OFFICIAL RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday, 24 January 2013

The Council continued to meet at half-past Two o'clock

MEMBERS PRESENT:

THE PRESIDENT
THE HONOURABLE JASPER TSANG YOK-SING, G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE LEE CHEUK-YAN

THE HONOURABLE JAMES TO KUN-SUN

THE HONOURABLE CHAN KAM-LAM, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE LEUNG YIU-CHUNG

THE HONOURABLE EMILY LAU WAI-HING, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE TAM YIU-CHUNG, G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE ABRAHAM SHEK LAI-HIM, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE TOMMY CHEUNG YU-YAN, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE FREDERICK FUNG KIN-KEE, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE WONG KWOK-HING, M.H.

DR THE HONOURABLE JOSEPH LEE KOK-LONG, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE JEFFREY LAM KIN-FUNG, G.B.S., J.P.
THE HONOURABLE ANDREW LEUNG KWAN-YUEN, G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE WONG TING-KWONG, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CYD HO SAU-LAN

DR THE HONOURABLE LAM TAI-FAI, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHAN HAK-KAN, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHAN KIN-POR, B.B.S., J.P.

DR THE HONOURABLE PRISCILLA LEUNG MEI-FUN, J.P.

DR THE HONOURABLE LEUNG KA-LAU

THE HONOURABLE CHEUNG KWOK-CHE

THE HONOURABLE IP KWOK-HIM, G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE PAUL TSE WAI-CHUN, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE LEUNG KWOK-HUNG

THE HONOURABLE ALBERT CHAN WAI-YIP

THE HONOURABLE WONG YUK-MAN

THE HONOURABLE CLAUDIA MO

THE HONOURABLE MICHAEL TIEN PUK-SUN, B.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE JAMES TIEN PEI-CHUN, G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE NG LEUNG-SING, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE STEVEN HO CHUN-YIN

THE HONOURABLE FRANKIE YICK CHI-MING
THE HONOURABLE WU CHI-WAI, M.H.

THE HONOURABLE YIU SI-WING

THE HONOURABLE GARY FAN KWOK-WAI

THE HONOURABLE MA FUNG-KWOK, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHARLES PETER MOK

THE HONOURABLE CHAN CHI-CHUEN

DR THE HONOURABLE KENNETH CHAN KA-LOK

THE HONOURABLE CHAN YUEN-HAN, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE ALICE MAK MEI-KUEN, J.P.

DR THE HONOURABLE KWOK KA-KI

THE HONOURABLE KWOK WAI-KEUNG

THE HONOURABLE DENNIS KWOK

THE HONOURABLE CHRISTOPHER CHEUNG WAH-FUNG, J.P.

DR THE HONOURABLE FERNANDO CHEUNG CHIU-HUNG

THE HONOURABLE SIN CHUNG-KAI, S.B.S., J.P.

DR THE HONOURABLE HELENA WONG PIK-WAN

THE HONOURABLE IP KIN-YUEN

DR THE HONOURABLE ELIZABETH QUAT, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE MARTIN LIAO CHEUNG-KONG, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE POON SIU-PING, B.B.S., M.H.
THE HONOURABLE TANG KA-PIU

DR THE HONOURABLE CHIANG LAI-WAN, J.P.

IR DR THE HONOURABLE LO WAI-KWOK, B.B.S., M.H., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHUNG KWOK-PAN

THE HONOURABLE CHRISTOPHER CHUNG SHU-KUN, B.B.S., M.H., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE TONY TSE WAI-CHUEN

MEMBERS ABSENT:

THE HONOURABLE ALBERT HO CHUN-YAN

DR THE HONOURABLE LAU WONG-FAT, G.B.M., G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE VINCENT FANG KANG, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE RONNY TONG KA-WAH, S.C.

THE HONOURABLE STARRY LEE WAI-KING, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE WONG KWOK-KIN, B.B.S.

THE HONOURABLE MRS REGINA IP LAU SUK-YEE, G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE ALAN LEONG KAH-KIT, S.C.

THE HONOURABLE CHAN HAN-PAN

THE HONOURABLE LEUNG CHE-CHEUNG, B.B.S., M.H., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE KENNETH LEUNG
PUBLIC OFFICER ATTENDING:

THE HONOURABLE MATTHEW CHEUNG KIN-CHUNG, G.B.S., J.P.
SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE

CLERKS IN ATTENDANCE:

MISS FLORA TAI YIN-PING, ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL

MISS ODELIA LEUNG HING-YEE, ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL
MEMBERS' MOTIONS

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Council now resumes and continues with the motion debate on "Optimizing the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance for the unemployed".

OPTIMIZING THE COMPREHENSIVE SOCIAL SECURITY ASSISTANCE FOR THE UNEMPLOYED

Continuation of debate on motion which was moved on 23 January 2013

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Does any other Member wish to speak?

MR ANDREW LEUNG (in Cantonese): President, we often say that the greatest and best resource in Hong Kong is our talents. The latest unemployment rate in Hong Kong is 3.3%, almost reaching full employment, so to speak. However, a lot of recruitment advertisements can still be found when we read the newspapers. The territory has an eager demand for talents.

The data collected by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) in September 2012 indicated that the number of unemployed Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) cases was 26,859 as at the end of 2011. According to the analysis on the duration of stay on CSSA, the median duration of stay of unemployed recipients on CSSA is 5.9 years, while 67.3% of them have been on CSSA for more than three years already. As Hong Kong is a society of full employment, how we can help these unemployed CSSA recipients leave the CSSA net, re-enter the labour market and become the labour force we need warrants consideration and concern of society.

To resolve the problem, the Business and Professionals Alliance for Hong Kong holds that emphasis should be placed on strengthening employment training, improving job-matching, and introducing incentives to help the unemployed CSSA recipients rejoin the workplace. In the long-run, it is only through the diversification of local industries that more employment opportunities can be created, thereby reducing the population of the unemployed and the number of unemployed CSSA recipients at source.
President, economic restructuring and the northward relocation of industries over the past 30 years have indeed affected the structure of our workplace in Hong Kong. Economically, Hong Kong is now service-oriented. Over the years, providing training for the labour force required by the service industry has been the major work of the Employees Retraining Board (ERB). More than 1 million participants have received training provided by the ERB over the past 20 years.

Nevertheless, no targeted measures have been put in place to help unemployed CSSA recipients get re-employed. To my understanding, the SWD only ask CSSA recipients occasionally to find jobs and seek employment. It is not a mandatory requirement for them to enrol in retraining courses to enhance their skills. As a result, their skills fail to meet the requirements of employers and they continue to live on CSSA.

When I was the Chairman of the Vocational Training Council (VTC), we initiated the pegging of courses to Qualifications Framework (QF), urging the institutions to make use of the courses to help young people enhance their skills. We hold that this approach can be applied to the unemployed CSSA recipients to facilitate reforms of the existing CSSA Scheme for the unemployed, in which recipients are required to pursue study of retraining courses on a mandatory basis, with the requirement of attendance rate specified.

Moreover, it is also necessary to reform the retraining courses. Take the Certificate Course in Chinese Restaurant Operations for Hotels organized by the Hospitality Industry Training and Development Centre and the Certificate Course in Food and Beverage Service organized by the Chinese Cuisine Training Institute of VTC as examples. Both courses are four-month full-time programmes suitable for those who have completed Secondary Three or above. On completion of the course, participants will be able to attain qualification at QF Level 2 and they will also be provided with employment referral by the institutions upon their graduation.

Full-time programmes lasting half a year, nine months or even one year can also be organized by the ERB, with the objective of comprehensively enhancing the skills and improving the work attitude of participants to enable them to attain qualification at QF Level 1 or 2. Arrangements can also be made for those who have attained qualification at QF Level 2 to pursue six-month or one-year
programmes which will help them attain QF Level 3 and increase their employment opportunities.

The ERB can also revise the courses and curriculum to take into account of changes in society, with a view to enabling talents who have received training to catch up with the latest economic developments and supporting the developments of the construction industry as well as emerging industries such as the environmental and recycling industries. In response to the demand for newcomers of various industries, the ERB can also extend the training period in order that participants will be better equipped with the skills before entering the job market, which will enhance their chances of being employed as permanent staff.

The Administration may also step up the efforts in following up the prospects of CSSA recipients who have received retraining and the circumstances under which they have to live on CSSA again. This measure will, on the one hand, regulate the situation where the CSSA Scheme is being abused; and on the other hand, enable employment counselling to be more effective and helpful to the recipients.

It is advisable that the Administration should not overlook the communication and co-operation with enterprises. It should explore the actual demand and requirement of various sectors for manpower and employees, with a view to improving job-matching. A more daring approach can be adopted in the form of providing tax concessions to enterprises that employ CSSA recipients, thereby encouraging business and industrial sectors to employ the recipients and help them re-enter the labour market.

In the past, there were views in Hong Kong that advocated the setting up of a time limit for receipt of CSSA. I have reservation about this. As a matter of fact, although a few places in the world have put in place such a time limit, under the premise that no social consensus has been reached in Hong Kong to facilitate discussion, I consider it inappropriate to implement the measure hastily.

President, as pointed out by many colleagues yesterday, to reduce the number of unemployed CSSA recipients, it is imperative for us to help them transform and upgrade themselves. This will, on the one hand, help them to be well-equipped in job-seeking; and on the other hand, provide employers with
incentive to employ this group of people poised to re-enter the labour market, which will allow them to successfully rejoin the workplace. Apart from providing our society with more manpower, this measure will also allow the Government to spare resources to help those in greater needs, such as the elderly and the disabled. I hope that the Administration will expedite its actions.

I so submit.

MR WONG YUK-MAN (in Cantonese): President, the two Legislative Councillors of the People Power and I resolutely oppose the Liberal Party's motion which smears the disadvantaged and creates class discrimination.

Early this month, the Liberal Party held a press conference and issued a study against the abuse of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme. They alleged that from 2004, the drop in the percentage of the CSSA cases due to unemployment over the total number of CSSA cases is lower than that of the drop in unemployment rate, while the unemployed recipients who stay on CSSA for two years or more account for about 80% of the unemployed cases, and these constitute the phenomenon of abuse of the CSSA Scheme. However, if we study carefully the statistics provided by the Government, we will find the fact that the unemployed CSSA cases account for 10% of the total number of CSSA cases, and account for only 0.9% of the Government's entire recurrent expenditure. The Liberal Party is making a big fuss over this 0.9% and making use of the figure as a pretext for some other purposes. A responsible study without any preset conclusions and genuinely examining the present situation will absolutely not overlook important statistics deliberately. However, the Liberal Party has not mentioned that the number of unemployed CSSA cases has dropped more than 40% since 2004, while the overall unemployed population has also dropped 43%. It is obvious that the number of unemployed CSSA cases is closely related to the number of the unemployed. If such an act of the Liberal Party is not considered to be sloppy, then it is simply quoting words out of context and making sweeping generalizations.

The unemployed CSSA recipients have no alternative but to live on CSSA. Each of them has their own story of misery. For instance, a single parent household on CSSA will automatically become an unemployed CSSA recipient once the children are over 15 years of age. It is not an easy task for middle-aged
and elderly workers with low academic attainment to switch to jobs of different nature. Among the company proprietors for whom the Liberal Party represents, many of them despise this group of miserable people who have no other option but to seek relief from CSSA.

The Liberal Party has organized signature campaigns, set up groups in social networking sites with much clamour and made a fuss over the issue. For what purpose are they doing all these? Let us look at the existing sufferings of our workers. The minimum wage is $28 per hour. The demand for an increase of $2 has been considered by some people as the killing of their father. No standard working hours have been put in place. Apart from working long hours for low income, wage earners have to cope with high inflation and high rental. "Master TIEN", do you know the price of beef per catty? A catty of beef costs more than $100. When you take $100 to the market, you can buy little food. I am qualified to talk about these because I go to the market once a week. Today, some Hong Kong people still blindly believe in the Hong Kong spirit, the so-called "spirit of the Lion Rock". Man will conquer nature. This philosophy no longer works. Buddy, this era has long gone by.

Hong Kong is a society where "people always hate the rich and loathe the poor". The poor look down upon those who are poorer than themselves. Those who are not on CSSA look down upon those who are on CSSA.

I read an article recently. I would like to quote from it because it is pointless for me to speak on the subject. The representatives of the labour sector have, just now, and even before that, indicated their strong disapproval for this. I do not think there are any new ideas. If I carry on my reprimand, "Master TIEN" will stare at me with a grim face. TSAI Ing-wen of the Democratic Progressive Party has recently written an article entitled "A Letter to Taiwan in 2013". I will quote in Mandarin, "Relying on education, they are unable to have a better life. Relying on work, they are unable to buy a home where they can live in peace and contentment. Relying on democracy, they are unable to elect a good government to help them resolve their problems. Anxiety and distress are spreading through this country. Looking at each other in dismay, young people have these doubts in their mind: Have the times changed? Or is it because I have not worked hard enough? The generation that must not bow to fate in this country has no other option but to bow to pressure exerted by the environment. In the year 2012, Taiwan had not only lost optimism and hope accumulated over
the past few generations, we had also lost our composure, confidence, and glory hidden in the blood of every Taiwanese. *(Putonghua)*" (unquote) I do not know whether you understand this or not.

What TSAI Ing-wen said in her article is still true if we take out the word "Taiwan" and replace it with "Hong Kong". Looking at each other in dismay, young people are asking whether they have not worked hard enough or whether the times have changed. They cannot even afford buying a home where they can live in peace and contentment. It is so hard to make a living. The composure in the blood of the Taiwanese has gone. Everybody is toiling and sweating every day. Isn't it the same in Hong Kong? The situation is even worse here.

The economic situation in Hong Kong is many times better than that of Taiwan. We have a fiscal reserve and Exchange Fund of thousands of billion dollars. "Old TUNG" slashed 11% off CSSA in 2003, and the amount has not yet been restored and paid to them. Now you are actually talking about limiting CSSA for the unemployed. Do you have a conscience? What actually are you doing? What kind of a subject is that? I have to ask, what subject is that? This subject should not be raised in this Council. "With hair, who would like to go bald?". To be honest, if you are 30 to 40 years of age, or 40 to 50 years of age, if you tell others you are on CSSA, you dare not hold your head up. If you tell others you are unemployed and on CSSA, and you are 40 to 50 years of age, you dare not hold your head up. To tell the truth, there is always someone who abuses the system. There are laws but still there are people who break them, right? This is the problem of the Social Welfare Department. This is the problem of Secretary Matthew CHEUNG. Now you have to answer my question. You have slashed 11.1% off CSSA. Will you restore it? It has been 10 years already. TUNG Chee-hwa slashed 11.1% and it has still not been restored. So what can you say now? Can you make use of the subject and make a big fuss over it? Members who have a conscience should not support this motion, right?

**MR TONY TSE** (in Cantonese): President, it is perfectly justified for the Government to provide assistance to those in need and the disadvantaged groups of the society. As Asia's international financial centre, Hong Kong's GDP ranks among the top in the world. According to the data released by *Forbes* magazine
in 2012, with a per capita GDP close to US$46,000, Hong Kong is among the top 10 in the world. It is obvious that Hong Kong's outstanding performance in economic development has resulted in relatively abundant resources available in the society. Under such circumstances, it has been agreed among the entire community that helping the elderly and the disabled is something to which we should commit ourselves. The SAR Government is duty-bound to invest more resources in this area.

I agree with the view put forward by the Chief Executive in the Policy Address — promoting economic development is the primary goal of the Government, while tackling the housing problem is the top priority. This is because economic development is the origin and the primary source of social welfare. Without economic development, how can we talk about social welfare? Thus, I would like to emphasize that every government must utilize its resources in an appropriate manner so that they are used on people with needs and those in need of assistance. However, once social resources are being abused, the social resources available for those in need will be directly affected. Therefore, the Government must formulate practicable policies to prevent social resources from abuse.

Many people hold that there are loopholes in the existing CSSA Scheme, which result in the lack of motivation of some CSSA recipients in achieving self-reliance and taking any initiatives to make progress. In fact, insofar as the CSSA recipients are concerned, this is not a good choice. If they do not proactively look for jobs and re-enter the labour market as early as possible, their future chance of moving up the social ladder will be drastically reduced. This is not something we wish to see. It will only turn the Government's introduction of the CSSA policy with the good intention of assisting people into a disservice. Thus, the Government must re-examine the existing CSSA policy, with a view to optimizing the Scheme, providing appropriate assistance to those in need, and enabling the recipients to maintain a chance of upward mobility. I hold that these are the most important objectives of the CSSA policy.

Meanwhile, from an economic perspective, encouraging and helping the CSSA recipients who have working capacity to secure a job is a good thing, as this will release more labour force to the market, which in turn, will be conducive to the productivity of the entire society. In the face of the difficulties of the middle-aged workers to switch to other occupations, the Government should
prescribe the right cure to the problem and formulate targeted measures which will not only help these people switch to other occupations, but also provide incentives to employers for them to employ middle-aged recipients, with a view to fostering mutual benefits.

Moreover, some Members have mentioned that the CSSA Scheme may result in CSSA recipients being stigmatized to the extent that the recipients will not be able to hold their heads up. Thus, the Government should start from policy formulation to encourage and help CSSA recipients (particularly those with working capacity) to be self-reliant, thereby reducing their dependence on public welfare.

President, as revealed by data, the condition of the young and unemployed CSSA recipients in the territory is a cause for concern. According to the information provided by the SWD, in recent years, the average duration of stay on CSSA of unemployed recipients has been rising instead of falling. The problem is particularly serious among young people aged between 20 to 29 and those who have received tertiary education or above. In the face of this, apart from feeling pathetic, I think we should try every means to help these people enter the labour market in order that they can contribute to society and enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong.

President, this Council has earlier discussed the funding proposals for the Old Age Living Allowance. I believe the majority of our colleagues hold that the Old Age Living Allowance is catered for people in need, and this welfare initiative is worth the support of the society and the Council. Meanwhile, as CSSA recipients belong to the group in need of assistance in our community, both the society and the Government are duty-bound to utilize our social resources to help them. Thus, I support today's motion "Optimizing the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance for the unemployed".

President, I so submit.

MR LEE CHEUK-YAN (in Cantonese): President, the Labour Party opposes today's motion. We oppose the original motion proposed by the Liberal Party and Mr Frankie YICK's amendment. As a matter of fact, although the original motion is relatively vague, it appears to be in order. Mr Frankie YICK's
amendment is more stringent. It is clearly written that limits should be imposed on the eligibility of CSSA.

President, in this meeting of the Legislative Council, the first motion has alleged to extend help to the middle class. In the second motion, the Liberal Party is trampling on the grassroots. The so-called help as extended by the Liberal Party — I have no idea whether they genuinely wish to offer help or not; they may be inclined to help the giant consortia — in fact, is intended to be seen as helping the middle class, but the approach they adopt is helping the middle class by trampling on the grassroots. I believe this kind of behaviour is disdained by the middle class.

What I find most disgusting is a recent banner of the Liberal Party, on which it is written, "Able-bodied persons should not be greedy; abuse of CSSA should be opposed." What does the Liberal Party mean by that? What does Mr Frankie YICK mean by that? "Able-bodied persons should not be greedy". First of all, does it mean that you stigmatize all able-bodied persons on CSSA as greedy? This will lead to serious consequences because among the CSSA recipients, many of them are single parents and some are patients with chronic disease. The single parents and the patients with chronic disease may also be able-bodied. Members of the Liberal Party are also able-bodied. But you suffer from a disease, and that is, "a disease of tinted glasses". All of you look at others through tinted glasses. You suffer a "disease of tinted eyes". But you are able-bodied. A lot of patients with chronic disease and ex-mentally ill persons have to face many difficulties not visible to us. It is not at all easy for unemployed persons aged 50 to 60 to find jobs. They encounter problems of mismatching jobs. Just one remark from you has knocked down all able-bodied CSSA recipients at one stroke.

Of course, we cannot rule out the possibility of abuse. There is a possibility of abuse for any systems in the world. However, should we knock down all CSSA recipients at one stroke just because some individuals have abused the Scheme? Of course, you can say that only long-term CSSA unemployed recipients are targeted. You can say that. But the wording on your banner is not like that. The content of the banner targets at everybody. The harm done by this to the CSSA recipients far exceeds the problem of abuse caused by individual CSSA recipients. This action of the Liberal Party has the effect of making sweeping generalizations, knocking all down at one stroke,
creating negative labels, inciting hatred, and dividing the society. Don't you think this kind of behaviour is shameful?

As a result of this action of the Liberal Party, many CSSA recipients and their children may feel that negative labels are attached to them, rendering them unable to hold their heads up. I have heard small children asking their parents not to live on CSSA. They ask their parents not to live on CSSA no matter how hard their life is. Of course, you can say this is good because even small children understand this. However, why do small children say something like this? It is because of the effect of the negative label created by you that makes those with genuine needs dare not receive CSSA. Many people with genuine needs have to starve because of this negative label. They have to go to the food bank to line up for food. Do you wish this to happen? The calamity of the negative label has the effect of making many people in poverty lose all their dignity. Do you wish this to happen? Do you wish to trample on them so that you can rise to the fore? Is it the principle of the Liberal Party to trample on CSSA recipients in order to rise to the fore, incite hatred in order to please those who loathe CSSA recipients? Adopting such a tactic to please a certain group and incite the hatred against CSSA recipients will only bring tremendous damage to society.

As a matter of fact, where does the problem lie? Why don't you extend any help? From the era of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions to the present Labour Party, we have all along advocated to enact legislation to prohibit age discrimination. Do you support this legislation? You do not. Thus, age discrimination has become a very practical problem. Once the person is required to show his identity card, he will not be employed. Therefore, if you wish to help people to find a job, you must first enact legislation to prohibit age discrimination, instead of refusing to do something constructive, coupled with trampling on others.

Secondly, regarding the arrangement of disregarded earnings of CSSA recipients, when the recipients enter the job market, they leave the category of unemployment and become someone with low earnings, with the disregarded earnings amounting to $2,500 only. Since this is the case, unemployed CSSA recipients will be worried that if they do not live on CSSA and remain in employment, once they are dismissed (as it is easy for casual workers to be dismissed), it will be very difficult for them to turn back. Further, the incentive
of entering the job market is $2,500 only; that is, at most the additional amount they can get is the amount of $2,500 under the disregarded earnings. In other words, no matter what their wage is, be it $5,000, $6,000 or $7,000, the additional amount they can get at most is $2,500.

I am not saying that unlimited incentives should be provided to them. But at least another approach should be adopted to implement the arrangement concerning disregarded earnings. If they have a surplus after the disregarded earnings of $2,500, they should be allowed to deposit it in another account as savings. When they no longer stay on the CSSA for the unemployed, they can take away the entire amount. For instance, if they can save up $5,000 per month, the amount will be saved up for them so that they can take away the entire amount in the future. When they are allowed to turn back, their mind can be put at ease. In this way, even though they no longer stay on CSSA for the unemployed, even though they can find a job on a temporary basis, they will try to cope with it with the hope of saving up money. However, you refuse to implement this.

In fact, there are many constructive means available to help people. However, you choose the means of trampling on others. This will infuriate many poor people in the society of Hong Kong. They feel that their dignity is trampled on and they are distressed. I hope you will genuinely reflect on yourselves in this respect.

Thank you, President.

MR WU CHI-WAI (in Cantonese): President, the subject of the motion today is: Optimizing the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance for the unemployed. I hold that it is necessary to clarify a point first, and that is, basically we do not have "CSSA for the unemployed" in Hong Kong. There is only a category of unemployment among CSSA recipients. The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) is a poverty alleviation policy and a kind of relief provided to society. When members of the society are facing hardship and are unable to support themselves financially, the Government provides the CSSA Scheme as an ultimate safety net, offering financial assistance to bring their income up to a prescribed level to meet their basic needs.
Unfortunately, in 1998, the Government took the lead to attach a stigma to this poverty alleviation policy that provides relief to society. Back then, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) alleged that given the drastic rise of CSSA cases and expenditure, a review on the CSSA Scheme had to be launched. Mr Andrew LEUNG Kin-pong, the then Director of Social Welfare, remarked in public that people would become lazy if the amount of CSSA was too high. Television commercials were used to smear the CSSA recipients. As a result, views have gradually started to form in society, with allegations that people on CSSA are lazy, the majority of the Government's resources are spent on CSSA, and the CSSA Scheme is being abused. As a matter of fact, the motion proposed by the Liberal Party today has only carried through the adverse consequences of the Government's act of stigmatizing CSSA recipients back then.

Let us look at the facts of CSSA. The present number of CSSA cases stands at 270,060, with the cases of old age accounting for 57% of the total number. Cases of permanent disability and ill health stand at 43,654; together with the cases of old age, they represent 73% of the total number of cases. Among the rest of the categories, cases of single parent account for 11% of all cases; cases of low-earnings (where a recipient is employed but receives subsidy because his income is lower than the eligibility of CSSA) account for 4%; cases of unemployment have dropped to 9% of the total number of cases. As cases under the unemployment category account for less than 10% of the total number of CSSA cases, should they be considered as inexcusable? Let us look at the figures provided by the Liberal Party. Out of the cases of unemployment, the number of short-term cases — particularly cases that stay on CSSA for less than two years — has, in fact, dropped rapidly. Consequent to the financial tsunami in 2008, the number went up, but dropped rapidly afterwards. As for the figure of the medium-term cases — cases that stay on CSSA for two to five years — there has been a gradual decline. Only the decline of the figure for long-term cases is found to be at a slower pace.

I hope Members will understand that there are many factors attributable to the problems faced by the long-term unemployed CSSA recipients. At present, an employment assistance programme has been launched by the SWD. Under the programme, CSSA recipients who do not work are not allowed to stay on CSSA. They are required by the SWD to apply for a job every two weeks. If they are employed, their CSSA eligibility will be nullified. If a CSSA recipient applies for a job every two weeks but still fails to secure a job, should the SWD
find out the reasons for this? After reasons have been identified, should the SWD provide assistance through other programmes? It is particularly so when a CSSA recipient has left the job market for a long period of time. We can understand that their confidence in securing a job, their performance at interviews and the impression they give to employers tend to be relatively negative. Should the Government introduce more channels through which they are offered jobs without pay — such as identifying job opportunities in the community where they live — to help them regain confidence to work? Such assistance warrants our consideration.

We hope that Secretary Matthew CHEUNG will make a response later and identify good measures to help people in these long-term cases leave the CSSA net. And most importantly, as many colleagues have mentioned, insofar as these CSSA recipients are concerned, "With hair, who would like to go bald?". This is a practical issue. It is absolutely unacceptable if we do not explore means to help them when they are facing substantial difficulties, but choose to knock all down at one stroke and attach a stigma on them instead.

Today's motion is "Optimizing the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance for the unemployed". There are views that the CSSA Scheme has been abused by recipients. Let us think about this. If the CSSA Scheme has been abused by recipients, according to the eligibility criteria of CSSA, if the SWD knows that CSSA has been abused by certain recipients, basically the SWD should not grant CSSA to them. In the process of granting CSSA, the SWD should keep the gate prudently. We must not take a casual remark that the CSSA Scheme has been abused as the truth. This is very unfair to all CSSA recipients. As a matter of fact, cases of old age, permanent disability and single parent account for 90% of all CSSA recipients. The majority of them are recognized by society as the disadvantaged groups in need of assistance. However, once the stigma of abusing the CSSA Scheme has been labelled on them, these disadvantaged groups with genuine needs will be more apprehensive when they solicit help, which will only lead to greater miseries.

Thus, insofar as this motion is concerned, to be sure, we hold that this kind of stigma that labels CSSA recipients as abusing the CSSA Scheme is unacceptable. We also hope that the SWD will set out to study how the ability of recipients to re-enter the labour market can be enhanced, with a view to helping them rejoin the workplace. We believe that everyone wishes to gain
respect from work and live with dignity. Thus, we hope that the SWD and the Secretary (The buzzer sounded) ….. will re-examine how …..

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr WU, your speaking time is up.

MR WU CHI-WAI (in Cantonese): ….. re-examine and see how we can help people on CSSA leave it.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr WU, please stop speaking.

MR WU CHI-WAI (in Cantonese): Thank you, President.

MR FREDERICK FUNG (in Cantonese): President, this so-called motion topic of "the able-bodied should not be greedy" proposed by Mr James TIEN of the Liberal Party today is infuriating, since the motion itself, coupled with the contents of their speeches, indicates that they discriminate against not only the unemployed recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) but also those elderly people, single-parent families and people with disabilities. Moreover, they do not know what discrimination is. I shall not repeat the data already quoted by our colleagues. Instead, I try to interpret the values behind the contents of their speeches.

Why do I say so? It is commonly understood that the number of people receiving CSSA for the unemployed only accounts for 9%, but he claimed that at present there were 270 000 CSSA recipients, as if all these 270 000 people were receiving CSSA for the unemployed. This is "an exaggeration", as the number is about 20 000 or a little more only.

The content of Mr James TIEN's motion can be likened to "mother is a woman; father is a man", which is definitely correct, as he reminds us not to be greedy. However, I would also like to remind employers not to be greedy. The TIEN family set foot only on the retail industry in the past, but why do they also get involved in the real estate industry now? It is simply a greedy attempt to
make more profits; doing business is also an act of greed. Reasonable and legitimate acts of greed may not be opposed in a free society, and I believe that those currently receiving CSSA for the unemployed have not yet reached this extent.

One of the cases cited by Mr James TIEN was a CSSA couple travelling abroad at the time of the tsunami incident. However, were this couple receiving CSSA for the unemployed, for families or for the low-income people? If a couple have the ability to work, and the whole family is taken as a unit, should all married couples not be greedy? He claimed that a mother left her children at home to go for fun and gambling, asking the mother not to be greedy and not to gamble, without finding out whether the CSSA she was receiving was for single parents, low-income people or the unemployed.

I am not sure whether Mr James TIEN has heard of another case: a foreign couple. The husband was a former judge living in public housing by fraudulent means, in addition to defrauding CSSA payment. In that case, logically speaking, should we ask expatriates not to be greedy, not allowing them to apply for CAAS, and not allowing judges to apply for CSSA? Or should we even ask judges and the legal profession not to be greedy? What kind of logic is this?

The Liberal Party claimed that these people had the ability to work, except that they were greedy, and the problem could be solved by providing training for them. However, among those receiving CSSA for the unemployed, which account for 9% of all CSSA recipients, that is, 20 000-odd people, more than half of them are the so-called disadvantaged workers over the age of 40. When the economic condition is good, a reduction in the number of unemployed CSSA recipients can be seen, but when the economy is unfavourable, the number is on the rise. It is apparent that the number of unemployed CSSA recipients is inversely proportional to the economic condition. If the unemployed are really greedy, why is there such a trend of reverse direction? They can simply ignore the economic condition, be it good or bad, and continue to receive CSSA, but facts and figures have proved that they are not. However, the Liberal Party fails to see this point, or their researchers have been blind to this? Otherwise Mr James TIEN did not care what the researchers said, except accepting all the data provided by them. If this is the case, you should dismiss those researchers.
Why did I say that you discriminate against not only the unemployed but also the elderly, single-parent families and people with disabilities? What we advocate is equality, instead of offering more assistance simply on the basis of people's old age or disability. People with disabilities have the same intention to work, and the elderly may also wish to work. Moreover, only 190,000 out of the current population of 900,000 elderly people are receiving CAAS, and they have already accounted for 70% of all CSSA applications. In that case, what are the remaining 700,000 elderly people doing? Why don't they need CAAS? Why are they not greedy? The elderly also wish to be considered as having the ability to make money, hoping to lead a normal life, rather than hoping you to be "benevolent" and offer them more assistances or exemptions due to their being miserable, disabled, elderly or single-parents, so that they can remain greedy to the extent that even abuse is not a problem.

However, I am sorry to say that abuse is abuse, irrespective of gender and age, and regardless of whether you are disabled or not, as abuse is abuse. If it is said that we need to provide assistance for people with disabilities since they are incapable of working, should those unemployed able-bodied be also offered CSSA? Why do we accuse them of abusing for this reason? The examples cited by you a moment ago included the retired judge aforementioned. He was already over 70 years old, but was what he did correct? If it was, why was he charged, arrested and fined, and even his public housing flat was taken back?

Therefore, abuse is irrespective of sex and age, "buddy", and what you said is exactly discrimination, not only discriminating against CSSA recipients, but also against those exempted persons whom you mentioned about. Your entire motion and the campaign enrage me. I cannot understand what your purpose is. If it is for combating abusers of CSSA, I will fully support. However, why did you depict the able-bodied applicants of CSSA as greedy? This is indeed discrimination, discriminating directly against the disadvantaged aforementioned, and indirectly against those you target at. In my opinion, behind this discrimination is a reflection of your pride as being the boss. Most members of the Liberal party are bosses believing that business makes profits, and there will be earnings as long as you work hard. Why do you not work hard? In other words, why do you have no money to buy meals? As long as beef or pork is available, I can afford it regardless of the cost.
I remember that in the past there were employers fleeing after their business had failed and being loudly insulted by people as unscrupulous employers. Mr James TIEN was once in rage and demanded people not to make "a hasty generalisation", but this is precisely what you are doing today. What makes you different from those people talking nonsense regardless of reasons, data and facts? That time you accused those people, and today you should also accuse yourself and those think-tanks behind you, since they have picked the wrong topic. Do not think that you can win the votes of the middle class as well as those voters disliking CSSA recipients by humiliating people with disabilities, the elderly and the unemployed? It can be achieved only by selecting a right topic.

President, I absolutely cannot accept the Liberal Party treating this issue as a movement, which is not only debated in this Council, but also written on banners hung everywhere on the streets. This is entirely an act of discrimination against all CSSA recipients concerned, whether they are the able-bodied or the disadvantaged; nobody is excluded.

DR HELENA WONG (in Cantonese): President, the Democratic Party will abstain from voting on Mr James TIEN's original motion. We agree on some of his viewpoints, including helping those who can work to be self-reliant. However, he mentioned the need to eradicate the abuse of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) for the unemployed, as if there were many cases of abuse. Moreover, behind the whole issue — as mentioned by a number of colleagues just a moment ago — there are a misunderstanding of CSSA recipients and an adverse effect of stigmatization on them. Therefore, we will not support the motion. Regarding the amendment proposed by Mr Frankie YICK of the Liberal Party which recommends a two-year time limit for receiving CSSA for the unemployed, we oppose to it.

These amendments proposed by the Liberal Party today have been criticized by many Members, and we agree to some of these criticisms. First of all, we question some unnecessary adverse labels on CAAS recipients, which will not only unnecessarily stigmatize those at grass-roots level as well as those in most dire difficulties and need of assistance in our society, but also discourage those in genuine need of assistance from applying for CSSA due to excessive pressure, rendering them to resort to different means and eventually remain "in great difficulties". What we do not want to see is that while we were discussing
yesterday how to assist the middle class, at the same time we treat stringently those who need help the most and depict them as if they were truly abusing the CSSA. As a matter of fact, are there many abuse cases? I have just seen a lot of different figures. In fact, out of the existing 270 000-odd CAAS cases, those of the elderly account for 57%, and it takes up 73% of all cases when those receiving CAAS for permanent disabilities and ill health are included. In other words, cases of CSSA for the elderly and the disabled have already accounted for three quarters of all CSSA applications. In addition, cases of CAAS for single parents account for 11%, and there are some cases of CAAS for low-income people. When all these cases are added together, as far as we can see, how many people who are really not most in need would actually apply for CSSA? The relevant figures are in fact very small.

The Liberal Party issued a report and held a press conference with fanfares, urging the whole city to target at abuse cases of CAAS for the unemployed. However, as a matter of fact, the situation in our society is that — as we have just mentioned — for cases of CAAS for the unemployed in the past four years, since the financial turmoil in 2009, we see that such cases have been declining year by year, from 34 600 cases in 2009, 31 897 in 2010, 26 859 in 2011 to only 26 317 in 2012, which actually accounts for only 9% of all cases. In other words, over the past four years the number of cases has continuously dropped to less than 10%, and, as the employment rate in our community has risen since the financial turmoil, this downward trend will further lead to a fall in the number of CAAS cases for the unemployed. Therefore, we do not understand the premise of the Liberal Party's argument, and why they depict it as if there were more and more people applying for CSSA for the unemployed and there were many cases of abuse, as we have not seen enough data to support this argument. The data inform us that, with the development in economy as well as the rise in employment, the number of CAAS cases for the unemployed has dropped to less than 10% over the past four years.

Therefore, we need to know why there is a change in the number of recipients of CSSA for the unemployed. Certainly, we must understand some basic principles. The longer the unemployment period lasts, the slimmer the chance for the unemployed people to secure jobs becomes. Employment opportunities will be better if they make an effort and have a motivation to secure jobs when they are newly unemployed. However, when they repeatedly fail to secure jobs after an extended period of time, in most cases, they will simply give up. Therefore, regardless of the causes that have led to unemployment, whether
they can secure jobs or not — for those unemployed people who are likely to secure jobs, they can in fact quickly seek employment in the job market, — for those who are unlikely to secure jobs again due to different personal reasons, possibly technical problems, education levels or various reasons, they will not be able to seek employment regardless of their effort. On the other hand, the problem also lies with employers. If an employer reads an application letter and finds that the applicant has been unemployed for a period of time, he may feel concerned and dare not hire this applicant. He may wonder why this person has been unemployed for such a long time and think that the problem must lie with him. In this case, employers will also have misgivings with applicants of long-term unemployment. The longer time a person is unemployed, the less the employers will risk hiring this unemployed person.

Therefore, I opine that if the Liberal Party is genuinely concerned about unemployed CSSA recipients, their motion should, in contrary, call on the Government and the industry to discuss how to jointly create opportunities to assist them. In this connection, the Democratic Party opines that we should urge the Government to conduct a review. We consider it necessary to formulate effective measures to help those intending to secure jobs, including studies on negative income tax, income subsidies for low-income people, so as to encourage them to re-enter society for employment. We also propose the introduction of a responsible welfare scheme, allowing those having been receiving CSSA for a period of time but with the ability to work to participate in unpaid jobs arranged by the Government, so as to enhance their confidence and skills, to establish a working habit and to increase their employment opportunities.

In this connection, the Democratic Party recommends that the Government should do something to create job opportunities, including resources investment and co-operation with social welfare institutions and civil organizations, so that unemployed CSSA recipients and those with the ability to work can participate in such schemes and gradually establish a working habit, thus making it more likely for employers to hire them.

MR MA FUNG-KWOK (in Cantonese): President, the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme aims to provide the most basic financial support for people in extremely financial difficulties, including the unemployed, the disabled, single parents and the elderly. The Scheme operates under a stringent examination mechanism with a comparatively strong social
stigmatization effect. I believe that most people will not receive CSSA to meet financial needs if they are not faced with great difficulties.

The original motion proposes the principle of "motivating those with the ability to work to be self-reliant". I believe the majority of our colleagues will assent to this principle. As regarding the more controversial issue of abuse of CSSA for the unemployed, I believe that there is always room for optimization and improvement in any system. According to the latest data released by the Government at the end of last year, cases of the unemployed accounted for only 8.9% of all the 200,000 CSSA cases, of which 80% belonged to the age group of 40 to 59, and it showed a trend of continuous fall in the number of such cases. This shows that most CSSA cases belong to categories of old age, permanent disabilities, ill health, single parents and so on. Judging from the figures, if there are abuses of CSSA for the unemployed, the problem should not be as serious as most people imagine, and it is being rectified.

However, what we are more concerned about is that the average time for young recipients of age 15 to 29 continuously receiving CSSA for the unemployed has risen from approximately four years in 2007 to eight years last year. Despite the fact that the number of cases of young people receiving CSSA for the unemployed only amounts to approximately 3,000 and continues to decline, we can see that some young people with the ability to work have lost their will to give full strength to their work potential. Even if there are only 100, 50, or merely 10 cases, they remain to be a concern.

A young and unemployed college graduate claimed in a press interview, "To work is to sell knowledge, not to 'sell the body' or even 'sell the life'." The statement reflects a thinking that goes against the so-called viewpoint of 'a person's ability is not limited to one skill". This shows that it is not the case that young people are unable to seek employment; instead, it is the case that some jobs fail to arouse their interest, so that they have lost the motivation to work. We need to understand the difficulties faced by young people, and respect their freedom of job selection. The Government should also create more quality job opportunities, so as to improve career prospects for young people. Nevertheless, if some people rely on CSSA for the unemployed to meet their financial needs simply because they fail to secure their ideal jobs, this will violate the CSSA principle of taking care of the elderly and the disabled, as well as acting against the hardworking spirit of Hong Kong people. Such a practice should not be encouraged.
President, in my opinion, the goal of optimizing CSSA for the unemployed should not focus on minimizing the abuse. Instead, it should primarily aim at assisting people so that those who have lost their will to work hard can give full play to their talents and be self-reliant to face their future life.

In this connection, I opine that the Support for Self-reliance Scheme (SFS) should be further optimized, including reinforcement of psychological counselling to fully understand recipients' difficulties in securing jobs and their reasons for losing the motivation to seek employment, offering more encouragement and moral support to strengthen their self-confidence and improve their mental quality for job application, so as to enhance their performance at job interviews.

With regard to job offering, the current SFS mainly arranges community work of physical types. For the unemployed with higher academic qualifications, the authorities may consider providing professional practice opportunities for them. On the one hand, it can alleviate workload for the industry, which is similar to job practice tests to identify talents; on the other hand, it can avoid affecting the job opportunities for people with low education attainment. When recipients with higher academic qualifications are engaged in low-skilled jobs, the authorities may consider offering job application leave by means of loans or allowances, so that they have time to seek employment which matches their qualifications and professions. This can accommodate their feelings and make the best use of their talents at the same time. In addition, the recommendation of increasing the exemption amount of SFS also warrants our support.

President, I opine that in the long run, the Government should consider detaching the assistance for the unemployed from the CSSA scheme to establish an independent system which not only offers financial assistance for job seekers, but also invests more resources from the perspective of employment support, and further strengthens co-operation with the Vocational Training Council, Labour Department or private markets and so on, so as to allow real self-reliance for assistance seekers, and to create more possibilities for their own life.

I so submit. Thank you, President.
MISS CHAN YUEN-HAN (in Cantonese): President, I was very angry when I saw the publicity boards of the Liberal Party on the streets. Although it appears that the Liberal Party has not clearly spelt out its intention in the original motion, it was betrayed by their publicity boards on the streets. The idea behind the motion is to punish people who have not been able to find jobs after a long period of time. Frankly speaking, I think that at a time when there are so much rivalry between employers and employees and so much sentiment against the rich in society, his motion has not only augmented contradictions, failed to solve the existing problems of the poor, but also given people an impression that he is hitting those who are already down.

I expect business men who run for direct elections to ponder over this. Some people say that we are populists, but how can we be populists? Would Mr TIEN please think about it: "With hair, who would like to go bald"? I think that everyone should understand this point. If Mr TIEN is willing to get in touch with the recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) and keep in touch with them for a long time, he would know how hard they have strived to eke a living.

It is now no longer possible for me to meet regularly with the public on a weekly basis due to my busy work schedule. I often met with the public back at the time when Hong Kong was faced with difficult conditions (that was four years ago). Recently, I have also met or come across members of the public who sought help, but back then, I met with them on a weekly basis, and I would try to persuade people whom we found to be in financial difficulties to receive CSSA. However, Mr TIEN, 10 out of the 10 people I tried to persuade were unwilling to do so and continued to struggle until they became sick. Although I told them that their kids would suffer if they continued to do so, they were still reluctant to receive CSSA.

What I have said are all plain facts with no exaggerations. There are now hundreds of thousand people with low-incomes who do not receive CSSA. This shows that many people in the Hong Kong community do not wish to do so. I have asked some women why they are reluctant to receive CSSA, and they say their children do not want their classmates to know about it, they do not want to be looked down upon by their relatives, and what is more, they do not want their husbands to be unable to hold up their heads ever since. Such examples are countless, and up to now, many of the poor people who I come across at various
districts also share the same views. I believe that the business sector should appreciate the fact that "with hair, no one would like to go bald."

As to the abuse of CSSA, there have been such cases but they are very extreme examples. I have looked up information and found that the number of those cases were only very few. I believe that for any system, there are always people who abuse it, but it does not mean that we should make sweeping generalizations and say that there is a problem with the entire system. I have been in constant touch with poor people for a long time, seen their plights, and seen that they had no way out in face of poverty. Frankly speaking, receiving CSSA is their last resort, and they would like to join the workforce again if condition permits.

Let us look back at the Government's system and we can see that though some people did not wish to receive CSSA, they were eventually forced to do so. However, they would like to maintain their working ability and go out to work while receiving CSSA, but people were restrained from doing so under the system, for a large amount of their wages would be deducted, thereby undermining the effectiveness of many job incentives. Well, how exactly does the existing CSSA Scheme of the Government for helping the unemployed operate? Originally, recipients were treated like ghosts and placed under scrutiny like prisoners who went out to work, thus making people very angry, but the system was eventually improved. Recipients of CSSA have continued to struggle while receiving payments because they hope that they would be given a chance by society and by Mr TIEN, but they were not given any chances. They told me that they were unsuccessful each time after they attended a job interview. I suggested that they should receive training, but they were still unsuccessful at interviews after doing so.

Let us look at the example of China, where the schemes for the "40 year-old" and "50 year-old" are launched to assist laid-off workers who are in their 40s and 50s. The upward mobility opportunities provided under such schemes launched more than a decade ago, are similar to that of our "moving up from public housing to Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) housing and from HOS housing to private housing" ladder. In the absence of such a ladder at the moment, the unemployed fail to find jobs and secure work opportunities after undergoing trainings and "trial placements". These people still fail to secure job opportunities after "trial placements", even when the Government has spent
money on offering subsidies to the organizations for providing the placements. There is no doubt that many people have complained about the performance of young people …… I very much agree with the views of Mr MA Fung-kwok — perhaps, it is because he is from the cultural sector — he could look at the work type and work hours of young people from their perspectives. I think what is most important is that we should not take a perspective that finds fault with the young people.

President, today, poor people are already faced with a very difficult situation. We should not force them to take to the streets against big businesses. They have already got a strong hatred for the rich and major real estate developers who tyrannized over them. It is very irresponsible of a political party to allow further growth of such anti-rich sentiments and it will be punished in future direct elections.

I felt very angry when I saw these words: "able-bodied person should not be greedy" on the streets. What are they greedy for? What can the Government give them? Has the Government given them any job opportunities? The development of creative industries in San Po Kong and Kwun Tong has enabled many young people who could not further their studies to learn IT, music and drama skills, but the Government has driven them away by refusing to provide the land. As such, what Mr TANG Ka-piu has said is all true. As regards the unemployed who are now receiving CSSA, we think that there is a need to improve the system, but unlike what Mr James TIEN said, the way to go about it is not to restrict people from the perspective of "greediness", but — as what Mr MA Fun-kwok has said — to focus at the relevant problems and solve them one by one, when these people are faced with difficulties.

Why does Secretary Matthew CHEUNG dare to make irrelevant statements but dare not solve the problem? I have talked about the problem for 10 years — at least more than 10 years. We should focus on identifying the problems of why they still fail to secure jobs after undergoing training, and then solve them one by one, as in the case of the schemes for the "40 year-old" and "50 year-old" in China, which have provided people with many suitable job opportunities. Specific arrangements have been made in Shanghai for many unemployed 40 year-olds to manage bicycles; and in order to create jobs for laid-off workers, arrangements have been made in Beijing for them to drive tourist buses and guide
visitors to see antiquities and monuments, thus created suitable job opportunities for them.

The Government should not casually assume that these people have not lived up to its expectations after undergoing training. It is not that they have not lived up to its expectations. Has the Government provided them with the necessary conditions? Instead of making casual remarks, the Government should first solve these problems before telling me who has not yet been able to find a job. I have repeatedly emphasized that "with hair, no one would like to go bald". Poor people do not wish to receive CSSA, but the problem is that they do not have any opportunities. The business sector has given them no opportunities at all, and this is precisely what the people, including young people, often say. I understand that the situation of some young people is rather particular, but it does not mean that their problems cannot be solved. The problem is whether the Government has the intention to do so. No, it has not. With an income of over $300,000 per month, will Secretary Matthew CHEUNG consider such issues? Has he come up with any formula and tell me how the problems can be solved? Secretary, this not the first time I have raised such issues. I have talked about such issues for a long time, and also during the term of the previous government, but the Secretary has not dealt with them and completely failed to deal with problems which we raised back then.

President, today, the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions is opposed to the motion of the Liberal Party.

(Mr James TIEN raised his hand to indicate a wish).

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr James TIEN, what is the matter?

MR JAMES TIEN (in Cantonese): President, I wonder under which rule of the Rules of Procedure I may request for the meeting to be suspended for one minute or so because I wish to go to the washroom. I am afraid the meeting has to be discontinued if I request a headcount. Moreover, I do not wish to miss the speeches to be delivered by Dr KWOK Ka-ki and Ms Claudia MO.
PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): At the request of Mr James TIEN, I now suspend the meeting for 10 minutes.

MR JAMES TIEN (in Cantonese): President, I will be back from the washroom in two minutes.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): The meeting is now suspended.

3.31 pm

Meeting suspended.

3.38 pm

Council then resumed.

DR KWOK KA-KI (in Cantonese): President, first of all, I would like to thank Mr James TIEN for listening to Members' speeches here. Mr TIEN and other Members of the Liberal Party are Members of the business sector for whom I have considerable respect because their speeches have always given me the impression that they have their own opinions and would not just agree to everything. However, regarding the motion moved by Mr TIEN today, I could only express my views in one word, "regrettable". I try to make a slight amendment to Mr TIEN's motion according to my own interpretation and would like to know what Mr TIEN thinks about it.

My amendment is as follows: "That this Council urges the Government to expeditiously adopt effective measures to motivate those of the business sector with abilities to be self-reliant and eradicate collusion between the Government and the business sector, transfer of benefits and abuse of Government resources, so as to focus resources on helping people in the business sector with genuine needs." In fact, I do not want to label the entire business sector as being engaged in "collusion with the Government", and "transfer of benefits", for there are small businesses which are worthy of our support.
Hong Kong is the home to businesses and many Government policies are tilted in favour of the business sector. Here, I do not want to go into the details of the Policy Address again, but I would like to mention one or two points briefly. The general principle of each Policy Address of the Government focuses mainly on economic development and business facilitation. The Government has plans to support Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) by providing loan guarantees which amount to about $100 billion. Secretary Paul CHAN said at a meeting of the Panel on Development held yesterday that the authorities had not let the engineering sector down, for the Government's capital works expenditure would amount to $70 billion each year in the coming years, and this made many members of engineering consultancies and construction companies rejoice in silence.

Real estate developers should be most delighted when the housing policy of Hong Kong comes under discussion. Of course, I am not referring to Mr TIEN; I mean those real estate developers who can definitely be described as "hegemony". Whenever our relationship with the Mainland comes under discussions, how to facilitate and help the business sector make more money is always the main focus. Yesterday, I sought the help of the Labour Department on behalf of several older driving instructors who felt helpless because they were laid off by the Hong Kong School of Motoring before the Lunar New Year. Like many colleagues who have sought assistance from the Labour Department on behalf of the public, every time I approached it for help I could predict that it would take the side of the business sector. Ask any labour organization or union and you will find that they all have the same strong feeling — that the Labour Department will be partial to employers. In fact, Hong Kong has become a place which has completely yielded to and tilted in favour of the business sector.

On the other hand, how are our disadvantaged and low-income groups fared? Colleagues have just quoted many data which I have no wish to repeat here, but I would like to focus and elaborate on a few. Fifty thousand applications for CSSA for the unemployed were recorded in 2003, while only 24,000 of such cases were recorded in 2011, and there were only 227,000 unemployed persons in 2004, and the number dropped further to 131,000 in October last year. Both figures see a decrease of about 42.3% or 41.8%. The rates are actually comparable.
I happened to have acquaintance with some educated CSSA recipients who are getting $1,990 from CSSA. No one in Hong Kong, in particular those with abilities and skills, are willing to collect a mere $1,990. The income of those who washes dishes in a restaurant will exceed that amount. They are making over $10,000 a month now. I believe that there are many jobs which these people would definitely take up if they are able to do so.

Everyone has a story. Indeed, in many similar cases, the persons in question can be called socially withdrawn or socially unadjusted, and most of them have adjustment problems that are medically known as "Adjustment Disorder". If they were asked to seek treatments, they would have to go through a very miserable process for there is a long waiting period at the psychiatric departments of public hospitals. When my colleagues come across cases of people with social adjustment problems, they will almost be tempted to ask them not to come for treatment. It is not that they do not want to treat these patients, but since they have only got two to three minutes for schizophrenic patients, they can only say sorry to patients with adjustment problems. As resources are limited, the follow-up appointments for such cases would often be scheduled to every six months or a year, and doctors may even ask the patients to go home and find their own solutions. These are all helpless people in the community whose withdrawals are not their own making. They are socially withdrawn because none of the public services in our community, and that is, services provided by our Secretaries of the Bureaux, can help them. Who would be born "socially withdrawn"?

However, our business sector can actually be more generous. If the motion of today had advocated the idea of the business sector working together, in addition to obviating reliance on the government, taking the initiative to promote certain employment pilot schemes, coming forward to help people who have been unemployed for a long time by actively helping them to find jobs through networks of their own, the motion moved by Mr TIEN today might have convinced us to have greater trust and respect for the business sector.

It is regrettable that Mr TIEN has not adopted this approach. He has chosen to label some people whom we think are reluctant to receive CSSA on a long-term basis. This may not necessarily have anything to do with Mr TIEN, but from the banners on the streets, we can see that this is equivalent to sprinkling salt on the wounds of all CSSA recipients. I am a medical practitioner and I
know it very well that it is very painful to have salt sprinkled on wounds. The pain of being labelled and branded as "slackers" is really unbearable.

About this motion, first of all, I hope that it will not be passed, and secondly, I also hope that the business sector and Government alike can be more tolerant and pull their strengths together in times of trouble. It is only by doing so can Hong Kong be more successful and fewer people have to rely on Government assistance.

With these remarks, I am against the original motion. Thank you, President.

MS CLAUDIA MO (in Cantonese): President, I was completely at a loss when I first saw the motion, and did not know what it was all about, what it meant by "urges the Government to expeditiously adopt effective measures". First of all, it implies that there may not be any existing measures, and even if there are, they are ineffective. Then it says, "To motivate those with the ability to work to be self-reliant and eradicate the abuse of CSSA". The term "eradicate" seems to be used by doctors talking about eliminating cancer, which must be cured and must guarantee to do so. Should such wordings be applied to all other organizations which represented the official authorities? For example, can we ask the police to adopt every means to eradicate the abuse of police power? Is that feasible? Can we require the Education Bureau to put in place effective measures to eradicate the abuse of certain allowance systems? Similarly, the Hospital Authority can also say that it has to eradicate the abuse of the accident and emergency departments, and explicitly says that this must be "eradicated". The wordings are so ferocious and it is a tone of finality. Does he know that this kind of determination is really intimidating?

I have also seen banners with the words "the able-bodied should not be greedy" on the streets. President, we have to be logical in our debate. In saying "able-bodied should not be greedy", it means that those who are not able-bodied should be greedy. This kind of language gives people a very bad feeling. I do not want to pinpoint at the Liberal Party or Mr TIEN's motion, and question why they bring this up to cause differentiation in the community and I also believe that they must have their own justifications and these words have not just appeared out of thin air. However, even if they have got the data from local
districts, I am very worried that, like government statistics, such data are often not credible. As a famous quote of Mark TWAIN goes, "Lies, damned lies, and statistics". Where do such figures come from? Even a lot of poor people will agree that "the able-bodied should not be greedy", but here we are talking about the physically able-bodied. President, there are people in our society who are deaf, dumb, suffering from amblyopia or blind, or those who have mental or emotional problems, which a doctor mentioned earlier, and it is very difficult for people who are suffering from depression to find a job. So how should we categorize these people? I am very disgusted with such wording, which is totally language-insensitive.

Since the original motion was so worded, I thought that many Members would move amendments to it. It came as no surprise that Mr Frankie YICK's amendment is even more shocking. The second point of his amendment states that the existing Extension of the Integrated Employment Assistance Scheme under the Support for Self-reliance Scheme should be optimized with the ultimate goal of making the recipients "to maintain a healthy mindset towards working". In other words, these people were very idle in the past and they can lead a "very enjoyable" and "care-free" life after collecting such payments, and they are virtually taking advantage of the Government by getting public money. Such injurious feelings are very overwhelming and we cannot support the amendment.

President, I not am going to repeat the figures which I have got in hand for they have been mentioned by other colleagues earlier. I only think that the original motion, in particular the motion as amended by Mr Frankie YICK, has not only invited criticisms, but also actually harmed the human relations principles which our civilized society believes in, and the basic major principle under which our civilized society operates, by putting it down in black and white, and he has done the business sector an injustice through the whole incident.

Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Does any other Member wish to speak?

MR LEUNG KWOK-HUNG (in Cantonese): President, I was at a loss when I saw the heading of the motion. Firstly, there is no doubt that the problem of
unemployment is something very common in a society of capitalism. The so-called "unemployment reserve army" — I believe that you would have studied this text when you were young — and what is an "unemployment reserve army"? It means that wages will naturally go downwards when more and more people become unemployed and this is the case of "too many monks, and too little congee", with not enough to go around. It is only congee, and before the legislation on minimum wages was passed by this Council, it was only a bowl of congee which might have been mixed with a variety of grains, and not rice congee. If you now fail to earn $28 an hour — there was a very sad phenomenon when the hourly wage for outsourced jobs of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department was seven dollars. An hourly wage of seven dollars is as outrageous as being able to buy two watches with seven dollars. An hourly wage of $7 is as outrageous as one can spend seven dollars to buy two watches. Two watches for seven dollars is something which can happen only when wages are extremely low, and the same goes for an hourly wage of seven dollars.

As such, Mr James TIEN's speech has strayed away from the point. If we have to ensure that the working class is offered minimum unemployment protection, we should adopt an unemployment benefits or unemployment insurance system. President, you have been to the United States and how are things over there? The piece of document most often presented by the people there is a social security card and not an identity card. Back then, I often said that you need not say that you did not know the number of people living in "sub-divided units". You could try to offer rent subsidies for households living in "sub-divided units", and only got to open up all District Offices in the territory, then people would come queuing up, and you would then be able to know how many people are living in "sub-divided units" or such inhuman accommodation.

If the political party, which Mr TIEN belongs to and represents employers, genuinely hopes that people will not abuse the CSSA, as they call it, and can have real unemployment protection, the system of unemployment insurance should be adopted. However, President, we have a problem here, for the implementation of the $28 hourly wage policy has already been considered as most benevolent, and they said it was terrible when they heard about the proposal to increase the hourly wage to $30, and Hong Kong would go under water if the hourly wage were increased by another two dollars. So, if the wages of the working class are too low, how can a member of the working class afford to contribute to the
unemployment insurance fund when they have to support their wives, children and elderly parents?

As such, the problem is that our wages are too low for people to afford an unemployment insurance system. To put it simply, people have to "fend for themselves", which has worked well in other countries. This is more obvious in an insurance system, under which one does not collect two dollars after contributing two dollars, for everyone's contributions are pooled together. This is how insurance works, and that is, those who are met with misfortunes can enjoy the benefit. If we look at it from this perspective, it will change the nature of CSSA — President, you are also aware that CSSA is something very bad, for it is a "safety net" created by the British Hong Kong Government. What is a "safety net"? It is a "bungy" that will save your life at the last second before you fall onto the mountain of knives, but you will be scared for you will be swinging over the mountain and could fall through the net at any moment — thus you have to find a job in society. The Gini Coefficient of Hong Kong is already in such a state. A large number of workers still fail to make ends meet even after they have contributed their efforts and labour, sacrificed their time with their families and enjoyment of family lives in order to earn money. How can they fend for themselves? I am talking about is that insurance can allow people to become self-reliant.

So, if Mr James TIEN really wants to achieve his goal, he should do it the other way round. Moreover, people are expected to find jobs under the CSSA Scheme — TUNG Chee-hwa had tried that more than a decade ago. "Buddy", how could people find jobs without travel subsidies? As such, if you make a person fall into a "safety net" or even lower, he is already sinking. Why should you keep condemning him? There is no doubt that there may be such individual cases, but "buddy", it is something that bounds to happen, and we should not stopping eating because of the possibility of getting choked.

I remember that I had come to grips with Mr TIEN before I served as a Member of the Legislative Council. I presented him with a poem which goes, "Like fire the red sun scorches, Wild fields and grains are half withering, While the hearts of farmers boil in anxiety, Descendants of noble families fan themselves in serenity". This is still applicable today. Mr TIEN is really oblivious of the hardships of the people. When a person has already fallen so low as to be condemned by everyone, accused of being useless, failing to find a
job, and questioned for not taking up low-paid jobs — I have to stress that half of the figures you have quoted were compiled before the implementation of minimum wages; and you have also said in recent years that in spite of the favourable economic and employment conditions, there are still people who are unemployed for a long time. This has clearly illustrated the problem and that is, regardless of market conditions, there are always workers at the lowest level who cannot get back on their feet. But shouldn't you treat them kindly?

President, this is a very vicious ideology. When there is a slight improvement in our economy, he will take a whip and whip you and ask you why you are not running faster. He says that Hong Kong has to make progress, so you have to run a little faster even if you have nothing to eat. President, I would like to quote a much-quoted example. After CHEN Duxiu said something very funny when he was tried at the court, the presiding judge said — like what the President said when he scolded me — "this is no place for joking." CHEN Duxiu said, "'Buddy,' you ask for unity, but you are a rider who constantly whips his horse and how can a rider be united with his horse?" And, the audience roared with laughter. Here, we cannot make jokes, but the situation is equally sad. Thank you, President.

MR ALBERT CHAN (in Cantonese): President, I am a bit disappointed that Mr James TIEN, as the leader of the Liberal Party, has moved the motion. I do not know whether it was because he or other key members of the Liberal Party had harboured a great hatred for those who received CSSA for the unemployed when they ran for direct election, or that they were very angry about certain cases which they have handled.

I have been a Legislative Council Member for more than 20 years, and surely I have come across cases in which I thought the system had been abused. I have encountered all sorts of situations. Similarly, this applies to big consortiums or big real estate developers, but why have we never seen the Liberal Party coming forward to condemn "inflated buildings"? Problems caused by the money earned from, public rights deprived of and consumers' interests curbed by "inflated buildings" are definitely more serious than those caused by the so-called CSSA for the unemployed. As the leader of a political party, he has to look at problems with the vision and perspective of a political party.
James TIEN, please check the record on unemployment assistance. More than 100 years ago, not only the Liberal Party, but also the Conservative Party of the United Kingdom worked together to put forward the People's Budget. Back then, David Lloyd GEORGE who was related to the Liberal Party worked with the then 33 year-old Winston CHURCHILL of the Conservative Party and jointly prepared a financial budget, which was known to the world as the People's Budget, to introduce a national insurance system which has offered protection for the elderly and the unemployed for over 100 years. While the idea of optimizing unemployment protection and replacing it with unemployment insurance can be considered, it does not mean that here we can hit people who are already down and discredit people who have already suffered great hardships.

When the insurance system was set up in 1911, Lloyd GEORGE said: "in face of the needs of the working class and difficulties which they have to overcome, and that they may lose their jobs due to illness or job insecurities, apart from introducing a national unemployment protection scheme which is sponsored by the Government and employers, I could not think of a better or more realistic way to help them." That was the speech of a person with leadership capabilities and the vision of political parties.

After the abovementioned Budget had been drafted for 30 years, Winston CHURCHILL became a world famous political leader and leader of the Conservative Party. James TIEN, please listen to what he said in a speech after the unemployment insurance system had been passed for 30 years, "The freedom and independence of enterprises and various services will only be empty words if no strict measures are in place to prevent their closures, accidents or unfortunate incidents. We are not as superficial as you think that we will vainly hope to subvert today's system but we only want to provide a safety rail for preventing the society from pushing the disadvantaged into the abyss of poverty. On the political spectrum, both conservatism and liberalism will make active contributions towards the work of protecting the basic livelihood of the people."

While two major political parties of the United Kingdom made speeches 70 years ago to the same effect, there is actually a leader of the Liberal Party in Hong Kong today whose thinking, principle and concept can be so different from that of overseas political parties back then. I do not know what liberal party the Liberal Party of Hong Kong is. It may be a metamorphosis of fascism, right? Or can it be a new fascism under the manipulation of communism?
President, speaking of CSSA for the unemployed or unemployment benefits, I have strong feelings. I believe that dignitaries, who are now present in this Chamber, even if they have studied abroad, have never collected unemployment insurance (UI) benefits, while those in Hong Kong would definitely have never done so. I collected UI benefits in Canada when I was 19 years old. Back then, I took a break from school to work for one year and did not know what I wanted. I had to stop working in winter for the job was of a seasonal nature, and everyone had to be laid-off, but we were entitled to UI benefits. It is a right, unlike Hong Kong where unemployment benefits are treated like handouts, for which entreaties have to be made and one has to go through a scrutiny process. All I needed to do was to register with the Ministry of Labour and then I could collect the benefits immediately. I collected UI benefits for three months and could have continued to do so, but I did not. Those three months were very important in my life for I took the time to ponder over what a 19-year old secondary school-leaver who had dropped out of school for a year and did not have a job could do next while I looked for a job. During those three months, I had some new thoughts, made some new explorations, and eventually found my way to a new future.

Several years ago, I came across a similar case in Hong Kong when I helped a man in his fifties in Tin Shui Wai who was suddenly laid-off after he had served at a job for more than 10 years. He had to take care of two children and could not find a job no matter how hard he tried. We suggested that he should apply for CSSA, but when he came back, he told us in tears while shaking his head that he was subjected to cross-examinations like an offender in the course of the application. We said we would try our best to help him and called the Social Welfare Department at once to see what could be done. Two days later, the middle-aged man committed suicide by burning charcoal and died. James TIEN, this is the system of Hong Kong.

Not so many Hong Kong people would commit suicides if there were a more humane and humanitarian system and Hong Kong people at the grass-roots level would not have to be in so much agony. Such are the miseries brought about by CSSA for the unemployed in Hong Kong; so please do not add insult to the injury. They, the dignitaries, should visit the local districts more often instead of doing shows and giving out gifts and stuff, which the Liberal Party is very fond of. They have to get in touch with the suffering masses genuinely
before they can realize how unbearable is the system, how bullying is the financial and real estate hegemony and how rotten is the system.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Does any other Member wish to speak?

(No Member indicated a wish to speak)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr James TIEN, you may now speak on the amendments. You have up to five minutes.

MR JAMES TIEN (in Cantonese): President, thanks to Members for their speeches. When I proposed this motion initially, I never thought that so many Members would listen only to their own words but shut their ears to those of others. Although the number of Members present is not large, we can still find some here. Hence, I would like to repeat the motion initially proposed by the Liberal Party. In fact, it all boils down to three key expressions, namely "able-bodied persons", "a long period of time" and "Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) for the unemployed". Many colleagues have raised in their amendments an even bigger issue concerning CSSA, though my motion is actually meant to focus on CSSA for the unemployed only. This has indirectly led a number of Members to use such wordings as "eradicate", "abuse", and so on. In our opinion, this will only give the Government an opportunity to continue its slow paces in dealing with this issue.

Both Mr TAM Yiu-chung and Mr CHAN Chi-chuen have proposed to delete the expression "eradicate abuse" in my motion. While Mr TAM Yiu-chung has proposed to substitute the expression with "avoid the occurrence of", Mr CHAN Chi-chuen has proposed to substitute it with "review". Broadly speaking, they agree that there is something wrong. President, as time is running out, I cannot respond to these points one by one. On the whole, Members proposing the amendments have deviated from the issue raised by me. They make no mention of "able-bodied persons" and "a long period of time", but suggest that we have some opinions on CSSA recipients. This is absolutely wrong.
In my speech delivered last evening, I already made it clear that we merely pinpointed the 23,980 recipients of CSSA for the unemployed, not all the 269,000 CSSA cases, let alone the 153,000 elderly persons, 18,384 people with permanent disabilities, 25,000 persons in ill-health, 30,000 single parents and 10,000 low-income earners mentioned by other Members, including those proposing the amendments. The Liberal Party is absolutely convinced that these people should receive CSSA, though this issue is not what we wish to raise now for discussion and to express concerns. Our focus of attention is merely on the 23,980 recipients of CSSA for the unemployed.

In this regard, some Members think that they are only the minority accounting for a mere 9% of the overall number of CSSA recipients, and therefore they do not warrant our attention. However, it is precisely because we have no opinion about the remaining 91% CSSA recipients — in fact we support their receiving CSSA and, like other Members, are concerned about these issues. In this respect, we are no experts. Nor can we understand the whole picture in concrete terms. Hence, we hope Members can give us more advice regarding whether there are any problems.

Even if we have opinions on recipients of CSSA for the unemployed, we are not talking about all the 23,980 recipients. We only have opinions about those who have been receiving CSSA for a long period of time. What does it mean? According to the figures published by the Government in late 2005, of the 23,980 recipients, 15,000 had received CSSA for the unemployed for more than five years. It is these persons that we are now talking about. I do appreciate Mr Albert CHAN. I did not know he was a diligent student in Canada and had received social security for three months when he was unemployed. It was really remarkable that he was able to re-join society later for employment. However, the cases we are talking about involve those who have received CSSA for the unemployed for more than five years. How will these people re-join society for employment? We think that we should do something about it. President, as I mentioned yesterday as well as in the past, we are not insisting that persons who have received CSSA for the unemployed for two years must stop doing so. We have only said that if they wish to continue receiving it after two years, they should re-apply to the Government rather than receiving it automatically for three, four or five years, or for an indefinite period.
Certainly, many Members proposing the amendments have said that these are just minor issues and they question why we should have brought them up. I believe many problems in society today were merely minor issues when they emerged years ago. Eventually, these problems grew bigger and bigger simply because no one took notice of them. For instance, a trellis illegally erected without anyone's notice has now stirred up "a storm of unauthorized building works". This is a problem faced by the Chief Executive as well as many members of the public. Similarly, because no one took notice of the 300-odd "doubly non-permanent resident babies" years ago, the number of such babies has now grown to 35,000. Hence, even though nothing happened years ago, many problems have now emerged. We disagree that this is just a minor issue now. Given that 15,000 able-bodied persons have received CSSA for the unemployed for more than five years, the Liberal Party holds that there are bound to be some abuse cases. Therefore, we oppose the amendment proposed by Mr TANG Ka-piu but support the other amendments.

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, I would like to express my gratitude again to Mr James TIEN, the mover of this motion, the eight Members who proposed the amendments, and a total of 18 Members who spoke on this motion last evening and this afternoon. I will focus on giving responses to the motion.

Quite a number of Members who have spoken are concerned about whether the employment assistance services under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme can effectively help recipients achieve self-reliance. According to the figures provided by the Social Welfare Department (SWD), the average employment rates of the Support for Self-reliance (SFS) Scheme participants in the last five years range from 19% to 27%, with the latest figure (as at the end of 2011) standing at 25.5%. In other words, nearly one quarter of the recipients succeeded in securing employment. We will continue to monitor the situation and review from time to time whether the services still have room for improvement.

Although the number of cases of CSSA for the unemployed has kept falling for 40 months, we have also noted the relatively high academic qualification of some unemployed CSSA recipients as well as an increasing average duration of stay on CSSA. To integrate and improve the employment assistance services
under the CSSA Scheme, the SWD has been allocated $230 million and commissioned 26 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to launch 41 "Integrated Employment Assistance Programmes for Self-reliance" over a period of 27 months from 1 January this year onwards.

On specific support, the SWD has integrated and improved three employment assistance services operated by commissioned NGOs, namely "Integrated Employment Assistance", the "Special Training and Enhancement Programme", the "New Dawn Project" and the Community Work (CW) Programme implemented by the SWD, to make its whole range of employment assistance services more convenient and comprehensive. The resources are utilized more effectively.

Participants of the SFS Scheme are usually required to join the CW Programme implemented by the SWD. The aim is to help them cultivate a work habit, enhance their self-confidence and extend their social network. The CW Programme also enables them to make contribution to the community while receiving CSSA payment. In the past, the service pattern under the CW Programme implemented by the SWD was subject to certain restrictions, with 90% of the work performed being environmental protection work, such as cleaning of country parks. There were established patterns in the arrangement of working hours and commuting to workplaces too, which might fail to meet the circumstances and needs of different CSSA recipients. Following the improvement of the services, NGOs will make use of their networks and expertise to implement more multifarious "work exposure services" to provide internships that cater for the needs of the labour market, regulated voluntary work, vocational training, and so on, to enhance the employability of the recipients.

We believe that through the integrated programmes, the NGOs operating the relevant programmes will provide employable CSSA recipients with multifarious and one-stop employment assistance services on a family basis according to their individual needs so as to enhance their employability and help them achieve self-reliance. NGOs may also put their resources into groups with special needs, such as ethnic minorities, to provide them with more appropriate employment assistance services.

The aim of the disregarded earnings (DE) arrangement is to encourage employable CSSA recipients to seek and remain in employment for the purpose
of achieving self-reliance. If their earnings from employment have increased to such an extent that they can meet their basic living expenditure, there is no case for them to continue to rely on CSSA. They ought to leave the CSSA net, so that public funds can be used to help other people with greater needs.

The maximum level of DE is currently set at $2,500 per month. Assuming that two members of a four-member CSSA family enjoy DE, the average earnings of the family ($16,242) will be $5,000 higher than the earnings of comparable families which have just exceeded the income limit eligible for assistance. Under such circumstances, I believe the DE arrangement can provide sufficient financial incentives to encourage recipients to seek and remain in employment.

Although further relaxing the current DE arrangement may provide more financial incentives to lure recipients to rejoin the workforce, it may be unfair to low-income families which are currently ineligible for CSSA and possibly delay the exit of recipients who are able to work from the system. Hence, careful consideration must be given to how to strike an appropriate balance between encouraging recipients to seek employment and making proper use of public funds.

As we hope to help the needy through the CSSA Scheme, the Government will absolutely not discriminate against CSSA recipients. Neither should members of the community put a negative label on CSSA recipients. The Government has all along been proactively providing members of the public with information on CSSA. The SWD has published a series of pamphlets about the CSSA Scheme for distribution at SWD offices, Social Security Field Units and Integrated Family Service Centres in various districts. With an easily comprehensible approach, the pamphlets introduce various arrangements under the CSSA Scheme, including ways to encourage and help able-bodied unemployed CSSA recipients to achieve self-reliance, the social security appeal mechanism, and so on. All the aforesaid information and other publications and press releases related to CSSA have been uploaded to the Internet to facilitate access of the relevant information by members of the public.

Quite a number of Members are concerned about the existence of frauds and abuses of CSSA at present. As I mentioned in my opening speech last evening, the SWD will continue to take every measure to curb and combat on
abuses of CSSA and process each CSSA application with prudence. We will carefully vet and properly screen the applications to ensure that only the truly eligible and needy persons will be granted CSSA payments.

Some Members are particularly concerned about the difficulty encountered by unemployed middle-aged persons in seeking employment. We fully understand this. In this connection, free and multifarious employment services are provided by the Labour Department (LD) to help job seekers secure employment. Special counters are also provided at all Job Centres under the LD for priority registration and job referral services for job seekers aged 50 or above.

Meanwhile, an "Employment Programme for the Middle-aged (EPM)" has been launched by the LD to encourage employers to recruit job seekers aged 40 or above. Under the EPM, employers who engage job seekers aged 40 or above and provide them with on-the-job training are given a training allowance for three to six months.

To further encourage employers to recruit more middle-aged and elderly job seekers, the Chief Executive has announced in the recently published Policy Address that the amount of on-the-job training allowance under the EPM will be increased. Under this enhanced initiative, the on-the-job training allowance payable to the employer will be increased by 50%, from $2,000 to $3,000 a month, for employing each job seeker aged 40 or above and paying him $6,000 or more each month for a full-time job with on-the-job training provided as well. The LD is currently drawing up details for the implementation of this enhanced initiative to be announced later.

Regarding the issue of age discrimination, which is a matter of concern for some Members, the Government is against any form of discrimination too and committed to safeguarding equal employment opportunities. During recruitment, employers are encouraged by the Labour and Welfare Bureau to adopt the principle of "making appointments on the basis of merits" and evaluate the capability of candidates or employees according to uniform selection criteria.

A guideline called the "Code of Practice on Employment" was already issued by the LD in 1998 to encourage compliance by employers and employment agencies. Announcement of Public Interests were also broadcast through the media, including the television, radio, and so on, and a series of
guidelines and publicity leaflets were published and distributed to promote the message of employment equality. We will continue to make efforts in eliminating age discrimination at work through various measures such as public education, publicity and self-regulation.

Furthermore, the LD will ensure that all job vacancies published there do not carry any discriminatory (including age discrimination) provisions. If such cases are found during the scrutiny of job vacancies, unless the relevant employer can prove that the relevant provision is related to "genuine occupational qualification", the LD will definitely refuse to entertain the employer's request and delete the relevant requirement. If the employer refuses to have the discriminatory provision deleted, the LD will refuse to publish the relevant vacancy.

The Government also understands the considerable weighting ratio of transport expenses to the income of low-income employed persons. Hence, the Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme (WITSS) has been launched to relieve the burden of expenses on travelling to and from their workplace. The proposed enhanced WITSS was already endorsed by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council at the end of last year to adopt a dual-track approach to allow applicants to submit applications on an individual or household basis. Furthermore, the income and asset limit for applications for transport subsidy dating back to 1 January have been raised substantially. I believe this will help more low-income earners to receive transport subsidy and encourage them to remain in employment.

As regards the implementation of the proposal on standard working hours, the policy study on standard working hours (SWH) completed by the Labour Department was already published in November last year. The Chief Executive has also pledged in his election manifesto to set up a Special Committee on SWH comprising government officials, representatives of labour unions and employers' associations, academics and community leaders for the purpose of following up the study. The Secretary for Labour and Welfare is now doing preparatory work at full speed, which is expected to complete in the first quarter of this year. The Government hopes to engage various sectors of the community in informed and in-depth discussions at the Special Committee, which will serve as a platform for establishing consensus and mapping out the way forward.
The successful creation of a family-friendly work environment hinges on the co-operation of the entire society. Employers may implement different family-friendly employment practices (FFEPs) in the light of the scale, resources and culture of the organization. The LD has all along encouraged employers to adopt the "people-based" best personnel management practice, and adopting FFEPs is one of our priority promotion projects. In promoting FFEPs, the LD will continue to play a facilitator role through the Human Resources Managers Clubs formed in various trades and industries and the industry-based Tripartite Committees as well as through various publicity channels, such as publications, publicity materials, road show exhibitions and newspapers, to further publicize the relevant messages to employers, employees and the general public and encourage employers to adopt more FFEPs in the workplace. The Chief Executive has also announced the Government's decision in the newly published Policy Address that legislation will be enacted for a three-day paid paternity leave. This fully demonstrates the attention given by the current-term Government to promoting FFEPs.

I cannot agree more with the Member who expressed concern that the provision of child care service and after-school care service was conducive to encouraging employment. In order to enhance child care service, the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project was regularized in October 2011 and extended to 18 districts across the territory to benefit more needy families. The Project provides parents with more flexible child care service while encouraging mutual assistance and care in the community. In order to provide more flexible child care service, after the regularization and expansion of the Project, the SWD has requested centre-based care groups to operate a minimum of three sessions, each session lasting two hours, until at least 9 pm on weekdays and a minimum of two sessions on weekends. Meanwhile, the operating hours of the home-based child care service will remain to be between 7 am and 11 pm daily, including weekends and holidays, and residential service will be provided under exceptional circumstances. This fully reflects that we are mindful about the issue. On the other hand, after-school care service will be provided in various sessions from Monday to Friday. However, individual after-school care service operators will consider extending their hours of service in the light of the actual needs of their districts.

The Government will continue to promote our existing industries and create new edges. We will formulate comprehensive industrial policies, create
employment opportunities and improve people's livelihood. The "Economic Development Commission (EDC)" to be established according to the announcement made by the Chief Executive will propose a forward-looking direction and advise the Government on ways to broaden Hong Kong's economic base and promote the overall strategy and policy for the promotion of Hong Kong's economic development, including reviewing industries or industry groups conducive to the further development of Hong Kong economy and studying the policy and other support measures required to assist relevant industrial development. Four working groups will be formed under the EDC, which will be headed by the Chief Executive, to conduct in-depth studies on "Transportation", "Convention and Exhibition Industries and Tourism", "Manufacturing Industries, Innovative Technology, and Cultural and Creative Industries" and "Professional Services".

Regarding the issue raised by a Member concerning open bazaars and community economy, the Government has all along adopted a positive and open-minded attitude towards the proposed establishment of open bazaars. Nevertheless, society is divided on hawking. In particular, residents near open bazaars will inevitably be affected to a certain extent. In view of this, we consider that a consensus on the specific proposal of establishing open bazaars at suitable locations should be forged at the district level with full consideration given to the views of nearby residents as well as discussions and confirmation by District Councils. If a consensus has been reached at the district level, the relevant government departments will undertake the relevant follow-up work according to their respective terms of reference. Allowing districts to organize, plan and manage open-air bazaars will provide more room and flexibility in meeting the requirements of districts.

President, in order to provide employment and on-the-job training opportunities for disadvantaged groups to help them achieve self-reliance, the Government will continue to provide seed grants for eligible non-profit-making organizations through the "Enhancing Self-Reliance Through District Partnership (ESR) Programme" to finance the establishment of social enterprises. Since its implementation in 2006, the ESR Programme has approved a total grant of about $150 million to 136 social enterprise projects, with about half of them operating in districts with less favourable conditions, such as Sham Shui Po, Wong Tai Sin, Kwun Tong, Kwai Tsing, Tuen Mun, Yuen Long, Tin Shui Wai and North District. Currently, 16 approved social enterprise projects are still under
preparation, and upon the establishment of these social enterprises, a total of some 2 300 employment opportunities will be created.

In order to promote lifelong learning, the Government launched the Qualifications Framework (QF) in 2008 to establish an accessible articulation pathway with a view to promoting lifelong learning and enhancing the quality of our local workforce. The Government assists various industries which have joined the QF to develop competency standards and progression pathways applicable to themselves to enable practitioners to gain a better understanding of their promotion and learning opportunities and facilitate education and training providers to design quality and recognized education and training programmes.

President, being the last safety net in our social security system, the CSSA Scheme is currently providing support for nearly 270 000 households (close to 420 000 recipients). With the expenditure of the CSSA Scheme reaching $19.3 billion in 2012-2013, we must act with prudence to ensure the financial sustainability of this safety net and our social security system.

We are mindful of the views put forward by various sectors on CSSA, such as how to strike a balance between the provision of a safety net and encouraging the employment of people who are able to work, implementing CSSA with a time limit, providing subsidy for low-income households, and so on. All these proposals involve major policy considerations and possibly have far-reaching consequences on our social security system and public finances. In this regard, not only will the Social Security and Retirement Protection Task Force under the Commission on Poverty conduct careful studies, we will also conduct in-depth studies on these issues. Meanwhile, I must emphasize that our aim is to devote our limited public resources to the needy to ensure that CSSA provide care for the needy without being abused.

President, I so submit. Thank you.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Frankie YICK, you may now move your amendment.
MR FRANKIE YICK (in Cantonese): President, I move that Mr James TIEN's motion be amended.

Mr Frankie YICK moved the following amendment: (Translation)

"To add "as the proportion of unemployed people receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ('CSSA') for a long period of time has continued to rise," after "That"; to delete "the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance" after "abuse of" and substitute with "CSSA"; and to add ", including: (1) to actively consider setting up a two-year time limit for receiving CSSA for the unemployed by those able-bodied persons, upon the expiry of which any application for continued receipt must be examined by an independent case review committee and approved on a case-to-case basis; (2) to optimize the existing Extension of the Integrated Employment Assistance Scheme under the Support for Self-reliance Scheme, and require those able-bodied recipients who have not re-joined the workplace to engage in the community work arranged by the Social Welfare Department ('SWD') on a full-time basis for five days per week and eight hours per day, and let them earn an income at the rate of the minimum wage, participate in job-seeking and employment training, maintain a healthy mindset towards working, and at the same time make the best use of their abilities to contribute to the society; and (3) to step up monitoring by SWD to ensure that there are no abuses of CSSA by those able-bodied recipients of CSSA for the unemployed, and besides exempting those elderly people, single-parent families and people with disabilities in receipt of CSSA for the unemployed from the aforesaid proposed measures, the authorities should also use the additional social resources reaped from reforming the relevant system to strengthen the support for the disadvantaged groups with genuine needs, including the aforesaid people" immediately before the full stop."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the amendment, moved by Mr Frankie YICK to Mr James TIEN's motion, be passed.
PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you as stated. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(Members raised their hands)

Mr CHAN Kam-lam rose to claim a division.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr CHAN Kam-lam has claimed a division. The division bell will ring for five minutes.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Will Members please proceed to vote.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Will Members please check their votes. If there are no queries, voting shall now stop and the result will be displayed.

Functional Constituencies:

Mr Tommy CHEUNG, Mr Frankie YICK and Mr CHUNG Kwok-pan voted for the amendment.

Mr Frederick FUNG, Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che, Mr Charles Peter MOK, Miss CHAN Yuen-han, Mr KWOK Wai-keung, Mr Dennis KWOK, Mr IP Kin-yuen, Mr POON Siu-ping and Mr TANG Ka-piu voted against the amendment.

Mr Abraham SHEK, Dr Joseph LEE, Mr Jeffrey LAM, Mr WONG Ting-kwong, Dr LAM Tai-fai, Mr CHAN Kin-por, Mr IP Kwok-him, Mr NG Leung-sing, Mr
Steven HO, Mr YIU Si-wing, Mr MA Fung-kwok, Mr Christopher CHEUNG, Mr Martin LIAO and Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok abstained.

Geographical Constituencies:

Mr Paul TSE and Mr James TIEN voted for the amendment.

Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung, Ms Emily LAU, Mr WONG Kwok-hing, Dr Priscilla LEUNG, Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung, Mr Albert CHAN, Mr WONG Yuk-man, Ms Claudia MO, Mr Michael TIEN, Mr WU Chi-wai, Mr Gary FAN, Mr CHAN Chi-chuen, Dr Kenneth CHAN, Miss Alice MAK, Dr KWOK Ka-ki, Dr Fernando CHEUNG, Mr SIN Chung-kai and Dr Helena WONG voted against the amendment.

Mr CHAN Kam-lam, Mr TAM Yiu-chung, Mr CHAN Hak-kan, Dr Elizabeth QUAT, Dr CHIANG Lai-wan and Mr Christopher CHUNG abstained.

THE PRESIDENT, Mr Jasper TSANG, did not cast any vote.

THE PRESIDENT announced that among the Members returned by functional constituencies, 26 were present, three were in favour of the amendment, nine against it and 14 abstained; while among the Members returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections, 27 were present, two were in favour of the amendment, 18 against it and six abstained. Since the question was not agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, he therefore declared that the amendment was negatived.

MR CHAN KAM-LAM (in Cantonese): President, I move that in the event of further divisions being claimed in respect of the motion on "Optimizing the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance for the unemployed" or any amendments thereto, this Council do proceed to each of such divisions after the division bell has been rung for one minute.
PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That
the motion moved by Mr CHAN Kam-lam be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Does any Member wish to speak?

(No Member indicated a wish to speak)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you as stated. Will
those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority
respectively of each of the two groups of Members, that is, those returned by
functional constituencies and those returned by geographical constituencies
through direct elections, who are present. I declare the motion passed.

I order that in the event of further divisions being claimed in respect of the
motion on "Optimizing the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance for the
unemployed" or any amendments thereto, this Council do proceed to each of such
divisions after the division bell has been rung for one minute.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Dr Fernando CHEUNG, you may move your
amendment.

DR FERNANDO CHEUNG (in Cantonese): President, I move that Mr James
TIEN's motion be amended.
Dr Fernando CHEUNG moved the following amendment: (Translation)

"To add ", as there is no legislation prohibiting age discrimination in Hong Kong, making it extremely difficult for middle-aged and elderly people with low education attainment to find jobs, with some of them having to apply for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ('CSSA')", after "That"; to delete "to motivate" after "effective measures" and substitute with ", including reviving labour-intensive industries, human services, agriculture and other industries for the development of economic diversification; increasing training opportunities, establishing career ladders for different trades, creating more employment opportunities, and promoting a family-friendly working environment; and optimizing the system of CSSA for the unemployed by relaxing the disregarded earnings mechanism to encourage employment and motivate"; to delete "and" after "self-reliant" and substitute with ", and taking measures to"; and to delete "the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance" after "abuse of" and substitute with "CSSA"."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the amendment, moved by Dr Fernando CHEUNG to Mr James TIEN's motion, be amended.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you as stated. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

Mr WONG Yuk-man rose to claim a division.
PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr WONG Yuk-man has claimed a division. The division bell will ring for one minute.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Will Members please proceed to vote.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Will Members please check their votes. If there are no queries, voting shall now stop and the result will be displayed.

Functional Constituencies:

Mr Tommy CHEUNG, Mr Frederick FUNG, Dr Joseph LEE, Mr WONG Ting-kwong, Mr CHAN Kin-por, Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che, Mr IP Kwok-him, Mr Steven HO, Mr Frankie YICK, Mr YIU Si-wing, Mr MA Fung-kwok, Mr Charles Peter MOK, Miss CHAN Yuen-han, Mr KWOK Wai-keung, Mr Dennis KWOK, Mr IP Kin-yuen, Mr POON Siu-ping, Mr TANG Ka-piu and Mr CHUNG Kwok-pan voted for the amendment.

Mr Abraham SHEK, Mr Jeffrey LAM, Dr LAM Tai-fai, Mr NG Leung-sing, Mr Christopher CHEUNG, Mr Martin LIAO and Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok abstained.

Geographical Constituencies:

Mr CHAN Kam-lam, Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung, Ms Emily LAU, Mr TAM Yiu-chung, Mr WONG Kwok-hing, Mr CHAN Hak-kan, Dr Priscilla LEUNG, Mr Paul TSE, Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung, Mr Albert CHAN, Mr WONG Yuk-man, Ms Claudia MO, Mr James TIEN, Mr WU Chi-wai, Mr Gary FAN, Mr CHAN Chi-chuen, Dr Kenneth CHAN, Miss Alice MAK, Dr KWOK Ka-ki, Dr Fernando CHEUNG, Mr SIN Chung-kai, Dr Helena WONG, Dr Elizabeth QUAT, Dr CHIANG Lai-wan and Mr Christopher CHUNG voted for the amendment.
Mr Michael TIEN abstained.

THE PRESIDENT, Mr Jasper TSANG, did not cast any vote.

THE PRESIDENT announced that among the Members returned by functional constituencies, 26 were present, 19 were in favour of the amendment and seven abstained; while among the Members returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections, 27 were present, 25 were in favour of the amendment and one abstained. Since the question was agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, he therefore declared that the amendment was passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Members have already been informed, as Dr Fernando CHEUNG's amendment has been passed, Mr TAM Yiu-chung and Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung have withdrawn their amendments. Mr Christopher CHUNG may not move the amendment to Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung's amendment.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr TANG Ka-piu, as the amendment of Dr Fernando CHEUNG has been passed, you may now move your revised amendment.

MR TANG KA-PIU (in Cantonese): President, I move that Mr James TIEN's motion as amended by Dr Fernando CHEUNG be further amended by my revised amendment.

Mr TANG Ka-piu moved the following further amendment to Dr Fernando CHEUNG's amendment: (Translation)

"To add "; in view of Hong Kong's imbalanced economic structure, which overly tilts towards service industries leading to few choices of local employment and narrow career prospects, making it difficult for working-age people to play to their strengths and even more difficult in particular for middle-aged people over the age of 50 to find jobs, coupled
with exorbitant transport fares, inadequate community child care service, and the serious situation of over-time work without compensation, which make it difficult for some unemployed people to find jobs in order to leave the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ('CSSA') net; in addition to financial assistance, the Government should allow unemployed persons to access comprehensive employment planning, including employment counselling and trial placement, etc., and in case they are unable to find jobs for a long time, they may be given subsidies to participate in skills upgrading programmes recognized by the Qualifications Framework; besides, the Government should also legislate to set standard working hours, and provide long-duration after-school care service and child care service for parents receiving CSSA to facilitate them to work and leave the CSSA net; in the long run, the Government should improve the economic structure and create more employment opportunities, so as to let CSSA recipients secure suitable jobs, play to their strengths and realize their aspirations" immediately before the full stop."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That Mr TANG Ka-piu's amendment to Mr James TIEN's motion as amended by Dr Fernando CHEUNG be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you as stated. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(Members raised their hands)

Mr James TIEN rose to claim a division.
PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr James TIEN has claimed a division. The division bell will ring for one minute.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Will Members please proceed to vote.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Will Members please check their votes. If there are no queries, voting shall now stop and the result will be displayed.

Functional Constituencies:

Mr Frederick FUNG, Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che, Mr MA Fung-kwok, Miss CHAN Yuen-han, Mr KWOK Wai-keung, Mr Dennis KWOK, Mr IP Kin-yuen, Mr POON Siu-ping and Mr TANG Ka-piu voted for the amendment.

Mr Abraham SHEK, Mr Tommy CHEUNG, Mr Jeffrey LAM, Dr LAM Tai-fai, Mr Frankie YICK, Mr YIU Si-wing, Mr Charles Peter MOK, Mr Christopher CHEUNG, Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok and Mr CHUNG Kwok-pan voted against the amendment.

Dr Joseph LEE, Mr WONG Ting-kwong, Mr CHAN Kin-por, Mr IP Kwok-him, Mr NG Leung-sing, Mr Steven HO and Mr Martin LIAO abstained.

Geographical Constituencies:

Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung, Ms Emily LAU, Mr WONG Kwok-hing, Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung, Mr Albert CHAN, Mr WONG Yuk-man, Ms Claudia MO, Mr WU Chi-wai, Mr Gary FAN, Mr CHAN Chi-chuen, Dr Kenneth CHAN, Miss Alice MAK, Dr KWOK Ka-ki, Dr Fernando CHEUNG, Mr SIN Chung-kai and Dr Helena WONG voted for the amendment.

Dr Priscilla LEUNG, Mr Michael TIEN and Mr James TIEN voted against the amendment.
Mr CHAN Kam-lam, Mr TAM Yiu-chung, Mr CHAN Hak-kan, Mr Paul TSE, Dr Elizabeth QUAT, Dr CHIANG Lai-wan and Mr Christopher CHUNG abstained.

THE PRESIDENT, Mr Jasper TSANG, did not cast any vote.

THE PRESIDENT announced that among the Members returned by functional constituencies, 26 were present, nine were in favour of the amendment, 10 against it and seven abstained; while among the Members returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections, 27 were present, 16 were in favour of the amendment, three against it and seven abstained. Since the question was not agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, he therefore declared that the amendment was negatived.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr CHAN Chi-chuen, as the amendment of Dr Fernando CHEUNG has been passed, you many now move your revised amendment.

MR CHAN CHI-CHUEN (in Cantonese): President, I move that Mr James TIEN's motion as amended by Dr Fernando CHEUNG be further amended by my revised amendment.

Mr CHAN Chi-chuen moved the following further amendment to the motion as amended by Dr Fernando CHEUNG: (Translation)

"To add "; as the situation of CSSA recipients being adversely labelled has become increasingly serious in recent years, this Council urges the Government to review the system of CSSA for the unemployed" immediately before the full stop."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That Mr CHAN Chi-chuen's amendment to Mr James TIEN's motion as amended by Dr Fernando CHEUNG be passed.
PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you as stated. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority respectively of each of the two groups of Members, that is, those returned by functional constituencies and those returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections, who are present. I declare the amendment passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr James TIEN, you may now speak in reply. You still have five minutes and 52 seconds.

MR JAMES TIEN (in Cantonese): Fortunately, President, I did not use up my 15-minute speaking time yesterday and still have much time left. During the debate on this motion yesterday, many Members were absent for various reasons. Since many Members are present today, let me say a few words about the views of the Liberal Party.

President, we are now talking about those able-bodied persons who have received CSSA for the unemployed for a long time, not the 269 000 CSSA recipients, or the 153 000 elderly persons, 18 384 people with permanent disabilities, 25 319 persons in ill-health, 30 903 single parents and 10 000 low-income earners under this category. What we are talking about are the 23 980 unemployed persons left by deducting the number of the aforesaid persons from 269 000 CSSA recipients. Nevertheless, we are not referring to all recipients of CSSA for the unemployed because we support granting CSSA to those persons who have been out of job for three to six months. We are merely focusing on the 15 000 unemployed persons who, according to the Government's figures, had been receiving CSSA for five years in a row as at late 2012.
Fine, what is the Liberal Party talking about? Can the period for granting CSSA for the unemployed be curtailed from five to two consecutive years? We do not mean to stop them from continuing to receive CSSA for the unemployed; we just want them to re-submit their applications. The point is: Should they be allowed to receive CSSA for the unemployed for two, three, four or five years in a row? I hope colleagues can understand what we are talking about. We are only focusing on able-bodied persons who have received CSSA for the unemployed for more than five years. In our opinion, the Government should do something, though we do not advocate adopting an across-the-board approach of ceasing to grant them CSSA. Instead of continuing to receive CSSA automatically for four to six years in a row, they should have their applications go through a committee again. This is our point of view.

(Mr Frederick FUNG stood up)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Frederick FUNG, what is your point?

MR FREDERICK FUNG (in Cantonese): President, I want Mr James TIEN to clarify because he did not mention anything about five years in the motion.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Frederick FUNG, your speaking time is up. Mr TIEN, please continue.

MR FREDERICK FUNG (in Cantonese): He did not say anything about it.

MR JAMES TIEN (in Cantonese): Never mind, President. I have only focused on the general situation in my original motion. Members are welcome to put more decorations on my Christmas tree. Except for the proposal put forward by Mr TANG Ka-piu concerning standard working hours, we support all the decorations, of course including my own Christmas tree. It is a good thing for Members to express more views for discussion by society.
President, in this respect, just now a Member mentioned that the business sector had said this and that. In fact, the Liberal Party has commissioned a consultancy to conduct an opinion poll. Concerning the first question raised in the poll, that is, "Do you think the abuse of CSSA in Hong Kong is serious?", a very high proportion of the respondents were positive. The next question was quite specific, which reads, "Do you agree that a time limit should be set for receiving CSSA for the unemployed by able-bodied persons?". Likewise, the proportion of respondents who indicated approval was extremely high. Broadly speaking, their ratio exceeded 70% to 80%.

President, the aforesaid opinion poll covered five districts, and up to 1,227 persons were interviewed. As my motive was questioned yesterday by a number of Members, I read the detailed data again after I returned home. Now I would like to say a few words about Kowloon West in particular. The consultancy conducting the opinion poll interviewed 200 respondents in Kowloon West, and half of them, or 100 respondents, were in Sham Shui Po, that is, the constituency to which Mr Frederick FUNG and Mr WONG Yuk-man belong. This is why I believe it was politically correct for me to conduct the poll there. Of the respondents interviewed in these two districts, 75% considered that the abuse of CSSA was serious or very serious in Hong Kong, whereas only 12% thought otherwise. As regards the question on whether a time limit should be set for receiving CSSA for the unemployed by able-bodied persons, 75% of the respondents in Sham Shui Po expressed support or strong support, whereas only 14% indicated disapproval or strong disapproval.

As Members are aware, I am a "novice" among directly elected Members. I have great respect for public opinion when performing my duty. As these were the findings of the opinion poll and the findings also reflected the public opinion of grass-roots districts, I said that the proposal was excellent when the Liberal Party questioned whether this issue should be addressed. We in the business sector have often been criticized for knowing nothing about public opinion. It is indeed true that I know nothing about public opinion in many respects. I have proposed this motion because it is rare for me to have some ideas about a certain area, but I have been criticized by many directly elected Members for not knowing what we are doing instead.

Later, I have come to notice this. Will Members please look at my street boards. Given their size, the largest characters are "against the abuse of CSSA" rather than "able-bodied persons must not be greedy". Certainly, Members may
say that if I can improve it with "against the abuse of CSSA" ...... what we really wished to say was "against the abuse of CSSA for the unemployed by able-bodied persons for a long period of time". However, as Members should be aware, squeezing so many words on street boards will make them less appealing. If Members have such a strong opinion about this proposal, I will take a look at it again later.

Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr James TIEN, as amended by Dr Fernando CHEUNG and Mr CHAN Chi-chuen, be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority respectively of each of the two groups of Members, that is, those returned by functional constituencies and those returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections, who are present. I declare the motion as amended passed.

NEXT MEETING

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now adjourn the Council until 11 am sharp on Wednesday 30 January 2013.

Adjourned accordingly at eleven minutes to Five o'clock.