

THIRD SESSION - TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE

of the

# Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

## DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

(HANSARD) Published under the authority of The Honourable Dan D'Autremont Speaker

N.S. VOL. 56 NO. 38A MONDAY, MARCH 24, 2014, 13:30

### Minimum Wage

**Mr. Forbes:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last July the government promised to make changes to the minimum wage before 2014. It broke that promise, and what the Labour minister told the Canadian restaurant and food association is that, and I quote, "Saskatchewan's minimum wage will not rise until the new Saskatchewan employment Act indexation formula kicks in next November."

To the minister: why did this government break its promise, and why is the minimum wage not going up until at least November?

**The Speaker:** I recognize the Minister of Education.

**Hon. Mr. Morgan:** Mr. Speaker, we last increased minimum wage December 1st, 2012. We increased it to \$10 an hour at that time. At that point in time, we were the third-highest after-tax income for full-time minimum wage earners. Since we have been in government, we've increased the minimum wage from \$7.95 an hour to \$10 per hour, an over 25 per cent increase.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that it's necessary to index the minimum wage to provide security for low-income workers. And, Mr. Speaker, we're well on in drafting regulations and doing final consultation. It is not very far off, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

**Mr. Forbes:** The minister is not saying it looks like it's going to be November. And he's right. The minimum wage has not gone up since 2012, but Saskatchewan has fallen behind Nova Scotia, Quebec, Manitoba, Ontario, BC [British Columbia], the Yukon, and Nunavut. And we know that the Saskatchewan people continue to be squeezed by the rising costs of living. This government needs to increase the minimum wage and index it to inflation.

And we saw a couple of weeks ago how quickly this government can draft regulations. They can do it overnight when the pressure is on them. So there's no reason why this government has to keep delaying this. To the minister: why is this government breaking its promise and dragging its feet on minimum wage?

**The Speaker:** I recognize the Minister of Education.

**Hon. Mr. Morgan:** Mr. Speaker, this government has a commitment to low-income people. We want to make sure that we do everything we can to ensure that they've got good opportunities for employment, that the wages are indexed and brought up reasonably expeditiously. Mr. Speaker, they will always ratchet up and down depending on what's . . . [inaudible] . . . in places in other provinces.

Mr. Speaker, when we formed government, we also chose to increase the basic personal tax exemption which eliminated personal income tax for 114,000 people in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I can also advise the members opposite that they had a chance to introduce indexation. And, Mr. Speaker, they were in government for 16 years. They did not index, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to put the question to them why they didn't choose to index during their 16 years in government. They knew about it. They could have done it. They did nothing, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

**Mr. Forbes:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here's what the media report from last July says, and I quote:

Saskatchewan's Labour minister is promising changes to minimum wage legislation before the new year. Don Morgan's pledge comes after the NDP yesterday accused the government of unnecessarily delaying a minimum wage index. Morgan says a formula is being developed and that a policy will be in place before the end of this year.

Well that's over eight months ago. The government missed its year-end deadline and now we know the minimum wage won't go up until at least November. And meanwhile Saskatchewan people continue to get squeezed by the rising cost of living. To the minister: what's the real reason why this government is refusing to help those who make minimum wage?

**The Speaker:** I recognize the Minister of Education.

**Hon. Mr. Morgan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I indicated earlier that the NDP could have introduced indexation during its 16 years but they didn't know about it. They didn't care about it. The previous leader of the opposition knew nothing about minimum wage. He claimed we hadn't raised minimum wage in three years while the fact is that we'd raised it from 9.25 and we'd raised it up and continued to raise it up.

Mr. Speaker, the previous leader, Dwain Lingenfelter, said on CHAB radio, minimum

wage workers in Moose Jaw have not had an increase in three years. Flat out wrong, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we're a government that has a commitment to low-income workers. We've increased it by over 25 per cent since 2007. We've . . . [inaudible] . . . the personal income tax. We've doubled the low-income tax credit. We've decreased the education portion of property tax by nearly \$166 million or 22 per cent. We've increased the disability tax credit by 25 per cent, and exempted the disability tax credit. Mr. Speaker, we have a record that we're not apologizing for.