

***Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Tuesday, November 15, 2016***

Unedited Transcript

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro Costs

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Michelle Michel, a gentleman in Ottawa- Vanier, called the Liberal campaign headquarters just the other day. Like most people, he was fed up with his hydro rates. Michel asked the Liberal campaign about his hydro bill. And can you imagine what he was told? Someone in that office told him to lower his thermostat and wear a coat. Mr. Speaker, is that the Liberals' new solution to skyrocketing hydro rates? She -- should everyone simply have to turn down the thermostat and wear a coat inside in winter? Are they that out of touch?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly expect that any -- any resident of any part of the province, but certainly in a by-election, Mr. Speaker, I would expect that any resident who calls any of the offices of the parties involved would get the information, Mr. Speaker. And in this case the reality is that we are working very hard to reduce people's electricity costs, Mr. Speaker. We know that the cost associated with the rebuilding of the system, which we inherited, Mr. Speaker, which was degraded, had not been invested in, had not been kept up, Mr. Speaker, was dirty. The electricity grid was dirty, Mr. Speaker. The work that we have done, to shut down the coal fired plants, to rebuild over 10,000 kilometres of line, Mr. Speaker, to clean up the electricity grid and make it reliable, there's a cost associated with that. And we are working to take costs out of the system for people across the province, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. It makes me shake my head to think that that's an acceptable answer to just wear a coat in your own home. Now the Royal Victoria hospital in Barrie is doing their best to lower their energy use. That's because they're seeing a six-figure increase in their hydro bills this coming year. The hospital will see a four to 6% increase in the hydro cost. It will cost the hospital approximately \$200,000. In the local media in "The Barrie advance" R.D.H. Spokesperson caulking said we know hydro rates are going up but we have to keep the lights on in the hospitals. But what expense? Should money not be going to frontline care instead of forcing hospitals to struggle to pay their hydro bills? Mr. Speaker, . Tell us what she's doing to hept help hospitals that are struggling to pay their hydro bills?

>> Premier Wynne: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted tot that the leader of the opposition has made the connection between electricity and health care, Mr. Speaker, because I know that he knows that the shutting down of the coal-fired plants, Mr. Speaker. Premier Wynne: Brown outs and blackouts and smog days, Mr. Speaker, to no smog days means, Mr. Speaker, that we've hit \$4 billion in health care costs. [Applause] And kids with asthma, Mr. Speaker. People with respiratory disease have a much easier time breathing in this

province because of the work that we've done. Thank you for asking that question. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. When it comes to Michel in Ottawa- Vanier, it's wear a coat. When it comes to a hospital that's struggling to pay their hydro bills, it's more Liberal spin trying to say everything is fine. Everything is rosy. It isn't. Working hospitals having to fire nurses because of hydro bills. It's not right. It's not appropriate. Mr. Speaker, let me share with you to the Premier another hydro horror story. Adrian in Smith's falls. Adrian has autism and is on odsp. She shares the cost of living with her mother, a pensioner. They live in a small wartime House and are energy wise as they can be. But their hydro bill is almost the same as their mortgage payment. They are juggling other bills but they can't make ends meet. Adrian says they can't afford to live and that's not hyperbole. That's the legacy of this Premier because of the unmitigated failure of her hydro policies. So my question, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. Does she really want energy poverty to be her legacy for

Premier Wynne: So, Mr. Speaker, as I said the work that we have done to clean up the air in this province, Mr. Speaker, to make a clean electricity grid, to rebuild a system that was degraded has a cost associated with it. We recognize that. So Adrian and all the people across the province who are struggling with their electricity bills, Mr. Speaker, we recognize they need support. That's why we have taken the debt retirement charge off their bills, Mr. Speaker. It's why in January there will be an 8% reduction across the province. It's why we've put in place programs to help people on low middle incomes, Mr. Speaker, with support on their electricity bills. We recognize there's a challenge, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that there needs to be support, which is exactly why we have made the changes that we have made.

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Hoskins) Re: Health Care Bill

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Yesterday public hearings began on the government's new health care bill, and one thing is resoundingly clear -- nothing in this bill puts patients first. In fact just hear what Michael Dexter from patients Canada had to say. I quote -- we strongly support a patients first agenda for health care. It is in fact long, long overdue. However we are hard pressed to find how patients are first with the actual sub stants of bill 41 when you read it. Patients candidate is right. This is an investment in administration. This is an investment in bureaucracy. It is not an investment in patients. Mr. Speaker, it is not too late to put patients first. Account Liberals explain why high-paid management is more important than caring for patients in the province of Ontario?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is going to want to comment but, Mr. Speaker, let me make it very clear that the impetus behind the legislature that has been proposed is exactly about making sure that patients, that people in communities across the province can access, can access primary care, Mr. Speaker, that they will know where to get that care, that they will get the appropriate care, Mr. Speaker. And in fact many of the things that critics have been calling for, Mr. Speaker, in terms of that access is exactly what is in the legislation. So that's what this is about. It's about making sure that people have access to those primary care physicians and primary care practitioners like nurse practitioners, Mr. Speaker, without having to spend an enormous amount of time finding people that they have access. And that they know where to go to get the appropriate care. That's what the legislation is about, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. This high paid administration bill does nothing to curb years of Liberal attacks on the health care system. Just look at the Liberal track record. They cut \$815 million from physician services. They cut 50 medical residency spots. They cut 50 million from seniors for physiotherapy. And this government has fired 1,400 nurses since the start of last year. That is their record. This doesn't sound like you're putting patients first. Mr. Speaker, the government spin is a

>> Go back 15 years to hide what's happened in the last few years. Know the truth. They don't buy the Liberal spin. When will this government finally put patients first?

>> Premier Wynne: Health and Long-Term Care. Well, Mr. Speaker, don't even get me started on referring back to their promise to fire 100,000 public sector workers.

[Applause] Many of them in the health care sector. Putting patient last, Mr. Speaker, and this bill does the opposite of what they would propose to do.

[Interjections] In fact I wish their spin on this was at least original because costing the position of the concerned doctors of Ontario, the coalition of Ontario doctors that represent those high-paid specialists that are perpetrating and propagating the mistruths that that sector --

[interjections]. I wasn't referring to the opposition. I withdraw. So, Mr. Speaker, the patients first act, its aim at its heart is to actually improve services for patients across this province, to provide quicker access, same-day, next-day services and outside of regular hours to better integrate health care services to find administrative savings and management savings so that they can be reinvested in frontline health services. The Speaker: Thank you. Final supplementary.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. We are joined by nurse practitioners from across the province today. Ontario is the only jurisdiction in north America that doesn't allow nurse practitioners to prescribe controlled drugs and substances. In some places in northern and rural and remote Ontario, nurse practitioners are the only primary care provider able to provide timely access to care. Mr. Speaker, this government needs to commit to making sure every person in Ontario has access to the care they need. We don't need vague promises. The government has hinted they're going to do something but it's hints and vague promises. I want a commitment. I want a date when they're going to honour their promise. Directly to the Premier, will this happen this year? Yes or no?

>> Min. Eric Hoskins: I just -- coming from this, the third party, I would understand the motivation. I just find it incredible coming from the official opposition with the commitments that they've made in election campaigns to gut our health care system, Mr. Speaker. But when it comes to nurse practitioners -- and they know. They know the equipment that I've made for prescribing controlled substances. They understand that it requires a bylaw to be posted and approved by the College of nurses. I apologize, Mr. Speaker. I'm just so excited that our nurse practitioners have joined us here today.

[Applause] So they know the commitment -- the commitment from the ministry. They know and I've recently wrote to the College of nurses as well to ask them to expedite this process. As fast as they can possibly do. I expect in

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Naqvi) Re: Energy Minister and Sudbury By-Election

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Premier. This Sunday, the February star published the results of a poll -- the suddenly star, 71% of its readers think the MPP Minister of energy should step down from Cabinet until the Sudbury by-election scandal has been resolved. It appears, Speaker
[Applause]

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I know that the leader of the third party understands that there is a court process under way, Mr. Speaker. The issue is before the courts, and I've been very open in the legislature, in the media over many months about the circumstances around the Sudbury by-election. We're going to let -- under the presumption of innocence, we're going to let that process play out in the courts and really there's not any appropriate way that the issue should be litigated here in the legislature, Mr. Speaker. There's a process outside of the legislature that has to be allowed to unfold.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, one reader called in to the newspaper to explain why she thinks that the Minister should step aside, quote -- it would be the Honourable thing to do. End quote, she said. Does the Premier think that it is Honourable to continue to protect Liberal insiders like the Minister of energy while ignoring the wishes of the people of Sudbury?

>> Min. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I think we had this conversation yesterday in the House on this precise topic. You also made a very, very clear ruling on the nature of questions and discussion and debate. Speaker, you also outlined a very clear ruling yesterday, talking about how this issue and the limits around the discussion around this issue both in question period and debate. I think the member opposite, the leader of the third party very much knows that this matter is before the courts. It will be highly inappropriate to deal with this issue, and as it relates to the Minister of energy, Speaker, is also clear the Minister of energy is under no investigation. There are no charges laid. Speaker, there are no charges laid against the Minister of energy. His responsibilities as the Minister of energy under -- are not the subject of this investigation as well. Therefore the Minister will continue to do his job and serve the people of Sudbury. Thank you.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, another caller told the Sudbury star quote I definitely think MPP Glenn Thibeault should step down. Yet another said, quote, I think he should resign completely along with Wynne. They're all in this together, end quote. How can the Premier continue to put the interests of

liberal party insiders ahead of the wishes of the people of Sudbury when we clearly see what a detrimental effect this is having on their faith in this government? When will the Premier do the Honourable thing? The thing that was done by other Cabinet Ministers over all parties, Speaker. The Conservatives had Ministers Runciman and Wilson. A Liberal Cabinet Minister Sorbara. All of those folks did the Honourable thing and stepped aside, Speaker. And I ask the Premier when will she ask her Minister of energy to step aside until the OPP Allegations.

>> Andrea Horwath: Regarding his role in the Sudbury scandal are fully dealt with? Speaker, the Premier, the member from Sudbury and all members on this side of the House continue to focus on working for their constituents, Speaker. The member of Sudbury, the member from Sudbury is focused on getting the

[unclear] Bill. Naqvi: He is focused delivering the cat scan NER for the good people of Sudbury, Speaker. These are the kind of -- these are the kind of public service that the member of Sudbury is providing. He is under no investigation whatsoever and the member from the third party very much knows that, Speaker. There are no charges against the Minister of energy either, Speaker. There is no reason whatsoever that the Minister be considering stepping down. He is focused on his job not only as the Minister of energy but most importantly as a very good member from Sudbury. Thank you.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Energy

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My next question is for the Premier. The Premier needs a reason other than the Sudbury bribery scandal to ask her Minister of energy to resign, I would suggest it would be the method he has helped her -- mess that he has helped her mo-to-make in our energy system. The Liberal shortsighted selloff Hydro One is hurting business in Ontario. Last week I was in Windsor and had a chance to visit the arnler stop, local diner owned guy Gabe fab. He has owned it for 12 years. He told my his hydro bill is now his second largest expense after his mortgage. It hit \$2,000 this summer and he's bracing for an even bigger bill now that winter is coming. He's tried hard to keep costs down. He's reduced the number of coolers he keeps in the diner. He's replaced the roof but still he's struggling, Speaker. When will the Premier realize how much damage her sell-off is doing to families and businesses across Ontario and put an end to it?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, again I will say to the leader of the third party, and I not Minister of energy will want to comment but -- because he is working every day to find ways to help people with their electricity bills, to take costs out of the system, Mr. Speaker, because he knows that the work that we have done to build the system up had a cost associated with it and that that's exactly why we need now to find ways to take costs out of the system, as we have been doing putting programs in place, taking the debt retirement charge off people's bills. And as of January taking the provincial portion of the H.S.T. Off people's bills. But again, Mr. Speaker, the leader of the third party as she is want to do, conflates issues. The reality is she refers to Hydro One and the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One, which is related to the investment in infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, in transit and roads and bridges and the very infrastructure. Premier Wynne: That the member for Sudbury has been fighting for, Mr. Speaker. And that she also knows that the electricity prices are not set. By Hydro One. They're set by the Ontario energy board.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I&think the Premier just admitted that the government, the Liberal government made a mess of our electricity system and now we're supposed to -- [applause] Speaker, but we'll leave that to the people. I also met a gentleman named mark scanner when I was in the Windsor area last week. Mark is a second-generation dairy farmer in Essex and his small business is also struggling under the burden of exorbitant hydro bills. He tries to conserve as much energy as he can, Speaker, but the reality of his business is that his cows need to be milked and they don't wait for off-peak hours, Speaker. Will this Premier -- in fact when will this Premier wake up and realize that this sell-off of Hydro One is hurting farm operations like mark's and do the right thing, make a commitment to stop any further. Andrea Horwath: Sell-off of Hydro One?

>> Premier Wynne: You know, Mr. Speaker, it is so interesting to me that, in this whole discussion, the NDP Has never talked about the importance of building infrastructure. The NDP Has never talked about the importance of clean air. The NDP Has never talked about how important it is that we have a reliable electricity system. I've never heard the NDP Talk about what the electricity system would look like had they not cancelled the deal with Manitoba for clean hydro power when they were in office, Mr. Speaker. I've never heard the NDP Talk about how important it is that we continue to build out the system so that northern communities can be connected to the grid. I've never heard the NDP Talk about how important it is that we have an electricity system that is clean. [Applause] That is -- [applause] I've never heard the NDP Talk about any of those, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

>> Andrea Horwath: Well thank you, Speaker. And I have never heard the Liberals admit that the sell-off of our electricity system is costing the people of this province bills that basically cannot afford. [Applause] It's ruining the future of the next generation for the people of this province. Bernard Nelson is yet another example, Speaker, of a dairy farmer that I met in Essex last week. Bernard has seen his hydro bills double over the last three years. Speaker, has tried to conserve. He switched to energy free water bowls for his cows. He changed out the barn lights. He bought new variable-speed fans that are more energy efficient to keep his cattle cool in the summer. But still Bernard is worried about having to lay off some of his staff because the cost of hydro means that he cannot afford to keep everyone working on the farm. Small businesses are hurting, Speaker. Farmers are hurting. Families are hurting. When will this Premier finally admit that the sell-off of Hydro One hurts families, it hurts agriculture, it hurts business and stop any further sell-off?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very please today risode and answer this question, Mr. Speaker. The broadening of the sale of Hydro One, Mr. Speaker, has allowed us to invest in many things that the Premier has talked about, and let's just talk about some of those, Mr. Speaker. 13.5 billion is being invested in the go regional express rail in the gtha, which will quadruple the number of weekly trips to 6,000, Mr. Speaker. The Eglinton crosstown L.R.T. \$5.3 billion in capital investment. Mr. Speaker, you know what? We are making sure that businesses, farms right across this great province of ours, Mr. Speaker, are getting a rebate, Mr. Speaker. We're working hard to ensure that happens. And just yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I was in the great riding of Hamilton, working and talking with dofasco, Mr. Speaker, where they're saving over 107,000 megawatts of power, Mr. Speaker, and saving over \$10 million, creating 81 jobs in that riding. That's what we're doing on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

[Applause] Creating jobs and helping our economy..

MPP Fedeli to Minister Sousa Re: Fall Economic Statement

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you. Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of finance. Yesterday's fall economic statement revealed the government is significantly hiking service fees and taxes to pay for their years of waste, mismanagement and scandal. Vehicle and driver registration fees have increased by, Speaker, \$503 million in just four years. If you drive a car, you pay more. If you heat your home with gas, you pay more. If you hunt or fish or camp, you pay more. In fact the financial accountability officer told us this Liberal government has hiked service fees on everything by nearly 40% in just five years. Yesterday's news, Speaker, did absolutely nothing to address this half a billion-dollar driver's fee hike. Mr. Speaker, can the government please explain. Why it's insisting on making life more affordable for the people of Ontario?

>> Min. Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about the fall economic statement that we delivered yesterday, the tremendous amount of work we are doing to stimulate economic growth, create more jobs. Independent economists have understood and are actually indicating that Ontario is surpassing and exceeding the growth in Canada. In the last quarter we outpaced -- out paced the United States and G-7. We're taking necessary steps to come to balance next year and the year after that. The member opposite makes reference to a number of programs that we are revising as we proceed to take cost recovery measures necessary in that program. At the same time, we're doing many other things to help everyday Ontarians, by providing free tuition to many student, by enabling us to provide more child care spaces to young families and, Mr. Speaker, we're providing a doubling of rebates for first-time home buyers to \$4,000 all of which will help our economy and help our families at the same time.

>> MPP Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Minister of finance. We know that their waste, mismanagement and scandals have made life more unaffordable for Ontario families. Yesterday they presented a fall economic statement, but the independent financial accountability officer told us their numbers just don't add up. He also told us that we have unprecedented debt levels and interest on that debt is \$1 billion a month, Speaker. It means that Ontario now pays more in interest than it does on postsecondary education and community safety combined. Wow. For taxpayers this government's reckless mismanagement means higher taxes, higher hydro rates and less funding for frontline services. Mr. Speaker, can the government please explain why it insists on making life more unaffordable for Ontario families?

>> Min. Charles Sousa: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite began by speaking about the implementation of additional \$30 in savings for the drive clean, which we are proceeding to do. But any reference interest costs. Let's be

clear, Mr. Speaker. Under this government, we have taken steps to reduce our overall percentage of costs for interest to 8.9% of our budget. That has been consistent over the last four years since we've been providing for some of the work. Under the Conservative government, it was 15% of the budget that costs were attributed. Under the NDP It was 12%. We have taken steps to control our spending. We are the leanest government in all of Canada, without sacrificing the things that matter. We're investing more in health care. We're investing more in education. We're producing 641,000 net new jobs, Mr. Speaker, all of which is providing for a growing economy. To come to balance next year and the year after that. The F.A.O. Knows that because we now have updated information that either have the benefit of and we are moving forward with our plan.

MPP Fife to Premier Wynne (Sousa) Re: Economic Statement

>> MPP Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Speaker, in yesterday's fall economic statement does little to address the real issues facing Ontarians. It's nothing more than a distraction. People in Ontario are facing energy bills that they can no longer afford, like in Ontario's less -- life in Ontario is less affordable every day. Instead of stopping the sell-off of Hydro One Ontarians found out yesterday how well the Liberals' asset sales are going. Basically they are boasting about the public sell-off of these assets. We now know the Liberal government is selling off Hydro One to meet the Liberals' promise to balance the books next year. Page 48 by broadening Hydro One ownership the province expects to generate 5 billion to reduce debt. The financial accountability officer has already told us once the sell-off of Hydro One is complete, it will cost Ontario \$500 million every year. Speaker, why does this Premier continue to put the needs of the Liberal party ahead of the needs of Ontarians?

>> Min. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite again makes reference to an asset that we are repurposing and actually we are augmenting to provide for greater investments into new assets. The member opposite also talked about the wholesale value of that asset, which does go towards debt, which is done by law. But she fails to mention that there's \$4 million in capital appreciation that's being real invested dollar for dollar through the trillium trust to be reinvested into programs and into assets, even in her own riding, Mr. Speaker, in order to achieve a better quality of life for all Ontarians. And at the same time we're taking steps to reduce the overall costs of hydro through the elimination of the 8% portion of the province's charges. And we also have eliminated debt retired rnl -- retirement charges another \$70 a year benefitted to those bills. We continue on our plan continue to reinvest dollar for dollar all of those say sets we can build new assets for the long-term benefit --

>> MPP Fife: Well, Mr. Speaker, the finance Minister should follow the money because we know from public accounts the trillium trust wasn't used last year. And also this Premier, if she was actually concerned about Ontario's priority, she could have proved it yesterday. Instead we got another distraction from this government. Rather than actually addressing the crisis in affordable housing the Liberals adjusted real estate transaction costs. A senior bank of Montreal economist said it would hardly and I quote -- it would hardly make a dent in worsening housing affordability. And if anything it just adds more fuel to the housing fire. Yesterday's report describing Toronto as the child poverty capital of Canada, pointed to the lack of affordable housing as a key contributor to profit and inequality. We know that investing in affordable housing is an investment in social justice and makes economic sense. Speaker, can the Premier explain why her fall economic statement did not address the affordable housing crisis.

>> Min. Sousa: Let me correct my record. Of course I meant billion dollars and new investments for the people of Ontario as a result of the work we're doing. But the member opposite doesn't feel that a doubling of a rebate to young families who are starting to buy into their new home matters little to them. And \$4,000, Mr. Speaker, does help. As well as the work we're doing to increase child care spaces for young families, Mr. Speaker, as is our ability to provide free tuition to many students who are entering the education system so that they're not burdened by debt. All of these efforts are designed to help those young families get started, Mr. Speaker. In fact because of the work we've done on this side of the House we're also helping them with retirement security in the future all of which requires us to be diligent and assemble some of these programs. It's not one item in particular. All of those combined enables us -- enabling us to provide for greater service and help for young families.

MPP Potts to Minister Sousa Re: Fall Economic Statement

>> MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question's also to the Minister of finance. Speaker, just yesterday we note the Minister delivered the fall economic statement which details the economic outlook and the fiscal review for the province. And then last night I attended the woodbine garden homeowners association annual general meeting chaired by president brier Delong, and they were delighted to hear that we're on track to balance the budget while we continue to invest in Ontario. Now, Speaker, I know as part of the announcement the Minister committed to helping first-time home buyers enter into the housing market and I also know that many Ontarians have expressed concerns about the difficulty first-time buyers are currently facing as they try to get into the housing market. So, Speaker, would the Minister please outline and explain how these recent changes outlined in yesterday's financial economic statement will benefit Ontario home buyers. Thank you.

>> Min. Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the member from beach East York for the question. And I think we all recognize and appreciate that many people have benefitted from improved equity in the valuations -- increased valuations of their homes. But some young families and others looking to buy their first home is becoming more challenging, and that's understood in this new market in this housing market as we stand today. So buying your first home as we all know is one of the most exciting decisions in a young person's life but many are worried how they'll be able to afford that first condo and House as the member just asked. So to address this and to help young families we are doubling the maximum refund for first-time home buyers refund to \$4,000 starting January 1st, 2017, enabling them to also benefit from enters the marketplace and having the same benefits many of us have had as we started at that young age as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the Minister of finance for the leadership he's showing for young people to buy into their first homes. I know the people at woodbine gardens were excited because there's still opportunity for affordable housing in the north part of my riding these people will benefit. It will and significant savings for the this is a very important step for first-time home buyers who are looking to enter the housing market and I'm please today hear the government is taking steps to invest in support that is help people and especially young people in their everyday lives. I also know that the province is also taking steps to modernize the land transfer tax system. Speaker, will the Minister of finance outline and explain further how these changes will also make life easier for first-time home buyers?

>> Min. Sousa: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Again thank you for the important question, recognizing that there are inventory available for many first-time home buyers. In fact these changes will mean no land transfer tax will be payable on the first \$368,000 of the cost of your first home. That also means that more than half of first-time home buyers will pay no L.P. T. Because of this refund. We're also modernizing the land transfer tax system for the first time in a generation to reflect the current real estate market in Ontario. Mr. Speaker, the housing market is an important source of economic growth and employment in Ontario. Improving housing affordability will help more Ontarians participate in the market. That is an exciting opportunity for them to take their first step and find their first home. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Yakabuski to Premier Wynne Re: Gandalf Group

>> MPP John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Sadly we did not get a response yesterday from the Deputy Premier so we'll try to get an answer today from the Premier. Ratepayers deserve answers as to why the Liberals hired David Hurley and the Gandalf group to conduct holding about ratepayers want relief from skyrocketing hydro prices. Ratepayers are astonished that the Liberals needed a poll to tell them the obvious, that there is an electricity rate crisis in this province. They're also appalled that the Premier would waste money on such a redundant poll that benefits an individual who is a senior Liberal strategist. Speaker, will the Premier finally come clean and tell us exactly how much money she gave her campaign manager to conduct this wasteful and unnecessary poll?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I know that the member opposite knows full well that every government does polling, Mr. Speaker, that every government taps into the opinions of the people in the province, Mr. Speaker. And I also know that the member opposite knows that there's a process. I believe there were five bidders, Mr. Speaker. It's a process. It's not a political decision who -- which group is chosen to do the polling, Mr. Speaker. I think the member opposite knows full well that that process is in place.

>> MPP Yakabuski: Thank you, Speaker. When the number comes back at 94%, it is proof that no poll was necessary. As we have said on countless occasions, families all across this province are struggling to pay their hydro bills each and every month. Yet instead of providing meaningful relief, the Liberals would rather give money to their campaign manager David Hurley, to tell them what they should already and I believe do already know. Moreover this contract strikes taxpayers as entirely wasteful and just another example of Liberals helping their well-heeled friends. Speaker, will the Premier live up to her lofty rhetoric, actually be open and transparent for once and tell this House exactly how much her campaign manager was paid for this totally redundant poll? [Applause]

>> Premier Wynne: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. So let me just go through the process. All public opinion research conducted by the government of Ontario is procured through a fair and transparent competitive process. And, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite I think is a member of a party that actually believes in competitive bidding, Mr. Speaker. The final decision about which vendor is best suited for the project is made by a committee of at least three nonpartisan public servants, Mr. Speaker. That's who makes the decision. Every company has to be qualified -- a qualified vendor of record and has to compete for a project with no less than five competitors, Mr. Speaker. And in fact the record shows that five other companies competed for this contract with the

gandalf group, Mr. Speaker. I believe the member opposite knows full well that that process means that there is not a political intervention. It is a process that is transparent and is applied in every situation, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Campbell to Premier Wynne (Zimmer) Re: Access to Clean Water

>> MPP Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Speaker, access to clean, drinkable water is a systemic issue in the province of Ontario. If you are an indigenous person living on a first nations reserve, for more than a week we ago beau first nation a community in my riding north of sioux lookout has gone without drinkable usable water. The aging water mains have burst. They've got staff working with what they've got to fix it. I'm sure the Premier will tell the House that it's federal jurisdiction, their responsibility. But surely abdicating the province's role will not sit well for the more than 800 people who are without usable water. My question is simple. What is your government doing to aid the situation?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I completely agree with the member opposite that it is unacceptable that anyone in Ontario would not have clean, drinkable water. I understand that it is absolutely critical that this be addressed and as recently as yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of indian relations and I had a conversation with regional chief day and with grand chief Alvin fiddler and with grand chief Patrick madaly, Mr. Speaker. We are part of a tripartite province, government working together because each party, each order of government brings something different to the table. The provincial government has expertise, has capacity, Mr. Speaker. There's funding that comes from federal government. And first nations have community knowledge. So, Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely working to make sure that all of these systems are being worked on.

>> MPP Campbell: Thank you, Speaker. The provincial government is responsible for first nations health through its responsibility for education. No clean water and sewage means no school. Children and elders are developing skin rash breakouts just like they did in kashechewan. There are over 80 first nation communities, mostly northern, mostly remote in this province that do not have access to clean water. For some communities, it has been decades. That number wouldn't stand in any other community in this province. The Premier met with her federal counterparts at the privatization conference here in Toronto yesterday. My question is simple -- what did she ask them about the situation in wiagmoe? ..

>> Min. David Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to respond to this question. Thank you, Speaker. Here are some things that we're actually doing to alleviate the problem. The Ontario clean water energy act is providing operations and maintenance services on a fee-for-basis service. The Walkerton clean water centre provides operator training. The Minister of the environment and climate change has provided engineering and technical advice to first nations and carries

out conformist reviews forever proposals of first nations water systems upon request. First nations are included in showcasing water innovation programs, funding cost effective solutions for managing drinking water, wastewater, storm water and sewers. The Canada Ontario first nations drinking water improvement initiative. Is a partnership with four small first nation communities to provide innovative solutions. The clean water act --

MPP Malhi to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Child Care

>> MPP Harinder Malhi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the associate Minister of education responsible for child care in early years. We know that the earliest years of a child's life are important to their future development. From the day they are born human (inaudible) absorbing everything around them and learning at an astounding rate. I've spoken with many of my constituents who tell me it is challenging to find affordable child care. I am encouraged by the speech from the throne committed to 100 new child care spaces. Made a sizable investment in children 4 and under. Will the Minister through the Speaker please explain to the House the details of the investment in child care and help shed light what it will mean for Ontario families.

>> Min. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I would like to thank the member from brampton-Springdale for this very important question. And I want to tell her what a great job she's doing for her constituents. [Applause], Mr. Speaker, in the recent throne speech we unveiled our government's vision for the early years and we made a bold new commitment for Ontario's child care and early years sector. We committed to transform the way we deliver child care in this province by creating 100,000 new licensed child care spaces. Within five years for children 4 and under. Yesterday the fall economic statement revealed our first step in this commitment to child care modernization. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud, proud that the fall economic statement announced an additional \$65.5 million in the 2016/17 school year to create approximately 3,400. New child care spaces across the province. [Applause] This is fantastic news and this investment means more --

>> MPP Malhi: Thank you to the associate Minister of education for that answer. I was glad to see yesterday's fall economic statement includes a significant investment in child care, because the creation of licensed child care spaces is a part of our government's plan to invest in the earliest years of a child's life and create jobs and help families in their everyday lives. Mr. Speaker, I've heard the Minister say in this House that engagement and consultations are very important to ensure that we get the new child care framework right. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister please inform the House of the status of her consultations and when we can expect to see these new spaces open?

>> Min. Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hardworking member from brampton-Springdale. Mr. Speaker, planning engagements are currently under way to inform the framework and distribution of the 100,000 new child care spaces. Over the next few months we will be consulting with the child care and early years sector parents and communities to get their advice and perspectives. In fact provincewide consultations are now under way. We want to ensure we make informed decisions so that our children can get a head start in

life and families can get the support they need. This feedback will help us develop a renewed early years and child care policy framework and the five-year plan to create 100,000 licensed child care spaces. This will be the first steps towards the 3,400 spaces announced yesterday, first spaces to count towards the government's historic commitment to build 100,000 new spaces for children 0 to 4 years old? New question. The member from Leeds- Grenville.

MPP Steve Clark to Minister Naqvi Re: Sudbury By-Election

>> MPP Steve Clark: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Speaker, at the justice committees hearings into the gas plant scandal on December 3rd, 2013, the Premier testified this. "I know that when I'm going to do an important interview or appear before a committee or go into the legislature to answer important questions posed by the opposition, I take some time to read documents, talk with my staff and understand the issues." Speaker, the Premier knew standing by Pat Sorbara put the integrity of her office at risk. And she didn't just stand by her. She publicly stated she didn't expect charges. We know she likes to talk with staff and understand the issues. So, Speaker, will the Premier tell us what Pat Sorbara told her in those conversations? And does she now regret believing her? [Applause]

>> Min. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I was wondering in the beginning of the question where the member opposite is going with that question. I think trying to put a different flavour to the same question that he's been asking for a few weeks, fully knowing that his question may be offside. And that the answer he's seeking is this is not the venue or the forum for that answer. Speaker, I think the Premier and I, on behalf of the government, have been very clear, as you have also suggested, that this will be an inappropriate place to discuss any matters that are before the courts. The issue at hand, Speaker, as you know is before a court and there are charges laid against two individuals who do not serve in this House. This is only appropriate, Speaker, and advisable to all members not to discuss those matters. Or the evidence or any questions relating to those issues in this House, and I know the member opposite knows this. But I suggest that he should consider it.

>> MPP Clark: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier. Speaker, I want to remind the Premier of something else that she said at those gas plant hearings. On April 30th, 2013, she explained her reason for testifying. Here's the quote -- I thought it was very important for me to be open and to let everyone know what I did know and what I didn't know. Wow. Hard to believe that that's the same person who now has so little to say about this very important issue. Speaker, since the Premier won't live up to that pledge of being open and answer our questions in the House, we're left with this. Premier, you and your Minister are not required by law to testify as MPP S. Speaker, will the Premier commit to Ontarians that she and her Minister of energy will waive their privilege and testify.

>> Min. Naqvi: Speaker, the Premier has co-operated in this matter. The Premier has co-operated in the investigation that took place. The Premier has been absolutely transparent in terms of answering questions that are posed in this House to Ontarians, and through the media, Speaker. The Premier will continue to serve her role, her duties and obligations that have been given to her from the

people of Ontario. The Premier also recognizes that it is not advisable to prejudice illegal -- a legal proceeding. Speaker, there are two individuals who are charged in this matter. Speaker, as we know. The fundamental principle our system is that everybody is innocent until proven guilty, Speaker. I think we owe it to those individuals to --

MPP Gelinas to Minister Hoskins Re: Nurse Practitioners

>> MPP France Gelinas: [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: For the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. [End of translation] Ontario's 3,000 nurse practitioners do remarkable work each and every day. Some of them are with us today. Welcome to queen's park.

[Applause] Nurse practitioners continue to face Barriers that only makes it harder for Ontarians, for us to get the care that we need. You see, Speaker, salaries for nurse practitioners working in our community has been frozen for eight long years, while the scope of practice and responsibility increased exponentially. This year the Minister offers \$85 million over three years to all primary care agencies. After eight years of salary freeze, the Minister offers 10 cents on the dollar, Speaker. It is wrong. It is disrespectful and it needs to change. Does the Minister agree? [Applause]

>> Min. Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'm proud of the fact that, since this party took office, this government in 2003, the number of nurse practitioners in the province, as the member opposite alluded to, has gone from approximately 500 to more than 3,000 nurse practitioners. Extraordinary. Reflects the incredible talent that they have and they provide. It was this government as well that began the first nurse practitioner-led clinic in Sudbury. In fact in the north, Mr. Speaker, we now have 25 nurse practitioner LED clinics.

[Applause] And I know and having worked hard with the nurse practitioners association of Ontario and others, which LED us to this year's budget decision to invest \$85 million, an increase to the compensation for nurse practitioners, but importantly. Ached -- ached to that was their ability to come into a new form of pension, which dramatically and substantially increases their pension entitlement as well, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Gelinas: Speaker the nurse practitioners are here today asking the government to help them help their patients. Primary care agency cannot recruit and retain nurse practitioners after eight years of wage freeze, and that has a direct impact on their patients, on us. Nurse practitioner cannot do a urine dip for pregnancy although any one of us can walk into a pharmacy and do one, and that impacts their patients and patient care. Nurse practitioner cannot use a defibrillator in their clinic, but their secretary and all of us can. That impacts patient care. When will the government remove all of the Barriers to quality care and let our nurse practitioner practice to their full scope for the benefit of the patients of Ontario. And pay them what they're worth? [Applause]

>> Min. Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that I'm getting this question from the member opposite. I do believe it's the only time we've actually had a

conversation about nurse practitioners specifically, including their compensation. [Interjections] But the nurse practitioners in Ontario understand and know that we are continuing to work to expand their scope of practice. In fact we, as alluded to earlier this morning, we're working with them on controlled substances. We know that they're going to have an exceptionally important role in the delivery of medical assistance in dying as well. We know that in many cases across this province they are the only care and the best care that's provided for Ontarians that depend on the highest quality of care. I have a list of how we've -- over this government how we've expanded the scope of practice of nurse practitioners. I'm working closely with them, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we continue to make progress. I look forward to achieving success on prescribing for controlled substances and moving on to the next challenge, which they so deservedly require and will provide.

MPP Sophie Kiwala to Minister Hoskins Re: Investing in Long-Term Care

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. There is no doubt that health care is a top priority for our government. And that is one of the reasons why we're so glad to see the nurse practitioners here today. And as a matter of fact providing all Ontarians with timely access to the care they need whether at home, in their community or in one of our outstanding hospitals is of the utmost importance to our government, but also to me as the member for Kingston and the islands. I know our government increased funding for health care by \$1 billion to 51.8 billion, and because of these continued investments in our health care system, we have seen changes and progress in Ontario. We've experienced reduced wait times for surgeries. We've increased the number of Ontarians who have a health care provider and we have expanded services for Ontarians at home and in their community. Cot Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please tell this House about this important new investment?

>> Min. Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, . Thank you to the member from Kingston and the island for this important question and giving me the opportunity to talk about the important investments our government is making in health care. And I think as we know and remember, in the 2016 budget we increased our investments in health care by \$1 billion and \$345 million of that went specifec hospitals, more than a 2% increase in hospital operating budgets, Mr. Speaker. But with yesterday's fall check statement -- economic statement we made another important investment in our hospitals. Our government will be investing an additional \$140 million this fiscal year, Mr. Speaker, across all hospitals in Ontario. [Applause] Every single hospital is getting an increase. In fact the amount of increase this fiscal year to our hospitals in operating costs is now more than 3% this fiscal year, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Kiwala: Thank you, Minister, for that response. I know that all of the hospitals across Ontario will be very excited to hear that our government is continuing to make important investments that will help patients and their families receive better care and quicker access to services at every hospital across Ontario. This investment will also be very well received of course by every hospital in my riding of Kingston and the islands. These investments will translate to better care for Ontarians, lower wait times and as a result improve health outcomes. Minister, yesterday our government's announcement of \$140 million for Ontario hospitals was the centre point of a great fall economic statement, but it was not the only important health announcement made yesterday. Can the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please inform this House on the work our government is undertaking to improve services. For older Ontarians and their families?

>> Min. Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that, as our population ages, Ontarians face new health care challenges. Today one in ten Ontarians over the age of 65 suffer from the dementia. That's why our government is committed to helping the growing number of Ontarians who do suffer from dementia in helping their caregivers and their families, Mr. Speaker. With the fall economic statement, we announced the introduction of our dementia strategy that will build on current investments from \$85 million to further enhance services for older Ontarians and their families. This strategy will include consultations taking place across the province. They've already taken place in Thunder Bay, North Bay, Kingston, Windsor and Barrie. There are more to come across the province, Mr. Speaker. The fall economic statement continues our commitment to helping all Ontarians, including our seniors with the challenges that they face with their health, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Harris to Minister Hunter Re: Cancelled Waterloo School Trip

>> MPP Michael Harris: Speaker -- for students hoping to commemorate 100 years since the heroic Canadian capture of Vimy Ridge. Were devastated on Remembrance Day when the board cancelled a once-in-a-lifetime overseas opportunity this April. I wrote the board chair yesterday to reconsider the decision that was made due to Travel Canada advice advocating caution and I'm hopeful following a board reversal last night to review the matter. Speaker, Travel Canada is not telling Canadians to avoid France and it would be a shame to see some students who worked for a year to earn their way across the Atlantic denied while thousands including neighbouring Waterloo Catholic students participate in this important learning opportunity honouring Canadian Vimy heroes. Will the Minister direct that the Waterloo region board to reverse its decision and prevent Waterloo students from being denied the vital learning opportunity to commemorate one of Canada's most important moments in our history?

>> Min. Mitzi Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for the question and, you know, obviously last week was very important, as we paid respect and we honoured all of our veterans that afforded us the freedoms that we hold dear.

[Interjection:] Hear, hear! As Canadian, as Ontarians. I know all members in this House participated in that and in fact all schools and schools across Ontario participated in that. And I know as I go through schools, I see those images inside the classroom. But, Mr. Speaker, I think that, you know, one of the things I want to remind the member opposite about is the role of our school boards. We have 72 school boards in this province, and you know it's a -- the very important role that they play is making sure that there are local considerations that are made and that they are the ones that are working together with all of our education workers to make sure that we deliver the best possible education for all students in Ontario and we have to expect the role --

>> MPP Harris: Speaker, while Waterloo board is reviewing the decision, at this point students who have had their hearts set on this trip still don't know if they'll be allowed to experience firsthand the international history that changed our world a century ago. It's as disappointing as it is ironic that while visitors to Vimy will be celebrating the victory and freedom over fear and terror 100 years ago, fear and terror may now prevent our students from enjoying those same freedoms to honour our heroes. Speaker, all students in Ontario deserve the same learning opportunities. Thousands will be getting a unique opportunity to recognize Canadian heroism overseas, while others may in fact be denied. Will the Minister tell us what she will do to have provincial ministry officials work with

school boards across the province to ensure consistency and equal opportunity for all Ontario students to honour this historic battle -- [applause]

>> Min. Hunter: Speaker, you know, I want to just make it very clear for the 2 million students that attend Ontario's publicly funded education system that the focus on student learning and student achievement is our top priority. That's also balanced, Mr. Speaker, with students' well-being. We want to make sure that all of our students are safe and that they have an opportunity to receive the best possible education, which they are receiving in Ontario. And, Mr. Speaker, I respect the role of our local school board trustees, Mr. Speaker. They understand the needs in their local communities, in each individual school in their communities, and in the classrooms, Mr. Speaker. And that's something that we want to ensure that we support our ministry of education and all of our officials are supporting and we -- Make decisions that are in the best interests of all of our students, their safety, in their well-being and in their student achievement.