They want to see taxes reduced and simplified. They want to make sure that the energy rates are definitely decreased, because that’s driving big companies and small companies out of this province at warp speed. The only job creation that I believe is happening in Ontario right now is with moving companies, and that’s moving all these people from here to the west, from here to the United States.

By the way, I’m not certain that people at home know, but this Liberal government, supported by the NDP, actually spent half a billion dollars last year, and they didn’t give power to the United States and Quebec, to our direct competitors; they actually paid them to take half a billion dollars’ worth of money to work against us. Our biggest consumer of power out there, Xstrata Copper, actually shut down their mine because Quebec came across the border and offered them a 50% less rate. So they knock down the factory; they move 670 families over there. We lose our biggest consumer; we lose 670 families contributing to this great economy of Ontario. And we lost the ability of that long-term need to be there forever. That’s just one small example.

We’ve got all those businesses that have been closing in the last little while—Kellogg’s, just to name one. It’s just crazy. Again, this government stands up with platitudes, but they never say, “You know what? We’re actually going to address this. We’re going to take action and change things around.” Today, I’m here on behalf of businesses that are going to employ those people, that are actually going to pay wages more than the minimum wage.

Most of the self-employed business people I know are quite happy to pay—if they have the ability, because they’re not spending so much money on the burden of red tape, spending it on energy bills, spending it on increased taxes. They are happy to give it to their workers. Who creates the value of the product and the service if it’s not those great workers? And how do you motivate them? You give them more money. But when this government has their hand in your pocket every time you turn around, more and more and more, you don’t have the ability because most of those small businesses that I’m speaking of are running on a shoestring. They’re getting to the point of saying, “Why am I even doing this? You’re going to increase my workload now from 60 hours a week to 70 or 80. Am I really going to stick with this or am I just going to pack up and move somewhere else?”

Mr. Speaker, we need to remove a lot of these burdens and put the environment back where businesses actually want to remain in Ontario. We want businesses to expand and hire more people in Ontario. We want businesses from outside that haven’t even thought about it to come

here. I believe it was our finance critic the other day who said that we're actually having big companies, small companies—any company—bypass Ontario and say, "Why would I even look at Ontario?" We should be the most attractive province to come to in this great Confederation. We always had been until this government took control, with the help of our friends to the left, the NDP. We know what happened under that regime in the Bob Rae days. I'm not certain we ever did recover from that. Surely to goodness, for the sake of my kids and, hopefully someday, grandkids, we never, ever try that again.

I'm having to struggle here with some of the things we're talking about. The Minister of Finance—some are referring to him as the minister of debt—believes they're on the right track. What they're doing is changing the channel: "We'll do some of this type of legislation." They're trying to confuse the public. They're trying to change the channel and get us away from talking about the things that I just brought in: the College of Trades and the new trades tax; rising power rates; higher WSIB premiums; and unsustainable salary and benefit increases in the broader public service. At the end of the day, you wonder where we're going to go with all of this.

Most recently, a study by Meridian Credit Union found that 75% of Ontario's small business owners have no plans to hire next year. That's a sad state of affairs. Between 600,000 to one million people out of work, and 75% of our small businesses—they truly are the heartbeat of our economy. The small, little businesses, like they are in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, are the people who are going to drive our economy. They're the people who are going to ensure that we are the leaders again someday. But when 75% of them are starting to worry because of all the things that I've been laying out here today, it's sad. It really causes me grave concern, particularly for those young people in our next generation.

Some 90% are not expanding, nor are they planning to open another location. Actually, 15%—and I trust that's a low number, given what's happened recently, and probably doesn't include some of those businesses that have already left in the last couple of months.

Mr. Speaker, we need to fundamentally change our approach. We need to get back to a government that sets the ground rules for a thriving economy, allows us to actually create jobs. My leader, Tim Hudak, brought in the Million Jobs Act, which both the Liberals and the NDP voted against. I'm not certain why you would vote against anybody who has a plan to create jobs when you have a million people out of work.

As I've said, we need to create the environment. We need to repatriate companies, to return them to Ontario. Those that have left will come back if we set the table properly, if we create conditions that are inviting, if we create them to ensure that we engage existing businesses to expand, to engage new entrepreneurs to start a business. We need a sign out front that Ontario is open for business. The PCs of Ontario have that sign ready to roll. It will be blue and white: Ontario is open for business. But to do that, we have to get our energy rates down. We

have to ensure that we decrease taxes and we're not coming out with yet another gas tax or health tax, any boondoggle tax or an eHealth tax or an Ornge helicopter tax, because those are all—when you waste a billion dollars on something like a gas plant, just think of those less fortunate people who we're not helping. Think of the \$10.3 billion we're spending on interest payments that is not going to the front lines of our hospitals. They're not creating the innovative schools that we could certainly have if we had that money. We're not attracting new apprentices or skilled trades people, which we could if we had \$10 billion to invest, as opposed to spending and giving it to foreign conglomerates on interest payments.

I will not stand here and be lectured by the Minister of Social Services on anything until he turns his ship around and puts his money where his mouth is for those people on social services who require them, because every day they come into my office, Honourable Minister, asking where mental health services are, where social services are.

**1730**

So, Mr. Speaker, let's lower the energy rates, let's take out the red tape, let's actually put a jobs plan on the table and, at the end of the day, let's open up Ontario to business again. Let's make sure that these young men and women have hope, have pride and want to stay here in our great community, in our great province. The leader of Confederation will come again under a PC banner; I guarantee it.

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

**Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong:** It's always—I don't know what word to describe it. Listening to the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound—

*Interjection.*

**Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong:** No, I wouldn't say that. I'd never say that.

But of all the words and phrases and sentences and ideas that this member had, not once did we hear what their plan is for minimum wage. He skirted around all kinds of issues. He talked about a lot of issues in 20 minutes. He must have a really good memory bank for everything he brought up, so I commend him for that. But there is no plan for the minimum wage. What is the PCs' position on minimum wage? Because I'm waiting with bated breath to hear what that is.

The Liberals pushed us: "We need to know your plan. We want to hear what the NDP has to say." And when we gave our plan, we came out with a very measured, responsible response to minimum wage and to what people are facing, because families today—and we've all heard it across this House, that people are feeling squeezed. That's a really good word; they're being squeezed in everyday life in order to pay their bills.

I had someone email our office just recently about the hydro bill. He has five children. One of his children is autistic. His wife works weekends, and he works during the week and overtime as often as he can to try to make ends meet. Here's the clincher, Speaker, and we were



talking about hydro bills: He has been late several times over the last year on paying his hydro bill. The hydro company wants him to pay a \$600 deposit because he has been late, and he has probably been late because of affordability. Things are going up every day. People can't afford to make ends meet.

We need to make sure that we get responsible about the minimum wage, and that hasn't been coming from the Progressive Conservatives.

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

**Hon. Ted McMeekin:** I'm pleased to respond to the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. I don't know what planet he's from, but he certainly made quite an impression on me. By the way, we don't intend to take any lectures from a member of that party which, when they were in government, decided they were going to balance the budget on the backs of the poor with their 23% cuts to OW and ODSP, and which downloaded everything onto municipalities and walked away from all of their responsibilities. Maybe you're too young to have any historical perspective—I don't know—but you need to think about that.

By the way, Nathan Stevens of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario said just last week that this proposed \$11 minimum wage is "fair for businesses and fair for workers." So you might want to dwell on that, too.

I learned recently that the federal finance minister, in a meeting with the finance ministers of the various provinces, complimented Ontario for creating more jobs in this province than all the other provinces in Canada together. He also complimented us for being the only provincial government in Canada that met their deficit reduction four years in a row and was leading the country in innovation. Now, that was right before he announced an arbitrary \$1.4-billion cut in transfer payments, so I'm not sure just where he's coming from either.

But the minimum wage at \$11, just for your information, member opposite—someone working 35 hours is now at 98% of the low-income measure on the poverty front. At 37, they're at 103%, and at 40, they're at 107%. I know the member opposite would want to know that.

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

**Mr. Jim McDonell:** It's always great to get up and reply to our great member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, who gets a few words in over his 20 minutes. It's hard to keep up with. There are so many good ideas out there that it's unfortunate the other side doesn't want to listen.

Last night, I was down at the mining convention down in Toronto, and we had a chance to meet with a number of students—great education, U of T, McGill University. The problem was, there were no jobs, and they were trying to look for jobs in all areas but the mining sector, which used to be a leader in this province. But between them and the different people who are working in the industry, who were talking about—in Ontario we've fall-

en down; there's no direction on the Ring of Fire. They're waiting, they're hoping—actually, they're hoping for a change of government so they get something going.

But it's that same old story. They're tired of listening to panels. It's time to get out and take action and time to get a huge project that could be our equivalent of the oil sands in Alberta.

If we go back to students, I talked to my son, who couldn't get a job in Ontario and went out to work in Alberta. After a year, he came back on vacation and he came to Toronto, where you'd think, with almost half the population, there would be good jobs here. He met with some of his friends, who were still looking for jobs. These are engineering students. We try to push people through, because we know there should be a lack of that type of skill in this province. They weren't able to get jobs yet. That's a year after they graduated, and I think that's a sad story to tell.

What they're waiting for is a change in government that will get things going. They might have made fun of Mike Harris, but Mike Harris created over a million jobs in this province—1.2 million in eight short years. I think we're desperate. We need that back, and we need to get off, so we're no longer leading the country in the unemployment rate. With 84 consecutive months, I mean, it's certainly a record we are not—

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

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh:** I have to admit, the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound is able to condense a great amount of material and content in his 20 minutes. I have to applaud him for that. That was quite phenomenal, if anyone paid attention. The amount of actual content he was able to put into his 20 minutes was actually phenomenal, and I have to commend him on that.

I also want to respond to some of the great points he made. He actually talked about some great issues. He talked about the fact that we need to have better mental services, we need to have better services for our less fortunate, we need to have a stronger social network. I was quite surprised—not to be rude, but I was surprised that it was coming from the Progressive Conservatives. I was quite inspired by your concern for the welfare of other people. I didn't expect that to be the thrust of your argument, and I was actually quite happy to hear those concerns. Those are important things and I was quite happy to hear them.

But I have to also raise a point of criticism. We're speaking about the minimum wage. As the member from Beaches-East York really, eloquently got into and expressed, the situation in Ontario is quite dire. It's quite difficult for the people of Ontario who are making minimum wage. I think the member from Beaches-East York talked really personally about his experiences growing up in Regent Park.

We all know all too well that people are in a tough situation and we need to make some serious changes, and we need to take some serious steps to make sure people are brought out of poverty. One of those steps is looking at minimum wage, looking at indexing minimum wage to

CPI or to inflation, and really looking at what we can do as a government to provide some leadership to bring people out of poverty. I think that's something we can all agree on.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** That concludes our time for questions and comments. We'll return to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** I'll reverse my order. I'd like to thank my colleague from Bramalea–Gore–Malton for the positive, kind things he said. I did cover many points, and I try to do that as much as I can. The sad state is that there are so many concerns that I have to share with the people of Ontario because of the mismanagement of this government.

But you know what? You've hit on a key point. The whole reason Conservatives are here is about the people, to care for the people. One of the key messages we're going to send is that we want to cut out the overspending and the waste, so there's more money going back to the front lines, so that those people who are most in need get their care. I thank you very much for that.

My colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry—I like that he mentioned about the jobs in the mining sector, because that brings up a very valid point. Where is the Ring of Fire after 10 years of the Liberal government? Where are those great-paying jobs? I can guarantee you, they won't be minimum wage jobs if the Ring of Fire gets going, and that will have a ripple effect to our whole economy. We'll have wonderful, booming jobs down here and we won't even be talking about minimum wage because we'll have more employment. We won't have to be worrying about this.

1740

I'm going to go to my friend from London–Fanshawe. She said, I think, some nice things about me; I'm not certain there. But she asked about minimum wage. I think the “spend-DP”—what I was hearing out there, unfortunately, was that they've abandoned their base in this debate originally, so I don't know if they should be asking us for our position. But I'll tell you our position, just what I said: We want to create good, full-time, good-paying jobs, as opposed to worrying just about minimum wage only. We want to take a bigger look. We want to be achievers and build a million jobs into this economy, not be cut back to 588,000 because we're overachieving.

She did mention something about a memory bank, so I'm going to bring up just two little things. One would be the Bob Rae days. I'm not certain the people of Ontario will ever forget that, nor will they recover from it, perhaps.

And there were two significant votes by the NDP. One was the first budget I was here for, when they sat on their hands, and the last time was when they stood up unanimously and voted to enable this Liberal government to stay in power, to boondoggle us even more and run us down the debt track.

Finally, to the Minister of Social Services, who doesn't like to listen but likes to talk a fair bit: You mentioned a

balanced budget; I'm not certain you've ever had that in your dialogue before, but I'm glad to see you're starting.

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

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Actually, it's a pleasure to stand up and talk about this very important issue in this House. It's hard to follow that pace, though; it's so frantic and so worried and so desperate. But I'm going to stay focused, actually, on Bill 165. I think that it's important to bring some clarity to this, and I think the member from Beaches–East York earlier did an excellent job.

A person who used to sit on this side of the House for many years was Peter Kormos, and he said that it was so important to actually read the legislation. As a relatively new MPP, I do take the time to go through the legislation.

I do have some concerns, right off the top, that this piece of legislation, under the issue of review—under subsection 10 it says, “Before October 1, 2020, and every five years thereafter, the minister shall cause a review of the minimum wage and the process for adjusting the minimum wage to be commenced.”

If you take that piece of information, I think that everyone should be very concerned that there is the very real possibility that the proposed \$11, tying it to CPI, will actually create a systemic version of poverty in the province if you do not review that figure by 2020. I don't understand why they put it in there, because we should constantly be measuring and talking about what a living wage is in the province of Ontario.

I think it's important to actually review what's in the bill. The minimum wage regulation that the government has put in place to implement their \$11-an-hour minimum wage and other levels for different classes of workers such as students is now official. So it's going to take place. This is going to happen on June 1, 2014, so we're not really debating whether or not it's going to go to \$11. We have a different proposal on the table and I'll talk about that in a few minutes.

What Bill 165 simply does reference—it essentially says that as of October 1, 2014, the annual increase will be equal to the CPI. The first increase using the CPI formula detailed in Bill 165 kicks in on October 1, 2015. And as the member from Beaches–East York mentioned earlier, right now it's about 1%. So I think that while our plan offers some predictability, which is what we heard from small and medium-sized enterprises across the province, this 1% is certainly concerning.

This debate this afternoon has been very long and very drawn-out. It's been very interesting, though, to hear the level of comments that have come from the Liberal side of the House, the Liberal government, especially directed towards our leader. I want to address it because I think that it's a slippery slope, and I'm really happy that the Speaker did address it four times, when members were mentioning our leader, Andrea Horwath, by name, in a very disrespectful way. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for pulling them back.

But it must be in the message box some place on that side of the House. It's so consistent. I mean, these things don't happen by accident. A lot of things do happen by accident in this House, and actually, that reminds me: This weekend, Thomas Mulcair addressed our provincial council, and he said he warned Canadians about Liberals in this country. He said, "Liberals flash left but turn right and cause accidents," and I think that that's generally a feeling that people are having about where we are in the country.

But the level of disrespect that I heard earlier clearly reveals a level of insecurity, and the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton earlier encouraged the Liberals to not feel so insecure. Dig deep and remember that they are the government for the time being, and perhaps instead of deflecting their own insecurity back to the third party, they should own their policies.

I just want to take a second—just a second—because it's such a different strategy that the parties have embraced with regard not only to poverty reduction but to the economy, when the two issues are obviously connected. In 2012, we came into this House as the first minority government in many, many years, although I'm pretty sure at the time the Liberals didn't refer to themselves as a minority: It was a major minority or a minor majority or what have you. But we brought to that first budget session a commitment to stabilize child care, which has been neglected for so many years. It's a bit embarrassing, actually, that the province of Ontario does not have a strong social fabric to support children and families, and, of course, recognizing that for every dollar you do invest in child care, the return on investment is very strong. It's also a very key issue around equality. As we move towards International Women's Day, I think that it's important to recognize that the funding that we negotiated in that budget significantly and positively impacted the lives of Ontarians, and actually municipalities have seen that funding in this last budget round. Even the region of Waterloo was so pleased to see that there was actually some funding for child care and that it's now going to be annualized. That's something that we can actually be very proud of. We negotiated it in 2012—

*Interjection.*

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** There's really no guarantee that you would have done it anyway.

Quite honestly, we had to do it because the Liberal government backpedalled on their plan to do the extended day from the Pascal report, which he recommended, and it has been successful in some school boards—my own, actually, Waterloo Region District School Board.

So the 2012 child care funding, which I think was \$65 million at the time, but my colleague may correct me—we did that. Then, the fairness tax: What a novel concept. For those people who make over half a million dollars, they are going to pay 2% more, which would generate revenue so we can refocus our attention to some of those priority areas that we see in the province of Ontario—2%. Actually, I don't know too many people who make over half a million dollars, but I'm pretty sure that they can afford it. You know what some people do say? "You

know, it's okay, collect the taxes, but spend them responsibly, put them to good use."

In 2013, on the same issue of strengthening the economy, the NDP actually came to the table and ensured that some long-standing promises came to the fore, primarily, of course, youth employment. Youth unemployment is a huge issue in the province of Ontario. We have one of the highest rates of youth unemployment in the country. So we negotiated a jobs experience program to ensure that youth have an opportunity to gain those experiential learning opportunities in the workplace. To date, I think that we're seeing some slow progress on that, but there's a lot more work to do.

We have been focused on affordability, and that's why we did champion the issue of the auto insurance rates. In 2010, when Dwight Duncan stood up in this House and said, "We are going to change the way that benefits are paid out. This will streamline the auto insurance industry and those savings will automatically get passed on to drivers"—when that didn't happen, we saw that as ultimately an issue of fairness. We saw that as an issue of fairness, but also an issue of affordability.

Then, of course, the health care file. I think that we can all agree that the health care file is a little messy. We've had a number of scandals, time and time and time again, which have pulled money out of the system and away from the people that we should be focused on. So we negotiated that five-day home care guarantee; it was said that was going to happen. So—

1750

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** I recognize the member from Ottawa–Orléans on a point of order.

**Mr. Phil McNeely:** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The member should be speaking to the minimum wage act, and we're going all over the place. I'd like her to focus on the minimum wage act.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** Well, I've heard the member talk about minimum wage. Again, I would remind all members that we need to bring our comments back to the subject at hand. We're debating the minimum wage bill, Bill 165.

I return to the member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Affordability obviously is connected to the minimum wage. The economics of this province are obviously connected to minimum wage. The rates for child care workers in the province of Ontario are connected, unfortunately, to minimum wage. For those people who are working in the home care sector, obviously—

*Interjection.*

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Yes, the personal support workers who had to walk out over the Christmas holidays, who are fighting for a livable wage—that's connected to minimum wage.

Finally, it really does actually come down to priorities. When we were able to ensure or to at least make sure that the Liberals pursued the issue of closing corporate tax loopholes to the tune of \$1.4 billion, that does come down to affordability, and it comes down to reprioritizing how tax dollars are spent. Why should corporations have

these corporate tax giveaways, no strings attached? It has not proven to be successful to create jobs. Instead, we've had this long, prolonged sort of period of inaction on poverty reduction. So it is all connected. A livable wage, a strong economy and reducing poverty in the province of Ontario are absolutely connected—as with those people who are on ODSP, who actually want to work, but don't want to get penalized for going out into the workforce and subsidizing what is a very low rate of compensation.

Finally, it all does come to accountability. Sometimes we can agree on financial accountability and transparency. I'm so pleased that we finally finished the interviews for the Financial Accountability Officer. It is only nine and a half months later. We did want to hire a Financial Accountability Officer; we did not want to give birth to one nine and a half months later, but it will happen. We will have an officer of this Legislature who will be able to ensure, as we move forward with financial decisions—perhaps like the minimum wage, just to speak to the bill—that we are making the right decisions, to ensure that research and facts impact policy and legislation and, hopefully, remove some of the very overly partisan decisions that have been made over this term of the Legislature. I'm not going to go through the long list of gas plant stuff because it becomes tiresome. It does become tiresome.

But going forward, as Bill 165, the Fair Minimum Wage Act, comes to the fore and for a vote, I think it behooves us—we actually have a responsibility to ensure that we also call for immediate action on public sector CEO salaries and management bonuses. You can't have a balanced conversation about what the hard-working folks in this province who will be making \$11 but perhaps, in the future, under an NDP plan, will be making \$11.50 and \$12 by 2015-16—if that does happen, clearly that will make a huge difference to those who struggle to make ends meet day in and day out, but I think you also have to find some justice for them. We certainly define justice as addressing those public sector CEO salaries and management bonuses. The latest example, quite honestly, is quite astounding. For the CEO of the Pan Am Games to be earning an annual salary of \$450,000—that's a good salary. It's a privilege to serve the public and the public sector. It used to be an honourable profession, that people sought out positions to serve the public, to make this province a great province. Nobody, in days gone by, would expect a \$780,000 bonus just for sticking around and doing the job that you agreed to do in the first place. It really is insulting to those people who are working for minimum wage.

We need to crack down on corporate tax avoidance as well. The Auditor General's 2010 finding was that the Ontario government had left over \$2.4 billion in corporate taxes uncollected while laying off tax enforcement agents. It goes back to a fundamental level of respect for

the citizens of this province, Mr. Speaker. For those people who are paying their taxes day in and day out and are trying to hold us accountable, as they should—every party. For large corporations to find these havens and for us to not address that is, quite honestly, irresponsible.

As I've already mentioned, the closing of the planned new corporate tax loopholes worth \$1.1 billion annually—the last time I checked, that was a lot of money. It could go towards a very progressive transit plan, which was left out of the original poverty reduction strategy. I attended the first meeting some five years ago and transit was a huge issue in the city—and also the lack of connection pieces with the rest of the province. Any transit strategy going forward needs to take the entire province into account.

I think that the plan that we have put forward—and I'm hopeful in this minority setting that the Liberal government may actually pay attention to it. Our plan is balanced, beginning with 50-cent increases; it's predictable. You get to \$12 and then you tie it to CPI. In 2011 our platform was \$11.

It was very interesting to see the media response to our announcement on the minimum wage. They expect us to be reactionary and to be overly emotional. They didn't expect us to come out with a pragmatic and balanced plan. We did consult, but we don't just consult for the sake of consulting; when we consult, we actually listen—active listening. I think that the plan we have put forward is balanced, it is pragmatic, it is respectful of the people who are going to be earning a minimum wage and it's also respectful of those small and medium-sized enterprises that have quite honestly said to us, “Just give us something predictable.” That is what we have done.

Mr. Speaker, it's been a pleasure to stand up and talk about this important issue. I've connected the economy and the health of our economy as a province. We have addressed the minimum wage and then, quite honestly, I've used the opportunity to clearly separate ourselves from some of the strategies that some of the parties in this House have adopted. I think we all have a responsibility to come to this place and do the hard work of a minority government. By all accounts, we will have a minority government going forward, so we're going to have to actually adapt.

*Interjections.*

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** The pundits say that there will be minority governments going forward, so sitting on the sidelines and heckling for a living is not in the interests of the people of this province. I think that it is our responsibility to try to make it work and to at least read a budget.

*Second reading debate deemed adjourned.*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott):** It being very close to 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

*The House adjourned at 1758.*

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Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
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Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
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Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
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Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
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Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
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Vic Dhillon, Garfield Dunlop  
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Bill Mauro, Phil McNeely  
Norm Miller, John O'Toole  
Jagmeet Singh  
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John Fraser, Monte Kwinter  
Jane McKenna, Rick Nicholls  
Peter Tabuns, John Vanthof  
Bill Walker  
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Bas Balkissoon, Ted Chudleigh  
Mike Colle, Vic Dhillon  
Cheri DiNovo, Ernie Hardeman  
Rod Jackson, Helena Jaczek  
Paul Miller  
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Cheri DiNovo, Christine Elliott  
Mitzie Hunter, Rod Jackson  
Sylvia Jones, Monique Taylor  
Soo Wong  
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