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Unedited Transcript

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown to Minister Ballard Re: Chemical Valley

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the environment. There are a lot of unanswered questions for the people of chemical valley in Ontario located between Sarnia and amginen first nations. For nine years, for nine long years we have asked this government for answers, and for nine years they have been ignored. There were 500 government reports documenting industrial environmental concerns in the Sarnia region over a two-year period. That's nearly 500 incidents where this government had failed to take action. 500 incidents where the people of Sarnia deserve answers. Mr. Speaker, how has this government ignored the people and workers of chemical valley for so many years, for almost a decade? Mr. Speaker, it's astonishing.

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker. I'm delighted to respond to the member opposite. It's the -- I think since my time in the House it's the first time I've heard a question like this. Let me tell you this, Speaker. It's a fundamental fact that everyone, every person in this great country, this great province of ours, deserves clean air to breathe, clean water to drink and clean land to walk upon. You know, as we continue to reflect that in the actions of this government, you know everything from eliminating dirty coal plants to moving forward with our ministry's government climate change action plan. You know, Speaker -- The air quality has improved over the past ten years, and we recognize there's more to be done --

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of the environment. The Minister pretends they haven't heard of this. The member of Sarnia- Lambton has responses from three Liberal Ministers saying that they're not responding. This has been brought up for nine years so it's a little too convenient to say you haven't heard about it when your government, your Ministers have responded in writing. We have proof that you did not take this seriously. Now in Sarnia, Mr. Speaker, there's a term the government uses "No field response." It's become well known because it is associated with the government's failure to take action and protect the people in chemical valley. When a report of an environmental concern in Sarnia there always seems to be the government's response "No field response." There's a joint report that reveals this is 2014 a detailed incident where 338 kilograms of ammonia was spilled. It received from the government -- A no field response. Same thing in March of 2014 and again in January 2016, when CO₂ emissions were well beyond regulations. Mr. Speaker, I'm tired of the no response

>> Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to clarify. What I want to clarify is the fact that this is the first time that I've heard the leader of the opposition talk about Sarnia. Nice to have some interest there. So, Speaker, let me just say a few things. You know, the Sarnia air action plan, it was

initiated to address community concerns, improve local ministry programs and reduce the ambient concentrations of air contaminants identified as priorities in the Sarnia area. By law, Speaker, all spills must be reported to our spills action centre. That centre's open 24/7 and takes all phone calls and addresses all of them. So --I just wanted to say, Speaker, that we're going to continue our collaboration with the community, with the indigenous organizations and business community in Sarnia to make sure we get it right.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of the environment. You know they should be operating 24/7, but when the only response we have to spills is no response, it's not good enough. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but he's not taking it seriously enough. For nine years the member from Sarnia Lambton and his community have been fighting for the government to wake up and realize this is serious concern here but they have not. The government -- another talking point from the government is they have some of the strictest limits. But, Mr. Speaker, those limits don't exist if they exempt companies like they have. You know critics have called this lack of oversight a clear example of environmental racism and that the government has turned their backs on first nations communities. The Minister of environment says everything's fine and he's doing his job. But this isn't the case. Mr. Speaker, we cannot. Mr. Speaker, the Minister's saying they've had no warnings. They've had warnings in 2008, in 2010, in 2016 but they've turned their back on the people of chemical valley. So, Mr. Speaker, rather than point fingers, rather than say everything is fine, will the Minister. Finally E responsibility and stop letting down, stop failing the people of Sarnia and first nations?

>> Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. I'm delighted to keep talking about the progress that the province --Thank you, Speaker. Delighted to continue talking about the things that we're doing to improve air quality right across Ontario. Speaker, we're building on previous regulations to lower air pollution. We're committed to funding and were committed to funding a health study of local Sarnia residents. We've been very clear about that. You know, we'll be announcing stricter regulations in the coming weeks, and as I said, we are committed to funding that science-based approach. To understanding the localized impact of air pollution on the health of sarnia residents.

MPP Brown to Minister Matthews Re: College Strike

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the president of the treasury board. Students want to learn and the faculty want to teach. But as of midnight last night, Ontario Colleges are on strike. 12,000 faculty and 500,000 students are impacted across province. Mr. Speaker, will the Liberals assure the House they will get both sides back to the bargaining table today?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question, Speaker. It's very clear that students are our top priority, and our College students who are not at school today need to know that all sides are working with the students as the highest priority, Speaker. You know our College system in Ontario is extraordinary. For 50 years, it has been training people, Speaker. Over half a million people are actually in class or taking the courses right now, Speaker. Nearly 2 million students over those 50 years have actually attended or graduated from our College, Speaker. And they get terrific 0% of employers say they are satisfied or very satisfied with the College grads. This is important work. We're urging both sides to get back to the table.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Minister. The College system is extraordinary, but when students are in the classroom, students aren't learning. They're not learning at Algonquin, Cambrian, Canadore, College, Conestoga, Durham, Fanshawe, Fleming, George Brown, Georgeann, Humber, Lambton, Loyalist, Mohawk, Sioux, Seneca, St. Clair and St. Lawrence. 24 great Colleges where students are not in the classroom. That's 24 Colleges for faculty are on the picket lines fighting for a fair deal. That 24 Colleges where we need provincial leadership so we have students in the classroom. So my question, Mr. Speaker, directly to the Deputy Premier is what is the Premier doing today to make sure that both sides are back to the bargaining table and we have students back to the classroom?

>> Minister Matthews: Well, Speaker, on this side of the House, we actually respect the collective bargaining process and of course -- We want both sides to get back to the table. We want students back in the classroom as quickly as possible. We believe in postsecondary education. We believe in eliminating financial barriers to students in Colleges and in universities which is why we have totally transformed OSAP, Speaker. We're seeing tremendous success with the changes to OSAP. Over 50,000 more students have applied for OSAP this year than at the same time last year. Speaker, we believe in postsecondary education. Our report is very, very strong. I wish, Speaker, of course that both sides will get back and resolve the dispute.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Minister. The Minister's talking about OSAP and, you know, student assistance is something we all support. But if you

can't actually have a classroom to go into, what does that do? We need to have classrooms where students can learn and the government's not taking this seriously. How about respecting the faculty? How about respecting the students? How about understanding the urgency that exists here? They can't do this while they're out of the classroom. Students can't learn and appreciate our extraordinary College system if they're not in school. I know that one day of a strike is too long and the government can just ignore this and allow it to go on. But what I want and what I'm pushing for is that we get a commitment that the Premier's going to take this seriously and the Premier's going to do everything she can to get both sides back to the table and get students back to class.

>> Minister Matthews: Well, Speaker, under the Colleges Collective bargaining act 2008, the Colleges, the employers have represented by the College employer council and they have the exclusive right and responsibility to negotiate. The government itself is not at the table. However, Speaker, we are committed the success of our College students. And if the member opposite actually wanted to support students, he would be supporting our policy of free tuition.

MPP Horwath to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Funding

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first question's for the acting Premier. Brantford general hospital has been operating well over capacity throughout 2017. According to internal documents released this morning, Brantford hospital's acute care beds reached a shocking 120% capacity in January. I just want to remind the government that 85% capacity is considered the safe level of occupancy in hospitals. We see numbers similar to this, Speaker, over and over again for hospitals all across the province. Why isn't the government taking the problem of hospital overcrowding and hallway medicine seriously?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We absolutely are taking the priorities of our hospitals as our priority, Mr. Speaker, and that's why we invested an additional half billion dollars for operating costs for hospitals around this province in this year's province and followed roughly half a billion dollars last year. Mr. Speaker, we're working very closely with Brantford hospital. In fact Brantford is facing a number of challenges. In fact we have a supervisor in place there that is dealing with a number of broad range of challenges that that important community hospital is facing. We increased their budget this year alone by \$3 million, but most importantly, Mr. Speaker, we're taking the good advice of our supervisor, who is working with the frontline staff, with the administrators of the hospital, with the community, to make sure that that community hospital is able to serve effectively in all ranges, including the capacity, the number of beds that are available --State of their E.R., all aspects that it's able to serve that community well.

>> Andrea Horwath: It would seem the members opposite have not been listening to patients, to families and to health care workers on the front lines. Brantford general is also struggling to keep up with demand in its mental health beds. The hospital reached 108% last summer in terms of capacity and stayed well above the safe 85% capacity throughout 2017 in their mental health beds. Does the government believe that it's ok for Brantford general hospital to be at 120% capacity of its acute care beds and 108% capacity of its mental health care spaces?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we are -- our attention is focused on Brant community health care system, the Brantford hospital, particularly because, as I mentioned, we have an unusual situation in the province. We have a supervisor in place, so the board has been dissolved, Mr. Speaker. We have a supervisor that is there because we understand there are a number of challenges being faced, and we want that supervisor working with the local community and working with the hardworking administrators and frontline health care staff at Brant to provide the best quality of care to the community that it serves. That is

our objective, Mr. Speaker. We're doing that in the face of making substantial investments, as I mentioned. More than 3 million new dollars this year alone going to Brant. A lot of that investment in fact is going specifically to address We continue to support the efforts of the health care system in Brant as they work towards delivering the highest quality of care for the patients in that community. some of the wait time challenges that they're facing but, Mr. Speaker, we, with the supervisor in place –

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, what's unfortunately not unusual in this province is overcapacity hospital beds from one end of Ontario to the other. Hospital administrators and frontline health care workers are doing everything they can with what they've been given by this Liberal government but it's not enough, Speaker. Hospitals in Peterborough, Brantford, Etobicoke, brampton, Toronto and Oshawa are all overcrowded, and the Premier has seen the proof in the numbers. She's seen the proof in the horror stories that are flooding into her office, I'm sure as they are every office of every MPP In this House, and she has seen the proof in the form of a public letter from the Ontario hospital association calling on her to immediately fund hospitals at an adequate level. What else do the people of Ontario need to do, Speaker, to make the government take this crisis in our hospitals seriously?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, here's what we should not do. We should not take our lead from the NDP When they were in government, when they closed 24% of the acute care beds in the entire province, or when they closed 13% of all the mental health beds in the province. The P.C.S as I've mentioned frequently closed almost 10,000 hospital beds. The NDP Closed 9,600 hospital bed during their brief tenure as government, Mr. Speaker. We won't take our advice from their track record, which is massive closure of hospital beds, massive cuts in fact to the hospital system and to the health care budget as a whole. We won't do that, Mr. Speaker. We've been investing in our hospitals year after year after year and will continue to do so.

MPP Horwath to Minister Ballard Re: Chemical Valley Air Quality

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My next question's also for the acting Premier. This weekend, we learned through shocking news reports, that the people of Sarnia have been exposed to dangerous toxic chemicals for many, many years. The result of industrial leaks from the city's chemical valley. There were over 500 separate incidents, 500 separate incidents in Sarnia in 2014/2015 including one leak in 2014 that saw an unsafe level of benzene released into the atmosphere. The toxic plumes reached nearby residential neighbourhoods but families were never told what the odour was or if it was dangerous. Can the acting Premier explain why the people of Sarnia were not warned by the ministry of the environment about a cancer-causing chemical wafting towards their front doors?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you for that important question, as usual. I'll start by restating a very fundamental fact to this government, Speaker, and to all of us here in the House that every person in Ontario deserves to breathe clean air. You know, we continue to reflect that very fundamental philosophy in all of the actions that we undertake in this government. You know, everything from eliminating dirty coal plant to moving forward with our climate change action plan. Speaker, the general air quality in Sarnia has improved over the ten -- past ten years in part because we are listening and consulting with indigenous communities. We are listening and consulting with the public and with business in those areas to make sure that we get it right and we

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, philosophical platitudes are useless when there's a toxic plume wafting up to your front door. The February 8, 2014 spill saw benzene levels in the air as high as 50 parts per per billion, 22 times the provincial standard. Benzene is carcinogenic, Speaker. The world health organization says that no amount of benzene can be considered safe. This incident risked the lives -- the health at least of every single person in Sarnia. Yet the ministry of environment, whose job it is to investigate when spills happen, didn't even bother to send someone out to see what went wrong. When did the Minister and when did the Premier learn of this dangerous spill, Speaker ?

>> Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. I'm glad for the opportunity to be able to talk about benzene, which we know is a very dangerous chemical. You know, Speaker, benzene levels in Sarnia have greatly decreased compared to what they were in the 1980s to the 1990s. In fact the average, the annual average benzene concentration is now about a third of what it was 25 years ago. But, you know, if that's not good enough, Speaker. So in 2016, a new air standard for benzene came into effect. It resulted in seven petrochemical and petroleum refining facilities in the Sarnia area taking action to reduce benzene emissions

through technical standards by applying the best available technology. We're going to continue to push to make sure the air gets cleaner all the time, Speaker .

>> Andrea Horwath: The government and the Premier just can't seem to get the basics right, Speaker. Whether it's skyrocketing hydro bills, overcrowded hospitals or chronic chemical spills and leaks that endanger the lives and people in Sarnia. In 2009, Speaker, the government agreed to review the cumulative air pollution in hot spots like Sarnia. In 2009, they made a commitment to do the heavy lifting to research what was happening in these hot spots when it comes to cumulative air pollution. Eight years later, the results of the review are nowhere to be seen, Speaker. Has review happened is my question to this government? Has it happened and where are the results?

>> Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. I'm really delighted to be able to talk about our commitment to funding a health study to understand the localized impacts of air pollution on Sarnia residents. And I think understanding that localized impact is what's really key in terms of how we figure out moving ahead. We'll also be taking some further steps to insure that the air quality has improved. Last week, Speaker, I was in Sarnia. I was meeting with first nations to hear their concerns first hand, and I'm in committed to building on previous efforts to reduce air pollution and ensure all Ontarians have clean air to breathe. We are committed to that study, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Nicholls to Minister Lalonde Re: Prison Overcrowding

>> MPP Rick Nicholls: Ontario's correctional system is in a disaster and our probation and parole system is a joke. Jails are overcrowded and cell block violence is out of control. Most inmates are held in maximum security without access to rehab programs. Assaults on correctional officers and staff have more than doubled over the past seven years. Sadly these detention centres are often understaffed and often lack the resources to deal with the violence. Regarding probation and parole, often the only contact between a criminal and probation officer happens when the offender visits the probation office. After the offender leaves there is little know to no follow-up up again because of a lack of resources. Independent advisor on corrections reform, check that, if you doubt what I'm saying. The Liberal party, Speaker, has done nothing to fix the problems in the past 14 years. why have the Liberals allowed the crisis in corrections to fester so long?

>> Minister Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate actually the member opposite for his questions this morning because I want to say thank you to the men and women who works actually and commend them for their enormous work in our institutions all across. We have 26 institutions. Certainly our ultimate goal is a truly modern and compassionate system. Whether it's through working with the ministry of health to ensure our health care outcomes in our -- health care outcomes in our system or through the construction two new facilities in Ottawa interim debate which will serve as models of innovation and renewal. I am proud of the progress that we're making, Mr. Speaker, and just so the member opposite actually knows our government's plan to transform Ontario's correction system did not start today. And I want to read a few things. Always tend to forget. We hired over 1,600 new correction officers. We created 60 new mental health nurses.

>> MPP Nicholls: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Minister. Speaker, over the weekend I published an opinion piece on Ontario's crisis in correction. It appeared in the "Toronto sun" and I shared it on Twitter. I appreciated the favourable responses from correction officers and my constituents, but I was shocked at the fact wuss response to the corrections Minister. He broadcast a s Eries of false accusations and personal attacks against me. He deleted his most offensive tweet but failed to apologize. The conversation can otherwise be seen on my Twitter feed. I have been on top of this file for years. I have a strong personal relationship with correctional officers and I have their backs and they have mine. I've spoken about the crisis in corrections many times in this House. To suggest otherwise, Speaker, is preposterous and -- So, Minister, could you instruct you-- to reply to my op-ed in that boorish manner and will you apologize?

>> Minister Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I want to continue, and I hear the questions. But I want to continue because the op-ed was referring to what we have not done and this crisis in correction. And I want to say, as I visited institutions in the past months, every single institution that I visit makes reference to actually the track record of this party as to all the cuts and the -- tried and failed. Let's go back to the point here, Mr. Speaker, which is I have to say we created 60 new mental health nurses, mental health training. We introduced new and improved policies on segregation. And the member opposite and the P.C. Party seem to be capable of uninformed criticism. And incapable of putting forward an actual plan. Since the party people have no plan, Mr. Speer. I can only judge them on their record. can only judge them on their record.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro One Sale

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, to the acting Premier. Nearly two years ago, the Premier gave Hydro One a \$2.6 billion departure tax gift, wiping away a departure tax that became due at the time of sell-off. The rules set by the Ontario energy board say that tax benefits like this must go to ratepayers. But instead Hydro One demanded that its private investors keep the benefit and not ratepayers. On October 13th, the Ontario energy board sided with Hydro One, giving its private investors 71% of this \$2.6 billion tax gift. Why didn't the government direct the O.E.B. To stick to its own precedent and give 100% to this tax benefit to ratepayers as the NDP De panelled add yearning a?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to the Ontario energy board, let's start, Mr. Speaker, in recognizing that they are an independent regulator with auto mandate to protect the interest of Ontario ratepayers. I know they can heckle, Mr. Speaker. They like it one day, don't like it the next but that's the facts, Mr. Speaker. The board reduced Hydro One's ask by \$278 million over two years for administrative and capital expenditure costs, Mr. Speaker. This was a reduction of almost 10% of what they asked for. And this is a great example of the o.e.b.'s strong record of denying hydro companies all that they ask for and reviewing rate applications with the consumer in mind first, Mr. Speaker. Over the past ten years, the O.E.B. Has denied or reduced the outcome of rate applications many times. In 2010 with Hydro One, when it asked for a rate increase on distribution and 2012 when Ontario power generation applied for a 6.2% rate increase. 2011, Mr. Speaker. The o..b.'s mandate is to protect the interest of ratepayers and they're doing just that.

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the acting Premier. Astonishingly the privatized Hydro One was not satisfied with 71% of that \$2.6 billion tax gift from the provincial government. Imagine. Imagine. Hydro One is actually taking the O.E.B. To court to demand that it gets 100% of that tax cut. Clearly the privatized Hydro One will not accept regulation by the O.E.B. And will do whatever it can to claim profit for its private investors at ratepayer expense. The privatized Hydro One will even sue the O. Becht -- O.E.B. And demand that ratepayers continue paying \$2.6 billion for taxes the government is no longer making it pay. Will the government stop the privatized Hydro One -- From extracting another \$2.6 billion from ratepayers?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province is going to continue to review the decision carefully and monitor the appeal as it moves through the process, Mr. Speaker. But again this is being done by the independent arm's length regulator of the province's energy sector the O.E.B.. As part of that decision, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the board reduced Hydro One's ask by \$278 million over two years for administrative and capital expenditure costs. And

this is a reduction of almost 10% of what Hydro One asked for. Mr. Speaker, when you're talking about cuts, let's not forget that our fair hydro plan reduced everyone's bills by 25% on average right across the province and also helping small businesses and farms. And the appeals of O.E. Decisions are not uncommon, Mr. Speaker. In 2013 O.P.G. Appealed a pension ruling which was later ruled upon the supreme court of Canada. The province again, Mr. Speaker, will continue to review this decision carefully and monitor the appeal as it moves through the process thank you.

MPP Baker to Minister Leal Re: Small Business Funding

>> MPP Yvan Baker: Thanks very much, Speaker. My question's for the Minister responsible for small business. Minister, in Etobicoke centre, in my ridin, we have many small businesses, but even more so we have many small business owners that call Etobicoke Centre home. As you know you've heard me say before my background is in business and I used to consult to businesses. In fact actually at one point I owned my own small business so you won't be surprised to hear that I wo ask you about the fact that we're marking the start of small business week in Canada. Speaker, you know, it's important for everyone to know that Ontario has one of the strongest most vi Brant small business communities in Canada. And small businesses actually make U 98% of businesses in Ontario. So it's important that we acknowledge their hard work and their contribution. So my question to you, Minister, is can you tell us what our government is doing to support small business in Ontario?

>> MPP Jeff Leal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from Etobicoke Centre for his question this morning, and he's right. He had a very distinguished career in the business community here in Toronto. Just recently he was very active with the Bloor Street west B.I.A. For the Ukrainian festival in his community. But we want to make sure we continue to foster the right conditions for more than 400,000 small business in Ontario to succeed and grow. Just this morning I joined the Ontario chamber of commerce to announce our partnership on a new service we're launching to better support small businesses called the small business access. This new service will help entrepreneurs and small businesses better accesstools to start and grow a business. But, Mr. Speaker, that's not all. We're also designating 33% of government contracts to small businesses by the year 2020, and further improving the procurement process for small business. And these measures are just some of what's to come, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Baker: Thank you, Minister. It's great to hear that you're doing all this important work. And I know that, as a small business owner I know that -- or someone who was a small business owner I know business people take on a lot of risk. They don't just work hard but they also invest a lot of their own capital. They put aside their careers to pursue their small businesses. These small businesses end up providing livelihood not just for them and their families but they create jobs for hundreds of thousands of other Ontarians, literally millions of other Ontarians so I'm glad to hear about the measures you're talking about. When I speak to small business owners, Minister, I often aer about other things the government could do to help small business owners. Sometimes they talk to me about input costs. Sometimes they talk to me about regulations. So as much as I'm glad to hear about the thing you've just spoken about, can you tell us more about what you're doing to help small businesses?

>> Minister Leal: I want to thank the member for Etobicoke Centre for his supplementary, Mr. Speaker. I've had the opportunity to hear from small business owners across the province about the challenges that they face and how our government can help them succeed in a changing global economy, which is why we've been committed to working with these small businesses to create the conditions for them to succeed. We've already eliminated the capital tax and lowered the small business tax rate to 4.5%. We're cutting electricity costs by 25% for 500,000 small business and farms and will introduce measures to save business millions by cutting red tape and reducing unnecessary burdens through the bill 154, the cutting unnecessary red tape act 2017 and we will continue to work with small business owners, leaving no stone unturned as options to benefit from strong economic growth, being witnessed in every corner of this province, Mr. Speaker .

MPP McNaughton to Minister Leal Re: Small Businesses

>> MPP Monte McNaughton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of small business. It's small business week, which is always a great opportunity to recognize the dedication of the hardworking people running the local businesses that are the lifeblood of our communities. Unfortunately this year small business week comes at a time when many local businesses are on their heels after a decisive one-two punch from the Liberals. While Prime Minister Trudeau hikes their taxes from Ottawa, the Ontario Liberals are rushing to hike the minimum wage. Speaker, this is on top of the battering they've taken from high hydro rates, high minimum wage. Speaker, this is on top of the battering they've taken from high hydro rates, high taxes and an enormous debt that keeps tax relief out of reach. Speaker, is this government ever going to stand up for small business owners and family farms?

>> Minister Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Honourable member for his question this morning. And I know that he has a background in small business. I think his family owned a home hardware in wallaceburg, Ontario. And so he has some background -- some background in this area. But I want to say we've Haid some real moves over the last number of years. We eliminated the capital tax and lowered small business tax rate to 4.5%, which is one of the most competitive tax rates across Canada. We've reduced electricity costs for 25,000, by 25% for 500,000 small businesses and farms across the province of Ontario. And we've been out chatting with small businesses in every part of the province of Ontario. And we're looking forward with my Colleague the Minister of finance, to present the fall economic statement in the not-too-distant future to see what measures may be contained in there to allow small businesses to grow in every part of the province of Ontario.

>> Minister McNaughton: Mr. Speaker, back to the Minister. The families running the businesses on main street, Ontario don't want to hear a bunch of political jargon from this government. They want real answers to their concerns. Speaker, from the Ontario chamber of commerce to the Canadian federation of independent business to the F.A.O., entrepreneurs and economists alike are telling this government they're on the wrong track. But the government continues to turn a deaf ear. For a government that seems to think the solution to every problem is a conversation, it's been shockingly difficult to get the Liberals to answer the outcries from small businesses. You hear it, Mr. Speaker, in coffee shops, town halls and constituency offices. Local businesses and farmers have been clear. These proposed changes will hurt their businesses and their families. Speaker, how can this government continue to insist they know better than small business owners, economists and even their own F.A.O.?

>> Minister Leal: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his question and his supplementary. In fact I've been going visiting Chambers right across the province of Ontario. And let me tell you both my local chamber of commerce in Peterborough and the Ontario chamber provided us with a valuable analysis and As we say when it comes to what measures we may look at down the road. We're leaving no stone unturned and everything is on the table according to what offices we look at. But the member's position is not quite the same as my good friend the member from Dufferin-caledon who last Wednesday I was at announcement at Mars. They told me they have absolute confidence in the growth of the economy in the province of Ontario.

MPP Sattler to Minister Matthews Re: College Strike

>> MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. This morning, more than 500,000 students woke up to learn that they would not be going to class today. One of those students, Calvin McDonald, who is in his final year of the environmental technology program at Fanshawe College, contacted me to share some very real concerns. He is worried that the laboratory experiments he requires for graduation will have to be restarted, potentially pushing back the completion date for his program. He is already carrying huge osap loans and is concerned about having to take on more debt. Speaker, what is this Liberal government doing to get the parties back to the bargaining table and ensure that students like Calvin are able to graduate on time without shouldering an increased debt load?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. Students like Calvin are exactly who we are thinking about. I know faculty. I know administration. Everybody wants to get back into the classroom, Speaker. It's where students want to be. It's where faculty want to be. So the Collective bargaining process is at play here, Speaker. We urge both sides to get back to the table, and I'm hopeful that that will happen and a resolution will be reached soon.

>> MPP Sattler: Speaker, I also heard from landscape design students at fanshawe, who have booked flights and purchased equipment for the program's annual education abroad opportunity in Italy and Spain. Many of the costs they have paid are nonrefundable and the entire trip is now in jeopardy. If the trip is cancelled, there are students who will have nowhere to live because they've given up their apartments and they may not be able to complete their academic year. Speaker, faculty want fairness and students want opportunities to learn. What is this Liberal government doing to get both faculty and students back into classrooms while making sure that students are not forced to carry an increased financial burden because of the strike?

>> Minister Matthews: Speaker, reading between the lines, I almost think I'm hearing the member opposite suggest that we legislate them back, and I don't think that is a position that the NDP Would typically have. So I'm just going to assume that that is not their advice. What I can tell you, Speaker, is there are students who are not in class today. We want both sides back together and we want to reach an agreement as soon as possible, Speaker. This is what Colleges exist for. They're extraordinary institutions doing very, very good work. The faster they can get back together, the bet it er.

MPP Malhi to Minister Del Duca Re: Transportation Investments

>> MPP Harinder Malhi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of transportation. Speaker, our government has made a clear commitment to expanding transit and transportation options in every corner of the province. I know that in brampton we're seeing critical investments like the Hurontario L.R.T. And the go regional express rail. These projects will bring better connections to more residents in my community, making it easier for them to get to school and to work and home again faster than they do now. But, Speaker, we need to make sure that our transit network is affordable so that commuters make the choice to hop on board. That is why I'm very please today hear that our government has taken a major step forward to reduce the cost of transit for people who rely on it each and every day. Speaker, through you to the Minister, would the Minister please provide more information on exactly how we're making transit more affordable for commuters in the gtha?

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I want to begin by thanking the member from brampton-Springdale for her question and for her advocacy on behalf of her community. Speaker, just after the House adjourned for our constituency break I was very pleased to be joining both Premier Kathleen Wynne and mayor John Tory mayor of Toronto to announce a historic agreement that will make it both easier and more affordable for commuters to get around our entire region. Effective this coming January, Speaker, when using your presto card, it will cost only \$1.50 to ride the TTC if your trip involves a transfer with G.O. Transit or the union Pearson express. That is half the cost of the regular TTC Fare. This will have a significant impact on the pocketbooks of our commuters. On an average weekday, Speaker, 25,000 commuters from across the region make this exact connection, this exact trip. And those 25,000 individuals will save up to \$720 per year on their commute, Speaker. Speaker, will keep working hard to make the commute easier and more affordable for the people across the region that we are proud to represent. Thank you very much.

>> MPP Malhi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for his answer. During this past constituency week, I heard from countless residents in my community are pleased about the approximate \$720 savings that they will -- in the upcoming year. Speaker, I know this will help more than just current commuters. By making transit more affordable we will encourage even more residents of the region to leave their cars at home, and we all know that getting cars off the road reduces congestion, which helps our economy grow and support the environment that will be here for future generations. I know our government under the leadership of our Premier is working extremely hard to create a truly regional transit network that works with commuters and consistently

attracts new ones. Would the Minister please provide an update on how our government is doing to create that network as well as some progress to date?

>> Minister Del Duca: Speaker, thanks very much. I thank the member for her follow-up question. Speaker, over the last number of days, in addition to the specific announcement around the significant savings that we're going to be providing to commuters across the region starting in January with our discounted fares, Speaker, just a few days ago I was in Durham, Speaker. I was in Whitby at what's known as the east rail maintenance facility. This is more than half a million square feet adjacent to the 401 that's going to help us deal with maintenance and the upkeep for our vehicles as we build, Speaker, go regional express rail. This morning I was with the member from Ajax member. We were at the Ajax G.O. Station, Speaker. That's a particular G.O. Station in our network that has seen massive upgrades and improvements over the last number of years. And again I want to stress, Speaker, as our government continues to enhance service in every corner of the gtha, starting in January, we are going to make it significantly more affordable. For commuters to connect between go and TTC Or the union Pearson express and TTC, an average of roughly \$700 a year in annual savings while we're enhancing their service is good news.

MPP Walker to Minister Hoskins Re: Mental Health Services

>> MPP Bill Walker: My question's to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. For 14 years this Liberal government has made life harder for Ontario families. We see the proof in the rise in mental health related emergency visits. Forced to -- at a great cost to watch over some of these patients who are a danger to themselves and others. Growing number of suicides tragically a crisis destroying entire families in our great province. Despite your multiple capacity reviews and the moving on mental health strategy, Minister, please tell me, tell the people of Ontario how many more children and people have to die by suicides before you take real action to stop this crisis?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And for a while I was completely aligned with the member opposite. I think we do share the same goal in providing the highest quality mental health services for all Ontarians. I've frequently said, Mr. Speaker, there is no -- there can be no health without mental health and that we need to look at mental health at the other side of the coin of physical health. Two sides of the same coin. We need to invest at a level that provides that quality of care. And we are doing that, Mr. Speaker. We have doubled our mental health funding since coming into office to more than \$1 billion, Mr. Speaker, and our plan is to increase that funding by an additional \$220 million over a period of three years. And we're seeing that investment in very specific and tangible ways. We're seeing that for example in Barrie, at the Royal Victoria hospital, where we have -- I'm not sure if it's -- Yet. Soon-to-be opened mental health unit, acute mental health inpatient and outpatient specifically for children and youth, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Walker: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. We do share a lot of thought process. You can find \$25 billion for an election ploy but you can't find it for mental health. And I'm asking this question on behalf of the families. The families whose children you're letting slip through the cracks who will be very disappointed to see you still haven't got a solution. One mother whose son, Tom, fell victim to the horrific wait times explains since Tom took his life she takes 18 antidepressants a day and I quote -- I will probably be on medication forever. Mine is another illness that could have been prevented. Minister, the impact and your inaction on Ontario families is too great to ignore. I ask you can Judy wisdom count on you today to take concrete action to stop the crisis in mental health?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, let's see if Hansard can keep up. We've added 16 million to create 1,000 more supportive housing spaces over three years. 48 million specialized St. Joseph's care group in Thunder Bay. 13 million for new primary mental health services at regent park in Toronto. 5 million to u.c.l.treatment centre to a ten bed mental health unit for children and youth. 1.9

million through the government's youth suicide prevention plan, Mr. Speaker. 1.2 million for a new mental health and addictions crisis centre in London. \$10 million to the Canadian mental health association in Waterloo. \$6 million to hire approximately 80 new child and youth mental health workers. The list goes on and on, including an enadvice. \$80 million in this year's budget for supportive housing, for cognitive behavioural therapy and other interventions specific to youth, youth wellness centres, that that member voted against.

MPP Horwath to Minister Ballard Re: Hamilton Air Quality

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the acting Premier. Over Thanksgiving weekend, a toxic and foul-smelling cloud was emitted from the Site in Hamilton sending a dark plume over the surrounding neighbourhoods as family -- families were trying to enjoy their holidays. This is the latest example of what is known in the steel industry as a process called confining. Meanwhile this emitter has failed to meet its air pollution compliance standards for 2017, and instead of enforcing his own standards, the Minister of environment and climate change has granted an extension. Instead of granting extensions, will the Minister come to Hamilton and figure out how to put a stop to the dangerous air pollution?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. And again thank you for the question. Because it really -- it really speaks to the incident and public -- very public concern and how seriously our ministry takes these types of accidental emissions. Ministry staff met with Dofasco officials this past Friday, Speaker, to discuss the recent emissions. That incident and what actions the company is taking to reduce these types of incidents going forward. We're told that the event was caused by a train malfunction that required steel production to stop, excess molten iron had to be temporarily stored. They call it confining. The emission happened when the molten iron was poured onto a damp confining area. Speaker, the company will also be providing the ministry with quarterly reports so we can ensure the company is avoiding future incidents. We are discussing with the company. We will be meeting with the company -- To make sure this doesn't happen.

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, we know that it is not impossible to comply with these air pollution standards. In fact a similar steel facility nearby not only complies with the 2017 standard but is currently exceeding the 2020 standards as well. When the Minister selectively enforces the rules for emitters, it's not fair to businesses that follow the rules. Will the Minister come to Hamilton himself, and will he meet with environment Hamilton, with community groups, with businesses, with city councillors, local MPPs and other stakeholders to figure out how to put an end to these confining events once and for all?

>> Minister Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker. You know, I'm open to continuing to discuss with all stakeholders how we can improve air quality not only in Hamilton but in every city and town and area right across Ontario, Speaker. So I know that -- I know that our ministry staff have implemented an increased observation and measurement of these confining emissions from this particular facility. We are increasing the amount of observation we're doing. We're increasing the amount of monitoring we're doing, and we're going to really make sure that this particular facility doesn't exceed those standards. We're going to

minimize emissions associated with those types of operations there. So, Speaker, to summarize, I'm quite happy to talk to -- to continue to talk with stakeholders.

MPP Kiwala to Minister McMahon Re: Library Services

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of tourism, culture and sport. Speaker, public library week gives us another chance to explore our local libraries and all that they have to offer. In 2015, 1,134 library service points across Ontario received over 72 million in-person visits. Our libraries help children learn, provide resources for students and help small businesses and entrepreneurs. Last week the Minister of tourism, culture and sport was at the Burlington central library to help launch Ontario public library week and to announce a short list for the public library service awards. One of the nominees being from my riding Kingston Frontenac public library for viva Voce and the juefnus festival building youth capacity in the arts. Mr. viva Voce and the juefnus festival building youth capacity in the arts. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister, can she tell the members of this House more about library week?

>> Minister McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for Kingston and the Islands for her advocacy on behalf of libraries in her community and beyond. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to announce a special initiative to celebrate library week called "Together we read Ontario" a collaboration between two agencies of my ministry, the Ontario media develop corporation and the southern Ontario library service. This joint initiative will highlight the work of talented Ontario authors by way of a provincial e-book club. During this week, together we read will feature two weeks, actually, of unlimited access to the e-book version of "The sweetest one" by Mel Melanie Mah, winner of the 2017 trillium book awards as well as providing fiction titles. Provides resources for students and newcomers and helps small business and entrepreneurs thrive. Community hubs across Ontario. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Kiwala: Thank you to the Minister for that response. Libraries are the pillars of knowledge in our city's towns and local communities. And not only are they a resource to grab your favourite literary titles but they're an integral tool when it comes to supporting our educational institutions. The services that libraries provide help to extend the knowledge and insight of the communities that they service and are meant to connect people to the resources in a way that is accessible and efficient, similar to the way Kingston Frontenac public library had a mobile unit at my barbecue this summer and actually lent out books right there in the park. The digital services fund will help to achieve that accessible and efficient level of service. Mr. Speaker, can the wonderful Minister of tourism, culture and sport please explain how this fund will support communities on a local level?

>> Minister McMahon: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member for that question. Speaker, as the member noted, libraries are essential spaces and are

a vehicle to spread knowledge within our communities. That's why we're continuing to make investments to libraries across Ontario. In fact I'm delighted to say that we made this announcement attended by library leaders from the Ontario library association at the beautiful main branch of the Burlington public library. I'm also pleased to announce that the Burlington public library will receive nearly \$25,000 from the improving library digital services fund and the Kingston Frontenac public library board will receive more than \$33,000. These are just two examples that are part of the \$3 million investment that we're making provincewide. Speaker, under this government culture strategy, we made a pledge to continue to support services like libraries to contribute to and enhance the quality of life of our community. We're very proud of our investments and we're looking forward to continuing them, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MPP Scott to Minister Jaczek Re: Human Trafficking

>> MPP Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of community and social services. The terrible crime of human sex trafficking can be found in every corner of Ontario increasingly in our small cities and towns. In fact Kawartha Haliburton victim services in my riding has helped 21 human sex trafficking victims since December alone. It's a shocking statistic in a community like Lindsay. A group of victim service providers from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock Peterborough and Northumberland applied for support from the government's antihuman trafficking community support fund but they were rejected. So were frontline organizations in Kingston, Belleville, Prince Edward County, Orangeville, Leeds-Grenville, Hamilton and Niagara just to name a few. My question is will the Minister ensure that frontline organizations like those in my region receive the support they need and deserve to save the lives of –

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this really important question. I know that the member opposite is certainly a wonderful a add -- wonderful advocate in her own communities for these services that are so vital. Because of course she must know that our strategy to end human trafficking has been launched, is extremely active. The Minister of the status of women and I recently made a major announcement regarding funds available to communities to prevent and assist with the survivors of this heinous crime. And we certainly are providing sustained community supports to help survivors repair their lives. We are providing more help to train our sector partners to investigate and prosecute these crimes. This is a very complicated situation involving a number of our industries. And we are doing everything we can to ensure that we help the survivors of human trafficking.

>>MPP Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Minister. It appears that the government's approach is to wash their hands and say we spent the budget amount and we're done. That's not acceptable, Mr. Speaker. Saving lives of human sex trafficking victims is not a bureaucratic box you can just tick and move on from. The government left many frontline victim service organizations with the impression that they would have access to much of the \$72 million figure that the government often likes to quote. The truth is they only ever had access to 18 million, one quarter of that amount. How can this government claim to be doing enough when so many human trafficking survivors remain without the help they so desperately need?

>> Minister Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, I really do sent some the implications of what happens said by the member opposite. On this side of the House we take this crime extremely seriously. We have established an antihuman trafficking office, led by a survivor of human traffickers herself. The ministries of the Attorney General, ministry of community safety and corrections, the Minister of the status

of women and my ministry are all involved in having a very thoughtful approach to this particular problem. It is not a simple problem. It takes coordinated action and we ensure that those agencies that apply for funding are going to receive what they need to combat -- Crime in their area. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .