Minimum Wage

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in July the Labour minister promised changes to the minimum wage legislation by the end of this year. Here's a quote from the media, and I quote:

> 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.

To the minister: will this government actually keep that promise?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite had some 16 years in which to index minimum wage. They didn't. Mr. Speaker, this is a government that has regularly and routinely increased minimum wage. We have the third-highest after-tax income for full-time minimum wage earners. We've increased the minimum wage some five times from 7.95 to $10 per hour. Yes, Mr. Speaker, the simple answer is, we will be indexing minimum wage and they'll see it soon.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, back in July the Labour minister also said the usual effective date for minimum wage changes is December 1st. Mr. Speaker, it's December 2nd and we still have no word on when this government will finally index the minimum wage. To the minister: when, when will this government release the full details of the formula and timeline for indexing the minimum wage?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, it's the intention of this government to index minimum

wage to provide security for minimum wage earners and to ensure business owners have some predictability.

In the five years, last five years, we've increased the minimum wage on average 5 per cent per year, over a 25 per cent increase, well in excess of what cost of living's done. We have in addition to that increased the basic personal tax exemption so it will have the effect of eliminating personal income tax for some 114,000 people in this province.

Mr. Speaker, we will be introducing legislation later this week dealing with other parts of the employment Act, and, Mr. Speaker, the members will soon learn when things are going to be rolled out. And the fact is, Mr. Speaker, this is a government that cares about and values low-income workers, unlike the members opposite who in 16 years did absolutely nothing for low-income workers.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, the cost of living has gone up significantly here in Saskatchewan. We know there are many people who are struggling to pay their bills and make ends meet. But it's absolutely essential the minimum wage be indexed at an appropriate level. Mr. Speaker, only one province, only one province has a minimum wage that is lower than Saskatchewan's minimum wage. To the minister: will he guarantee that the minimum wage will be indexed at an appropriate level so it provides a living wage for hard-working Saskatchewan people?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, I'd urge the members opposite to stay tuned, watch for it. Yes, Mr. Speaker, it's something we're going to do.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to mention something about the previous leader of the opposition. He was somebody that knew absolutely nothing about the minimum wage. He reported on CHAB radio, Dwain Lingenfelter, August 4th, 2011, "Minimum wage workers in Moose Jaw have not had an increase in three years." Absolutely false, Mr. Speaker. Not correct. The fact is that we have routinely and regularly increased minimum wage, on average 5 per cent per year. Usually every year this government has raised minimum wage, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue to do so.