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Unedited Transcript

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Hardeman to Minister Ballard (Mauro) Re: Housing Costs

>> MPP Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of housing. I've heard from many young families about their dream of buying their first home, only to be outbid time and time again. Why has the dream of home ownership become so much more difficult because this government's burdensome regulation and red tape, the supply of House s doesn't meet the demand. In fact if no new House s went on to the market after today, the supply would be gone in one month. Mr. Speaker, it's time the government gets out their scissors and truly starts cutting red tape. Will the Liberals commit to slashing red tape and letting the housing market meet the demands we need?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member opposite for that question. You know, Speaker, as we've repeated, stated repeatedly in the House, we really understand the concerns throughout the gtha regarding the booming housing market. We know that Ontarians are worried about homes. They want the peace of mind knowing that they'll all have an affordable place to call home. And I can say that we have been working and consulting across this province, and in fact across Canada, looking at solutions that we can use in Ontario. Some of those will be coming soon, Mr. Speaker. We've been participating alongside B.C. And the cities of Toronto and Vancouver in a federal working group to look at housing. Tenancy act, we have been looking at. We've been consulting extensively across Ontario over the past few weeks. We're on it.

>> MPP Hardeman: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, this morning I was joined by Juan rohas, who is in the gallery with his wife today. Juan and his wife and 3-year-old daughter are looking to move to a bigger House for their growing family. They've been looking for months in Etobicoke, and based on their bids, on the housing, prices they saw the week before. They bid last week's price today and they didn't get it. They never seem to be enough. Mr. Speaker, can the Liberals tell Juan why they are making it harder for him to buy a House for his young family?

>> Minister Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker. It's a very interesting, very interesting question coming from the member opposite. I will tell you that the former leader of the opposition, Mr. Tim Hudak, recently said that he congratulated the government for taking positive steps to address affordability. So we agree, Mr. Speaker. Let me just reiterate a few of the things that this government has done. We're continuing to work with our municipal partners to make secondary suites. Those are the self-contained residential units, available more quickly, helping communities better respond quickly to renters' needs. You know we recently passed legislation. That empowers communities to use a new

tool called inclusionary zoning. Mr. Speaker, we have a whole host of things we've done and I look forward to explaining more.

>> MPP Hardeman: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government significantly increased -- my apologies. The government significantly reduced review times for our planning application. They raised it from 90 to 180 days for amendments to the official plans and subdivision and condominium approval. 90 to 120 days for zoning and holding bylaws, and 60 to 90 days for consent applications. All of which made it harder to get foundations dug, walls put up and roofs over the heads of our young families. Mr. Speaker, the dream of home ownership should be attainable for most young families. Why does the government insist on making it so much harder for the majority of the families?

>> Minister Bill Mauro: Speaker thank you very much. I want to thank the member for the question. There is an interesting narrative. I think that is beginning to take hold in the gtha around housing afford ability. We understand, Speaker, very clearly that this is a real issue but what I do want to say is from our perspective in our ministry -- ministry we have been doing a significant amount of work on this file already, Speaker. I would say we feel comfortable in discounting the following from being in any way influencing the price of housing in the gtha. Number one is land availability. There is absolutely enough land available in the province of Ontario and in the gtha to meet de panned. And number two, there is absolutely enough service -- It is mandated three-year supply required. We've done a deep dive. In fact there is a three-year supply of service land available. We continue to work farther on this. Our part of what's holding it up.

MPP Scott to Minister Naidoo-Harris (Naqvi) Re: Sexual Assault Centres

>> MPP Laurie Scott: Mr. Speaker, my question to Minister of the status of equipment. There is a central centre in Brampton. It currently has 132 people on the waiting list, and it takes nine months for survivors to get their first session. That wait is about to get longer. Staff hours are being cut and the centre is closing on Friday. Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of the status of women believe that this is acceptable?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'm pleased to rise and talk to the member opposite about this important question. Absolutely sexual violence has a devastating impact on the lives of survivors and their families, and it's far too prevalent in our society and it's absolutely unacceptable. That's why our sexual violence and harassment action plan, to that plan we're addressing awareness. We're raising awareness, improving supports, making workplaces and campuses safer. We know that Hope 24/7 does important work throughout Peel region, which is why we have provided them funding for sexual violence and harassment and prevention over the last 20 years. And in fact, of the 42 sexual assault centres in the province, they now receive the sixth highest funding allocation of any of the centres in the province. I think that's amazing. Now I understand -- That their model of delivery is different and we are working with them to ensure that they get the funding that they are in fact --

>> MPP Scott: Well, Mr. Speaker, Jane Paul Massey-Singh the president of Hope 24/7 board had this to say -- unless the province is prepared to step up in a meaningful way, we are really in a situation where we are going to fail our community. Mr. Speaker, is the government prepared to step up in a meaningful way or will the Liberals fail sexual assault survivors in Peel region?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. This is a very important question. This is an issue that this government and our Premier has taken a tremendous amount of leadership. Our Premier's the one who stood up to make sure that we deal with issues around sexual violence and sexual harassment in a meaningful way. Not to -- Speaker but to actually take action -- Thank you, Speaker. To take action that is going to ensure that there are supports available for victims of sexual violence and harassment, Speaker. To ensure that we change attitudes when it comes to sexual violence and harassment by our -- Campaign, Speaker, we are making a meaningful substantive difference. In my supplementary I will speak to the supports we have available. Thank you.

>> MPP Scott: Well, Hope 24/7 has the second-lowest funding per capita of all sexual assault centres in the province. Yet the government's tone-deaf response to Peel has been that they funded the centre for 20 years. But what's good,

what's good is this funding if it doesn't meet the needs on the ground? I know that the government doesn't believe in mandatory sexual assault training for judges, but now it seems that they're not prepared to help the most vulnerable victims of sexual assault. Mr. Speaker, once again, will the government respond to the cry for help from sexual assault survivors in Peel region?

>> Minister Naqvi: Speaker, hope 24/7 does important work throughout the Peel region but I think it's really important to note also the kind of support we have been providing to this very important industry. Since 2003, Speaker, our funding for all sexual assault centre programs as increased by 45%. Speaker, and in 2015, we increased hope 24/7's budget by over \$31,000 as part of our "It's never ok" action plan to increase funding to all sexual assault centres, Speaker, by 7%. Hope 24/7, Speaker, currently receives almost \$500,000, the sixth highest funding allocation in...

[Snapstream cut out at the end of Minister Naqvi's response]

MPP Tabuns to Minister Sousa Re: Ontario Economy

MPP Peter Tabuns: (Snapstream did not transcribe beginning of question)...does the acting Premier see anything wrong with that?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, in Ontario, we've had the largest job growth in the past ten years. We now have more people working in the private sector than ever before. These are high-paying jobs, good-paying jobs, Mr. Speaker. Many of the workers that the member opposite makes reference to, and relative number of sectors in our economy, are now receiving more than they ever have before. Mr. Speaker, would this Minister of labour -- Mr. Speaker, would this Minister of labour within this caucus who put forward an index on wages, Mr. Speaker. Now minimum wage is forever going to be increased as a function of C.P.I.. Something, Mr. Speaker, that that side did not - Weren't even part of their official plans.

>> MPP Tabuns: Ok. So you're fine with that. Let's go on to the next question. It's not just million-dollar raises that are unfair. After 14 years of letting hydro rates reach a crisis point, the Premier promised relief. But she didn't mean for everyone. Their plan doesn't apply to hospitals, large businesses or even municipalities. Why is the Premier only interested in helping some people, not everyone?

>> Minister Sousa: So, Mr. Speaker, Ontario's prosperity, its growth has increase. We're now leading Canada. We lead the G-7 and we're taking a number of steps to diversify our economy so as not to be reliant on anyone or anyone's commodity to ensure we advance in a new age economy, Mr. Speaker. That's high-paying jobs, good-paying jobs, stable jobs, Mr. Speaker. And the member opposite seems to want to go back to the days of assembly lines and smokestacks, Mr. Speaker. We can't compete in low wages but she's trying to propose we're losing to other economies around the world. We're going to support and invest in our young people. We're going to invest in jobs and positions to create those jobs, unlike that member who wants to increase our taxes and push them away, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Tabuns: Again to the acting Premier. Speaker, the Premier's priorities don't make sense. She rubber stamps multimillion-dollar raises for hydro executives who don't need them and leaves people leaving on the minimum wage struggling. She's promising hydro relief, but schools and hospitals could actually see their hydro delivery charges increase under her privatized Hydro One. Ending the runaway hydro salaries and runaway bills by stopping the sell-off of Hydro One. Will she do that?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we're balancing the books. We can afford to pay and invest more in education, Mr. Speaker. We're balancing the books so that we can invest more in hospitals, Mr. Speaker. We're balancing the books so we can invest more in our young people, so we can create those jobs. We're balancing the books so we can ensure that businesses invest and come to Ontario. And they are, Mr. Speaker. They're creating jobs, good-paying jobs. Stop talking down Ontario and the people of Ontario who are delivering for our province.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Ballard Re: Housing Costs

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, this weekend I received a letter from a senior named Clarence Bax. Mr. Bax lives in Sault Ste. Marie and he and 31 of his friends and Neighbours are facing a 31% increase in their rent. Does the acting Premier think it's fair that a senior, like Clarence, living on a fixed income, should be subject to a drastic increase in his rent at the drop of his landlord's hat?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. And thank you to the NDP For that question. You know, Speaker, it's absolutely unacceptable that so many Ontarian tenants are faced with housing costs that are rising so dramatically. And that's why we've -- we're already developing a plan to address unfair rises in rental costs right across Ontario. Speaker, in the coming weeks, we're going to be rolling out our plan for substantive rent control right here in Ontario. It's going to be a very broad package of changes that will protect tenants. We've been working on legislation since last June. It's important that we get it right. Mr. Speaker, we've already taken, as I said in a previous response, we've already taken a whole host of things in regards to actions. We've introduced secondary suite legislation. We've introduced inclusionary zoning. We've frozen municipal property tax on apartments. We've doubled. The maximum refund for first-time home buyers. We're continuing to Collect data to better understand housing needs right here in Ontario. And we're working with --

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, again to the acting Premier, and I quote -- we are all senior citizens living on a fixed income and are faced with the problem of where the funds will be coming from to pay this substantial rent increase. Mr. Bax wrote in a letter he sent to Premier Wynne. Last week the Premier and her Liberal parties voted against my bill, which would have closed that loophole now that allows these devastating rent increases. Will she change her mind now? Will the government change its mind?

>> Minister Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker. As I said before, I outlined a whole host of things that this government has already put in place. I've talked repeatedly about the broad package of change that we're going to be moving ahead in the days and weeks ahead, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and I both have been exceptionally clear that we're moving forward with a plan to address unfair increases in rental costs. The NDP Know that, Speaker. The NDP Know that. We appreciate that they are on the same page when it comes to helping families who are feeling the pinch. But, Mr. Speaker, our plan will go further. It will address a whole host of issues around tenant rights. Simply addressing rental -- a rent removal of the rental cap, Mr. Speaker, is a good first step. Our plan will do that and it will do more.

>> MPP Tabuns: You want to be on the same page, act now. Pass it now. These seniors need the Premier to act and they tell her so in their letter. We're asking you to support Mr. Tabuns' bill 106 which would eliminate the dramatic rent increases we and 150,000 Ontarians are facing, they said. Will the Premier put aside partisanship, put the interests of Mr. Bax, his friends and thousands of other Ontarians who are facing unfair rent increases, will she put their interests first and agree to pass my bill today?

>> Minister Ballard: Thank you again, Speaker. You know, Speaker, what the NDP Put on the table in that private member's bill was pretty thin rule when it comes to addressing the needs of Ontario renters. You know, dare I say one-trick pony. I will say again what we're bringing forward in the coming days and weeks ahead, Mr. Speaker, will be a more robust rent control, more robust legislation regarding the rental tenancy act. We heard time and again, Mr. Speaker, as we travelled across Ontario what is bothering tenants, some of the issues facing landlords. Our changes are going to address a whole host of those things, you know. It's wonderful to hear the N.D.P. Standing up for seniors, but I want to remind -- Thank you, Speaker. The NDP Didn't even mention the word poverty in their last election platform.

MPP Scott to Minister Flynn Re: Gender Wage Gap

>> MPP Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of labour. Speaker, on March 8, international women's day, I met with Ontario's longtime commissioner for pay equity and had the opportunity to review the 2015/2016 statistics for the pay equity office. Well, the pay equity office does what it can to support women, it still lacks the tools and resources it needs to fulfil its mandate. As usual this government loves to talk about equality but when it comes to actually getting to the work that needs to be done, they are missing in action. The government has yet to act on the gender wage gap steering committee's final report which was published almost a year ago in May of 2016. Why has it taken the government so long and the Minister so long to convene a working group to review the well thought out recommendations made by the expert committee?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Speaker, thank you very much and thank you to the member for that very important question. Speaker, we know the gender wage gap still disadvantages women right across Ontario and throughout every jurisdiction within Ontario. Speaker, the conversation that was started awhile ago LED to the creation of a working group, Speaker. They came forward with some recommendations afternooon we didn't wait, Speaker. We implemented those things so we can implement immediately. You've got gender-based analysis now required any time any policy that goes through this government, Speaker, gets put through a gender lens. We've been providing employers with this province, very Progressive employers in this province with the resources they need, training materials on antidiscrimination, developing other educational products. Speaker, the task force is meeting on April the 13th. Its first meeting, Speaker. I'm expecting some pretty good recommendations out of that group. I look forward to. People. We're determined to close this gap.

>> MPP Scott: Back to the Minister. Not only has it taken this government more than six months to even notice the report. They have now decided to convene an invite-only closed-door session to discuss how to close gender wage gap. So why not bring this discussion to this legislature? These are important issues that should be discussed publicly and not behind closed doors. I remind the Minister that when the pay equity act was adopted in this House in 1987, it was passed unanimously with the support of all three parties. It's time for this government to do what's right for women. I call on the government to work with all parties in this legislature and establish a special legislative committee to sit this summer to work on strengthening the pay equity act. Can I expect the Minister's support. For this kind of nonpartisan initiative to improve the lives of hardworking women in Ontario? Or will the government reverse --

>> Minister Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. And thank you for the supplementary. Again, we're determined to build on the progress we've already made, Speaker.

Everybody knows that we need -- Thank you, Speaker. All members of this House I think share the feeling that we need to do better on this, we need to close the gap, Speaker. It's not just confined to that side of the House. I tell you, Speaker, when I hear the member opposite demean, denigrate and dismiss the people putting the hard work into this, the people we've appointed to the task force, Speaker. We've got organized labour, Speaker. We've got business. We've got advocates. We've got equal pay advocates coming forward. Speaker, the member needs to pay a bit more respect to those people that are working hard on that issue, Speaker. Not just this side of the House, that side of the House. It's the women that have stepped forward to serve on the working group that are going to --

MPP Gates to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Wayne Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. I stood up in this House many times before to try and explain to you what your hydro crisis is doing to Ontario. Manor cleaners had 30 employees with locations in Niagara Falls and St. Catharines. They're another example of a business struggling to afford their hydro cut rates. Their hydro bills in 2017 have doubled. They tell me that dry cleaners across Ontario can't raise their prices fast enough to keep up with their hydro bills. And if they do, they can't hold onto the customers who are struggling to pay their own hydro bill. My question to the acting Premier -- will the government commit today to make real changes to our hydro system to ensure that businesses in Ontario have the ability to stay open and equally important queen their workers employed? Thank you.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, . Thank you for the member for -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to stand and rise and talk about how Ontario's fair hydro plan is going to help 500,000 small businesses and farms right across the province, Mr. Speaker. Not knowing the specifics of the business that the Honourable member mentioned, if they're a general-service business, Mr. Speaker, as the 500,000 businesses right across the province are, Mr. Speaker, they'll be receiving a 25% rate reduction, Mr. Speaker. That is significant for small businesses right across the province. I know, Mr. Speaker, we've been working with the Minister of economic development and growth to also continue to have a very Protz Prus business climate in this province, Mr. Speaker. And that's something that we're going to continue to see in this province. Our businesses are going to grow, hire more people, create more jobs and that's something we should all be proud of. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you, to the Minister and both Minister s that manor cleaners called me. I didn't call them about their hydro bill. And it's absolutely disgusting that the Minister would stand up and laugh at a question I'm asking about hydro when hydro in this province is in crisis. Disgusting and shameful you do that. I didn't call -- they called me. There's a real and serious problem in the hydro system in this province. To put out the flames, a pail of water. Mr. Speaker, it's not putting out the fire and it's not stopping the closures of businesses right across the province of Ontario. I ask the acting Premier again -- will you commit to take immediate action to help small businesses in Ontario. With their crushing hydro bills by stopping the sale of Hydro One and taking real action to lower hydro bills?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleased once again to be able to stand and rise and talk about how all businesses, Mr. Speaker, will be getting a 25% reduction when we bring forward Ontario's fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker. That is actually relief that is coming for businesses right across the province.

Unlike that party, Mr. Speaker, that puts forward a plan that's pie in the sky, Mr. Speaker. Many of their proposals rely on vague yet-to-be-determined expert panels to be convened sometime in the future. I not P.C.S, Mr. Speaker, don't even have time to think about a plan. But on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker, they have no idea on how to deal with it. This expert panel, Mr. Speaker, with the NDP Have they heard back from anything, Mr. Speaker, yet? They have not. Let's be honest, Mr. Speaker. The feds aren't even returning their calls. Maybe that's why they're sending out the member from Bramalea- Gore- Malton to go to Ottawa. Mr. Speaker ,. So to see action to help small businesses you look to this government, Mr. Speaker. To see no action, look at the other side.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Mauro Re: Northern Job Creation

>> MPP Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question this morning is to the Minister of northern development and mines. I know that our government strongly supports communities and business in northern Ontario. We recognize that through strategic investment, northern Ontario is on the right track to prosperity. Investing in the north is a critical part of this government's plan to build Ontario up by supporting job creation and create a dynamic and innovative business climate. I understand that through the northern Ontario heritage fund corporation, our government does exactly that., Mr. Speaker, can the Minister please tell us more about supporting job creation in the north and the work of the nohst?

>> Minister Bill Mauro: Speaker, thank you very much. Speaker, in the late 1980s, the David Peterson Liberal government put in place this fund, a flagship program for northern Ontario called the northern Ontario heritage fund. It has served northern Ontario very well for almost 30 years now. Speaker, what I like to remind people about this particular fund is that in 2008 as the recession had taken hold and in northern Ontario we had already felt the effects of that in 05/06 when forestry was affected before the recession. We made a decision not to scale back when the recession took hold but to actually increase funding in this program. Historically at \$60 million a year, Speaker, we took it from 60 to 70, 70 to 80, to 90 and now that fund sits at \$100 million every year and has continued to enhance and facilitate. Economic development in northern Ontario ever since then. It's a great program, Speaker. We're very committed to it and increase the funding level by \$40 million.

>> MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Minister. For setting the record straight in this House. I know that northern Ontario is a top priority for our government and it's clear that the investments made through the nohst are having a direct impact on universities, communities and businesses in the north. Investing in universities and Colleges benefits everyone by creating jobs, enriching society and stimulating culture. Account Minister please speak to other investments made specifically at Colleges and universities in the north?

>> Minister Mauro: Speaker, thank you. Again to the member for the question. We recognize, Speaker, that in northern Ontario our Colleges and universities have capacity to grow and to help our northern economies ride out the cyclical nature of the many of the economies of many of our communities. One of the things we've been doing through the northern Ontario heritage fund is invest in research, innovation and knowledge-based jobs that help our smaller communities ride out the cyclical nature of our economy. Two weeks ago I was at lakehead university for a \$500 million announcement for the centre of advance

studies in advanced engineering sciences, create 6,700 jobs over five years. In a few weeks, a ribbon cutting for their new technology hub which will prepare students very well for the jobs in the future. Nohst to help us ride out and change our economys in northern Ontario.

MPP Martow to Minister Coteau Re: Child Welfare System

>> MPP Gila Martow: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of children and youth services. Mr. Speaker, we've had three days of hearings into bill 89 which is looking to overhaul our child welfare system for the first time in over three decades. I've attempted five times to put forward a motion in order for the committee of justice policy to formally request the Minister present himself at the committee. I'm sure the MPP Member from Hamilton Mountain can vouch for me since she agreed she'd like to hear from the Minister as well. Mr. Speaker, would the Minister please explain why his Colleagues on justice policy committee are block the committee from inviting him to speak?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to take the question here today on this bill. The legislation, Mr. Speaker, is a very comprehensive piece of legislation that I believe will give young people the best start to life they possibly can have. We know here in the province of Ontario we want to make sure young people can transition into adulthood and find success here in the province. And we also need to make sure that young people get the service that is they need when they need t.so this piece of comprehensive legislation that I'm very proud to -- that is being debated here in the legislature and proud that it went to committee for the three days, is something that I believe will be a big game changer here in the province of Ontario. In my supplementary I will talk about some of the highlights from that proposed legislation.

>> MPP Martow: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There were five attempts and I even tried to set up a phone call -- After three days of hearings, many questions remain, questions only the Minister can answer. For example, our indigenous communities are expected to join the integrated child welfare data system known as cfin. Yet they have not been told how this will be possible without the proper internet infrastructure in these communities. I'm baffled as to why the Minister responsible for child welfare would not want to address the concerns raised at the hearings. For a government that claims to be open and transparent, why in this case does the Minister refuse to be accountable to the elected members of the justice -- Committee?

>> Minister Coteau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker ,, the member knows in the Westminster system, the member has an opportunity to ask questions here in question period. That's why we call it question period. And you can ask any question you want during that time period. We have an hour Monday to Thursday where members can stand up and ask members on this in the legislature questions. Mr. Speaker, I'm so proud of this piece of legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I will remind the member opposite and all the members opposite in a this is their opportunity. If they have questions, we

have something called question period and we're here today. Use the opportunity to ask questions, and any member, any --

MPP Armstrong to Minister Hoskins Re: Long-Term Care Homes

>> MPP Teresa Armstrong: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the acting Premier. Today we see more and more evidence that this Liberal government has driven long-term care to the breaking point. Carp, which represents 300,000 older Canadians, polled its members and found deep dissatisfaction with long-term care facilities. Seniors are not happy with long-term care today. They are worried about their loved ones. They have lost confidence in oversight and they see that staff are overworked and just don't have the supports they need. After 14 years in power, after 14 years to improve long-term care, after 14 years of inaction, when will this Liberal government finally admit it has had -- it has spent 14 years failing Ontario seniors?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. There's nothing more important to us as a government and a health care system than providing a safe, secure and compassionate environment for our seniors, wherever they reside, including in long-term care homes. Mr. Speaker, that's why, since coming into office, we have almost doubled our funding for long-term care from \$2 billion to more than \$4 billion today. We've also invested in health care personnel, Mr. Speaker, that, since 2008, in the last decade, we have added 4,600 new staff into our long-term care homes, Mr. Speaker. And that includes more than 2,000 nurses. We've built more than 10,000 new long-term care beds. We are in the process of redeveloping 30,000 new ones. In fact we're almost halfway toward that target already. We're investing in behavioural supports because we recognize the higher prevalence of dementia. We're making all those investments for that reason. To have the best quality care.

>> MPP Armstrong: Seniors want to see big improvements in long-term care, not more excuses from this Liberal government. Wanda Morris, the vice-president of carp, says these findings should be a wake-up call for this Minister. Seniors have little faith in the oversight of long-term care, and they want standards of decency and care to protect every resident. Yet this Liberal government refuses to back the NDP's call for minimum standards of care. Why is this government refusing to listen to seniors and refusing to do the right thing to protect the safety and the dignity of every long-term care resident in Ontario?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we require long-term care homes to develop a staffing plan, which is specific and reflects the unique characteristics and needs of the population they've served. So we think rather than an arbitrary minimum number of hours or staffing, Mr. Speaker, which in fact was investigated by Shirley Sharkey several years ago, and she did not advocate for that approach. Rather, she felt and others have felt to this day that it's most appropriate to recognize that long-term care homes. In one part of the province may have a completely different population than in another part of the population. Some

arbitrary staffing number is not nearly as helpful or important ensuring the development of which they're required of by law. That reflects the needs of those patients that reside in that residence, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Potts to Minister Chiarelli Re: Infrastructure Investment

>> MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question today is for the Minister of infrastructure. Our government recognizes that making smart investments in public infrastructure is one of the best ways to stimulate growth in our economy, create jobs and enhance quality of life. And for decades, Speaker, previous governments, including both opposition parties have failed to keep our infrastructure up to date. And we want people in every corner of the province to share in the stronger communities that we are building, whether they live in big cities or small towns. I am so proud to be a member of a government that is investing directly in communities through programs like Ontario community infrastructure fund which supports priority projects in ridings across the province. And I know, Speaker, that our government is making an exciting announcement today regarding this year's ocip funding. So, Speaker, through you to the Minister, will he share the details of today's announcement.

>> Minister Bob Chiarelli: Speaker, my thanks to the member from Beaches-East York. Yes, our government created the \$100 million ocip fund to provide all communities in Ontario with a population of 100,000 or less with funding for critical projects. Every eligible municipality's allocation is reliable formula-based funding but they can also all apply for additional supports to ocip's top-up component. Speaker, today our government is pleased to announce the approval of 55 ocip projects worth \$60 million, bringing the number of top-up projects funded by our government to 200 since 2015. After listening closely to stakeholders like Amo, we are also tripling the size of the program from 100 million to \$300 million. Ocip supports smaller municipalities in a bigger way and makes a real difference for –

>> MPP Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My thanks to the Minister for the great work he is doing building Ontario up. Because addressing the infrastructure deficit is a major priority of our Premier and this side of the House. And I know that the 60 million will go a long way to addressing municipal infrastructure needs. And I also know that the changes to the structure of ocip will maintain the program's role as a major support for Ontario's small communities. So our infrastructure investments are being made on a truly provincewide scale, with every riding benefitting from the \$160 billion this government is investing over 12 years. But, Speaker, while we invest in our community, the opposition seems focused on taking down the largest infrastructure investment in Ontario. We fear, and the people of Ontario fear, that they will cancel the ocip program should either party opposite form the next government. So Speaker, through you to the Minister, could you please outline exactly what the infrastructure programs mean for Ontario's residents?

>> Minister Chiarelli: The difference between our government and the parties opposite is that we have a plan and they don't, Speaker. And our plan is making a positive difference for their constituents, Speaker. The leader of the third party should know Hamilton is eligible to receive nearly \$33 million of clean water and wastewater funding to say nothing of the billion dollars we have committed to their L.R.T.. The leader of the opposition should know that, in his riding of Simcoe North, communities will benefit from \$8 million in ocip and clean water funding, to say nothing of the \$474 million we invested in the mental health centre in his riding, Speaker. Communities in NDP-held Timmins- James Bay will benefit from \$5 million in combined ocip and clean water funding. Communities in P.C. Simcoe- Grey. Will benefit from \$12 million. Speaker, our government is working extremely hard to support all of our residents in every part of their province.

MPP MacLeod to Minister Hoskins Re: Opioid Crisis

>> MPP Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of health. I've written and spoken to the Minister many times regarding the opioid crisis in Ottawa, a crisis which has caused almost as many overdoses in the first three months of 2017 as we saw in all of 2016. I'm in daily contact with the parents and youth who are struggling with this addiction. These parents have taken matters into their own hands, organizing support groups, holding information sessions and raising funds for a youth centre because they feel that their government isn't listening to them. I've received correspondence from the Minister on the high-level things that the Minister says they want to commit to but the opioid strategy is either not working fast enough or it's not working at all. Will the Minister visit Ottawa during the constituency break next week to meet with these families and myself to see their struggle and commit to the action that they need?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I first want to express my sympathy for and compassion for families that the member opposite is referring to, families in Cannata and Ottawa area that have experienced such tragedies, and particularly I think of the 14-year-old who lost -- whose life was lost tragically because of an opioid overdose, Mr. Speaker. But that's why we are taking the measures that we're in an extremely comprehensive way, from ensuring appropriate prescribing of opioids to providing appropriate treatment and lifesaving medications like naloxone to ensure individuals, including youth, have access to the supports that they need. We announced just a couple of months ago, \$140 million of new investments including in cognitive behavioural therapy that will reach individuals who are at risk. Support in such saying situations.

>> MPP MacLeod: I again extend my invitation to the Minister of health to join us in Ottawa next week. I know he says there's a lot of money out there, but there are still many people that are left behind and fallen through the cracks. Here's an e-mail I received from one parent dealing with this crisis first hand. Unfortunately this has been a terrible week. In and out of hospital. He was staying downtown in the drug House. We found Thursday he was a mess, totally out of it, marks all over his face and his mouth. So swollen either from his heart condition or from injecting in his toes. We called police. They took him to the E.R. And they released him six hours later. This mother was devastated. She finishes with this and I want to leave this with you, Minister -- -- the system isn't doing anything about this because they are following the natural elimination of waste. Why spend money on addiction? Most will relapse over and over again. Why spend \$5,000 a week in a hospital? Will the Minister answer this mother whose son is falling through the cracks and whose government is failing her?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are taking action, including directly in Ottawa, and the Premier and myself, we've committed to a meeting with municipal leaders, specifically on the opioid situation. But this year alone, we invested one point -- and I not member opposite is well familiar with this treatment centre. 1.5 million to the Dave Smith youth treatment centre in Ottawa to support the construction of a new 30-bed youth residential treatment facility, helping more young Ontarians, including and especially young Ontarians youth in the Ottawa region, Mr. Speaker, in providing support to their families and helping them to overcome substance abuse and related issues. This new centre, Mr. Speaker, is not a panacea. It's not -- but it is part of a comprehensive approach where we have to touch -- Tragedy at every possible location that we can, Joo heo graphically and whether it is with regards to avoiding individuals from becoming addicts in the first place or providing -- The necessary supports to leave that addiction, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Gretzky to Minister Jaczek Re: Canadian Hearing Society Strike

>> MPP Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the acting Premier. It has now been over a month since workers at the Canadian hearing society were forced off the job after working without a contract for four years. This means people who are deaf and hard-of-hearing don't have access to the 227 interpreters, speech language pathologists, counsellors, literacy instructors and audiologists they depend on to thrive. Speaker, no member of the deaf or hard-of-hearing community should be forced to go without service, period. Will the acting Premier stand up for all clients of the Canadian hearing society, insist that no scab workers are used during the labour disruption and ensure all parties return to the bargaining table immediately?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the question, because as the member knows, contract negotiations are a matter between the agency of the employer and the union and I'm sure the Minister of labour will want to follow up on the supplementary. We certainly encourage the union and the agency to get back to continue contract negotiations because we certainly hope that the matter will be resolved as quickly as possible. Because of course the Canadian hearing society does -- Certainly the agency does provide very valuable services to the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. My ministry has been advised that there is a contingency plan in place so that there is continuity of services. To these individuals served by this agency. That is my ministry's primary concern.

>> MPP Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. What the Minister should know is the government play as large role in ensuring that no scab workers are used during a labour disruption. And since -- Fund the C.H.S., you have the ability to force the employer back to the table to actually bargain for a fair contract. Again to the acting Premier -- late last month, Mount Sinai permanently shut the doors to their audiology clinic. For people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, the scarcity of services in the Toronto area has just increased exponentially, but it's not just Toronto. Workers at the Canadian hearing society are on strike in Windsor, Ottawa, Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie and throughout the province. Many of these workers are deaf or hard-of-hearing themselves. I ask again -- will the acting Premier acknowledge the importance of these services to a vulnerable community, insist no scab workers are used during this labour disruption. That includes management and their families and ensure the employer returns to the bargaining table to negotiate a fair deal immediately?

>> Minister Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you for the supplementary, Speaker. Speaker, during labour disputes, which nobody likes to see -- Speaker, Collective bargaining is tough by its nature. Nobody likes to see disputes drag on

far too long. It's a shared responsibility to get people back to the table. Speaker, the province of Ontario has some of the best mediators in this country, Speaker. And you see the track record they have. Over 98% of Collective bargaining is reached without an -- an agreement is reached without a strike or without a lineout, Speaker, in the province of Ontario. So we're involved with this -- without a lockout. But we'll take no lessons from the NDP Last year 18 work stoppages. NDP Were in power, 139, Speaker. That record speaks for itself.

MPP Rinaldi to Minister Flynn Re: Occupational Diseases

>> MPP Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of labour. Over the past few weeks, we've seen some local -- about the Minister of labour's surprise visit to Peterborough. Speaker, the Minister was there to visit, an information clinic for workers who previously worked at G.E. My friend the member from Peterborough, Jeff Iles, also stopped in to meet the workers. The media coverage I have heard from my constituency in my riding of Northumberland-quinte west have been extremely positive. These workers and their families felt as though people were there to listen to them and to help them work through some of the problems they have encountered as a result of the worker compensation claims. Speaker, to the Minister, could you please explain more about purpose of the information clinic, next steps in dealing with these important --

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Thank you very much, Speaker. Thank you to the member for north hup ber land quinte west for his question and the involvement he's had in this issue to date. Speaker, it was a pleasure to work with the MPP For Peterborough, my seat mate the Minister of agriculture and food and rural affairs, Speaker, for the support he had that he brought was just incredible. Great volunteers, Speaker. There was Heather Brooks-Hills, Marion Burton, Cathy Drake Harris, ordinary people who stepped forward. As a result of that stepping to the fore March, my ministry organized a three-day information clinic. All the parties came forward that are involved in this very complex case and we started an information clinic. The office of the worker advisory, wsib, local was there, Speaker. Over these three days these organizations were able to sit down face-to-face with workers in Peterborough. And were able to help them through. I'm proud of the work that's been done, Speaker. There's more to come.

>> MPP Rinaldi: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the Minister. I agree with him that this information clinic was an important first step. It was to bring guidance on a complicated issue to the community all in one place. I will certainly be following the issue as it moves forward. I know the Minister of labour is working hard to transform workplace health and safety in the province. Keeping people safe, work begins with create agriculture and -- health and safety work is pair mounts. Speaker, through you to the Minister. What our government is doing to ensure we are working to prevent occupational D.C. In the province.

>> Minister Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you again to the member from Northumberland-quinte west for that question. Speaker, it's critical to my ministry all occupational diseases are treated with the same seriousness we bring to physical injuries which we've done so well in, Speaker. The ministry's developed a proactive strategy for detection and prevention. It including regulation, Speaker. It includes enforcement and includes research, education and awareness. The

cornerstone of this, Speaker, is going to be a dedicated occupational disease response team that's been put in place this very year. This new unit's going to examine and it's going to respond to all aspects of occupational disease exposure and that goes from the initial report, Speaker, tone enforcement to helping the workers themselves. Speaker, everybody in the province of Ontario who goes to work each day deserves to work in environment that's safe. Free from harm and to return home at the end of each day, Speaker. I'm committed to ensuring that Ontario remains one of the safest places you can work on the entire planet, Speaker. Thank you.

MPP McDonell to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker. To the Minister of energy. When Ontarians were facing disconnections middle of winter, the Premier said to this House Hydro One was already complying with the no disconnection policy. So once again this government does not know what's going on. Steve and George in my ride wrg disconnected February 20 and 21st and had to deal with flooded basements and buying generators to avoid frozen pipes. As Hydro One has finally disconnected their service. Both had no arrears. The Minister of energy says and I quote that the one thing they've been doing, Mr. Speaker, is enhancing public service -- customer service. Speaker, is this government made of hydro sales people or are they actually made of Minister s who will provide proper oversight?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know lately the opposition have been bringing stories to this House about individual customers, Mr. Speaker. What's frustrating, Mr. Speaker, is that often the member hasn't contacted me directly about this issue or apparently hasn't even contacted the local utility to try and resolve the issue before bringing it up here in question period, Mr. Speaker. Last week for example a member opposite raised the story of someone who received a false electricity bill after their House was tragically lost in a fire, Mr. Speaker. If the member had talked to me or Hydro One, we could have gotten the issue resolved right away, Mr. Speaker. When they learned of the mistake, Hydro One immediately reversed the charges, Mr. Speaker, and has promised the customer four months of free credits. But apparently helping this customer. Wasn't really that priority of that party, Mr. Speaker. I get it, Mr. Speaker. If you don't have a real plan on electricity, it makes sense to try and focus on the problems.

>> MPP McDonell: Speaker, back to the Minister. And, Minister, we have revolved the conflict. It shouldn't have happened in the first place. The government promises modest compensation and Hydro One we've seen outrageous salaries. The government promises no disconnections. Yet Hydro One disconnects anyway. Every time a story of incompetence and outrageous customer service comes at Hydro One to the House, all the government can say is well, we'll look into it, or we are becoming customer focused or Hydro One is becoming a better company. How long will it take this government to realize this pattern is a pattern and it needs to be broken? As a majority shareholder, Hydro One is in Minister 's duty and obligation to act in public interest and fix these problems. Long needed leadership. Executive pay, transparency and customer service while they are still the majority shareholder?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker ,. Always happy to rise up and talk about the great work that this side of the House has done on the electricity file, Mr. Speaker. For decades Mr. Speaker -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So it's interesting that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So we're happy to actually provide solutions to the people of Ontario. That's what we do, Mr. Speaker. We act on that. On that side of the House, Mr. Speaker, they have no plan. They have no idea on what to do and that's why they come to us, Mr. Speaker, to actually get things done, and that's what we've done with the fair hydro plan. That's what we've done on these issues and we'll continue to do that as we build this province up, Mr. Speaker.