

CO Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript - Thursday, November 24, 2016

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Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Thursday, November 24, 2016.

MCI did not receive any questions of interest.

MIT did not receive any questions of interest.

For OWD Minister MacCharles responded to a question from MPP Kiwala on human trafficking.

OSS did not receive any questions of interest.

Questions today focused on the Sudbury by-election and electricity prices.

The official Hansard will be available later today by clicking on the link below.

http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/house-proceedings/house_proceedings_home.do?locale=en

Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Thursday, November 24, 2016

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown to Minister Coteau Re: Autism Treatment

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Grandview Children's Centre offers amazing programs for children in Durham region. The centre is life-changing for many children and their families. So when I heard there are 2,500 children on the wait-list, I was shocked. Grandview is in desperate need of an upgraded facility but this government continues to do nothing and back away. There are 970 children with autism who are waiting for ABA services and the average wait time at Grandview is 521 days before beginning treatment. The government has an opportunity to make a difference. Actually, the Liberal MPPs from Durham have written the Premier pleading for investment here. My question to the Premier, Mr. Speaker, is will the Premier commit today to listen to her own members, to listen to the Grandview Children's Centre, and get shovels into the ground to help these children ... to the Premier is: will the Premier commit today to listen to her own members, to listen to the Grandview Children's Centre and get shovels into the ground to help these children with autism because it's the right thing to do?

>> Min. Michael Coteau: I want to thank the member for the question and also for the members on this side who have been advocating for this facility renewal. Thank you. The member opposite has brought up the issue around autism here in the province of Ontario, and the member knows very well that this government has invested, will invest half a billion dollars of additional funding to autism here in Ontario, which is the most historical investment into autism not only here in Ontario, Mr. Speaker, but right across this country and probably North America as a whole. So we're very proud of the fact that we are able to make investments into our children in the province of Ontario, and this investment is historic and it will make a huge difference in the system.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier, and hopefully I can get an answer from the Premier. It's one thing for the minister to say that they're making it a priority but not answer the question about Grandview. There are almost 1,000 kids on the wait list waiting for ABI therapy.

There is a wait list of 521 days per child. It's one thing to say you're going to make this a priority, but we're not seeing shovels in the ground. We're not seeing commitments of actual dollars to these important projects. It's not just Grandview in Durham: look at Yes I Can nursery in Don Valley West. Yes I Can is going to have to close its doors and Ontario could lose another 130 precious child care spaces. It's not too late to save Yes I Can nursery. This government has the opportunity to do the right thing, whether it's in Oshawa with Grandview, whether it's at Yes I Can in the Premier's own riding. I'm asking the Premier directly: will you provide the funding for these centres so children with autism can have the help they need? Yes or no to Grandview? Yes or no to Yes I Can?

>> Min. Michael Coteau: I want to talk about capital investment into our children's treatment centres here in the province of Ontario. Since 2008/2009, this government has invested over \$300 million into capital investments into our children treatment centres. When the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, is talking about autism and program investment, again, we're talking about a half a billion-dollar investment into autism here in the province of Ontario. This is unprecedented. No government in the history of this province has done anything like this government and we're very proud of our records.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, that half a billion-dollar investment will create 16,000 new spaces across the province of Ontario and we're aiming to reduce wait times so it's six months or less. We are going to create more diagnostic hubs across the province and we're going to make sure that our children here in the province of Ontario have what they need to be successful.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier, and for a third time I'm going to ask the Premier to address this. The government has taken families of children with autism to the court. They've kicked thousands of children off the IBI treatment wait list. They refused to build the much-needed and desperately-needed expansion at the Grandview Children's Centre in Oshawa. Soon enough this government will be forced to close Yes I Can nursery in the Premier's own riding, desperately taking away a service for those children that need it. Mr. Speaker, this government's attack on children with autism and their families must stop. This has been continuous. This has been unrelenting. The Liberals can't take back their lawsuits but they have an opportunity for these two centres with Yes I Can and Grandview to actually offer support. And so, rather than government talking points of what they might have been 10 years ago or 20 years ago, what Premier Hepburn might have done, I'm going to ask a question to the Premier: will you fund Grandview? Will you fund Yes I Can? Yes or no? Don't pass the buck. Please answer the question.

>> Min. Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, we're not talking about ten years ago or 20 years ago. We're talking about today. There's a big difference between his government and what the opposition opposite has brought forward. We're bringing half a billion dollars of new investment into autism. And, Mr. Speaker, he's talking about two separate things. On one side he's talking about services and then the other side he's talking about capital investment. We've made over \$300 million in the last several years of new investment, capital investment into those facilities. A half a billion dollars into the services for autism. And the member opposite knows that this government has done more for autism than any government before.

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro Rates

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Since I can't get an answer on her commitment to children with autism, let's talk about hydro. Last weekend, the Premier acknowledged the hydro crisis was her mistake; a mistake she apparently never saw coming. But as CBC's Robyn Urback put it, "Aside from the repeated, incessant warnings—there was no warning." She also added, "Besides the dozens of reports, years of increasing consumer prices, dire financial warnings and protests over unaffordable hydro bills—there was no way they could have seen this coming." So when did the Premier realize she had made a mistake? Was it when she learned people couldn't afford to pay for the bills to have food on the table? Was it when she realized that seniors were living in energy poverty? When did the Premier realize she made a mistake? And, for the fourth time, will the Premier answer the question?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: The member opposite knows that we have worked for some time to reduce costs; whether it's taking the debt retirement charge off people's bills, whether it's putting the Ontario energy support program in place, or whether it's renegotiating the Samsung deal which takes billions of dollars out of the system, or whether it's making a decision not to go ahead with new nuclear build which they actually oppose. So we have made a number of changes. What I have said is that the mess that we had to clean up when we came into office under the previous Premier, the mess that has been left by the previous government—the electricity system was in disarray. There had not been the investments that there needed to be made. There had not been decision-making. So, as far back as the NDP government where there could have been deals with Manitoba that actually would have bent the cost curve, those decision whereas not made. We had to clean up a mess. We cleaned it up, and there's a cost associated with it.

>> Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier. I thought the Premier acknowledged responsibility. She admitted a mistake, and now she's back to blaming everyone except for her government when every report, when all evidence suggests, it's because of their mistake. Admitting a mistake is the first step. But this admission is too little, too late. Just ask the people of Owen Sound whose mayor calls his latest hydro bill "ridiculous." "For 13 streetlight accounts ... the city consumed \$442 in electricity in a one-month period." However, the total bill was over—hear this—\$10,000: nearly \$5,000 for delivery fees and over \$4,000 to pay for the Liberals' mysterious global adjustment fee. I agree with the mayor of Owen Sound: That is ridiculous. How can the Premier justify a bill like that—\$10,000 when only \$442 was used? It's ridiculous.

>> Premier Wynne: In my first answer I talked about the changes that we have made. I talked about the reality that we had a mess that had to clean up, which we have done. I say now, as I said on the weekend, that there is more that we need to do, and I take responsibility that we have to focus on people's day-to-day costs. I understand that. I also understand that the changes that we have made and the cleaning up of the system and making the system reliable had a cost associated with it. So, we know there's more that needs to be done. On the issue of municipalities, I understand that there are some municipalities that may be speaking to the opposition, but the reality is that on that front as well, we have working to undo a burden that was put on municipalities by the previous government. We have been taking costs off the property tax bill of municipalities. We've been doing that because we believe that municipalities needed more room to be able to deliver services—to the tune of \$3 billion that we've taken off those property taxes.

>> Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier. How is it an apology when you continue to blame others and take no responsibility? Global News shared a story about a Kingston, Ontario couple and their struggles paying their skyrocketing bills because of ... Global News shared a story about a Kingston, Ontario couple and their struggles paying their skyrocketing bills because of the Liberal hydro crisis. The family had been without electricity since August, when Hydro One cut off their ??power for not paying their bill. Then, a generous donor in the neighbourhood paid off that bill. They now have their lights on for the first time in a few months. But it shouldn't take the generosity of a donation from a kind neighbour. Too many Ontarians are in this predicament. Sadly, the government just doesn't seem to care. Will the Premier finally show some compassion? Not allowing neighbours to take care of someone that can't afford their hydro bill—and I want not a band-aid solution, Mr. Speaker; I want a real solution. I don't want to hear about a PST rebate that doesn't even cover the clean energy rebate. Will we have real meaningful changes—not band-aid solutions. People can't—

>> Premier Wynne: I understand why the Leader of the Opposition might want to deal with an issue like this in a very simplistic way. I understand that. I understand that that's a tactic. That's a political tactic. The reality is that there are a number of things that are going on at the same time. The reality is that we did need to clean up the electricity mess. The solution that has come from the other side is to do nothing, to not make the changes that were made, not make those investments, and stick with coal, stick with a dirty grid, stick with air that was polluted—that's not a solution—and to not make the investments that are necessary. We rejected that notion. We have made the investments that are necessary and I know it clearly that there are people in this province who have to pay too much on their electricity bill. We are going to take the PST, the provincial portion of the HST, off their bills, and we know we have to do more. We're very clear about that.

MPP Horwath to Minister Naqvi Re: Sudbury By-Election

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Does the Premier believe it's unethical for someone to request or accept a bribe to run for office, even if the law does not specifically address it?

>> Min. Yasir Naqvi: Absolutely, I would say on this side of the House, as all members would say, that any form of bribery is unacceptable. If the member opposite is asking these questions in light of a case that is ongoing, as we have discussed before in this matter, that issue is before the courts. It will be highly inappropriate to discuss the facts of that case or to litigate that case before the House. There is a very clear rule of sub judice that exists in this House that warns that we should not be discussing the matters that are before a court or a tribunal. I'll urge, again, all members of the House, Speaker, to respect that very important rule. You have ruled on that as well, Speaker, as other Speakers, and let the courts pursue the matter.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, a federal prosecutor said the Minister of Energy asked for special treatment so he would resign as an MP and run for the Ontario Liberals. While Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed have been charged for offering a bribe, there's a loophole so that the person allegedly requesting a bribe or receiving a bribe isn't covered by the law. Does the Premier believe bad ethics are okay if they fall through a legal loophole?

>> Min. Yasir Naqvi: Again, this is a matter that has been subject to extensive investigation. This is a matter where allegations have been made. Charges have been laid based on the investigations done. Charges are laid against two individuals who are not members of this House. Those charges are now being prosecuted in a court of law. The Minister of Energy has not been charged with anything whatsoever. He continues to do his job in an honourable way in that role. It is not appropriate, as I've said earlier, to be discussing this matter in this Legislature. This is an active matter, a legal matter, dealing with two individuals in the courts, and we should respect said earlier, to be discussing this matter in this Legislature. This is an active matter, a legal matter, dealing with two individuals in the courts, and we should respect the process.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier and her House leader insist that everything is okay because the Minister of Energy hasn't been charged. At least one reason, perhaps, that he hasn't been charged is because of a technicality, a loophole. It's a basic of good ethics not to offer a bribe, not to ask for a bribe and not to accept a bribe. Today, the MPP for Timmins–James Bay is putting forward legislation to close that loophole and to put voters first. My question is a pretty fundamental one. Will the Premier support putting voters first and closing that loophole?

>> Min. Yasir Naqvi: First of all, it's disappointing that what the NDP is trying to do is just score some political cheap shots, when we are dealing with real matters that are before the courts, that deal with individuals who have been alleged to have done some serious things. It is only appropriate that that matter be dealt with within the courts. If the member opposite has a bill, that bill will go through this process. That is a part of this House. It will be properly debated. It will be properly consulted. I look forward to participating in that conversation. I look forward to listening to the point of views of the others. But, Speaker, you don't just bring in provisions like this and expect that they be passed on a whim in the House when they have not gone through a serious analysis or discussion, when we have not had serious consideration and deliberation and have heard from people like the Chief Electoral Officer, which is a very important part of the process.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Duguid) Re: Hydro One

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier but I have to say I don't recall her asking for unanimous consent for immediate passage of the bill, just whether the Premier actually thinks it's a good idea. Anyway, the Premier apologized to the Liberals on the weekend, although I'm

not sure exactly what she thinks her mistake is because, frankly, nothing's changed. She's still planning to sell Hydro One, which will drive up costs even more for the people of Ontario. This is the kind of thing that makes people cynical, Speaker. The Premier's apology gets headlines, just like in 2014, but then she goes right back to helping her friends—and ignoring the people of this province. Will the Premier show that her apology means something and stop the sell-off of Hydro One?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: What I said on the weekend is absolutely consistent with what we have been doing which is to work to take costs off people's bills. We recognize—I recognize—that the upgrades that we have made in the system, the changes that we have made in the system to make it reliable and to make the grid clean have a cost associated with them and that people are bearing an undue burden. We are making changes, including taking the provincial portion of the HST off, which was suggested by many people but included in those people was the NDP, and so that is happening at the beginning of January. No matter how many times the leader of the third party conflates the issue of the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One with the issue around electricity costs, Mr. Speaker, that does not make it so, does not make it true. The reality is that the Hydro One ??issue is about building infrastructure in this province and we are going to continue to make those investments ??that are needed for the economy of this province.

>> Andrea Horwath: The people of Ontario can't pay their hydro bills. Who would have ever thought that the people in this province cannot pay their hydro bills? Having your power cut off because your bill has doubled and you can't afford it is the reality for far too many people in this province today. A hollow apology to a gathering of Liberals is not going to help those people. It doesn't help anyone except perhaps Liberals who want to feel better about themselves. Will this Premier stop making this about her and her Liberal family, and start making it about the people of this province and commit to stopping any further sell-off of Hydro One so that the privatization of our electricity system ends once and for all in this province?

>> Premier Wynne: I know that there are people in this province who are having trouble paying their electricity bills, so taking the debt retirement charge off their bills is about them. Creating the Ontario Electricity Support Program is about them. Putting off new generating projects is about the people of Ontario and the costs that they can bear. Taking 8% off people's bills starting January 1 is about people of Ontario. Building infrastructure costs that they can bear. Taking 8% off people's bills, starting January 1, is about the people of Ontario. Building infrastructure, building roads, building bridges, building transit—which a previous version of the NDP would support—that's also about the people of Ontario. We are going to continue to make those investments, and, at the same time, recognize that we have to continue to take costs of people's electricity bills. Both things are necessary.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, does this Premier know that over 80% of the people of this province do not support the sell-off of Hydro One? That's what she should be paying attention to. Ontarians are hurting, and everybody knows it. People have lost their jobs because hydro costs have meant that their employers have not been able to keep them on. People can't pay their bills, and they're having to make the choice between groceries and keeping the lights on. Continuing the privatization of Hydro One means that insiders get richer, friends of the Liberal Party get richer and more ordinary Ontarians will be hurting. That is the reality of privatization in this province from the day that party started it in the late 1990s. Now how can anybody, anybody at all, take this Premier's apology seriously if she is still helping her friends and making life harder for the people of Ontario by continuing on the wrong-headed path of the sell-off of Hydro One?

>> Min. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, if the leader of the third party wants Ontarians to take her seriously, she's going to have to start dealing with the facts. The fact is, the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One has nothing to do with hydro rates in this province—absolutely nothing. You've got to be honest with the people of this province. You've got to be factual with them. If you want credibility, you've got to deal with the facts, and those are, pure and simple, the facts. We're investing in public transit because we have a Premier that has the courage to make the tough decisions you need to make to build transit, to build roads, to build bridges— I've come to the conclusion that there are two kind of politicians in this place: those who talk a big game and those that have the courage to take action to do what they need to do, to make things happen in this

province and build a strong—

MPP Clark to Minister Matthews Re: Sudbury By-Election

>> MPP Steve Clark: My question is for the Premier. The Liberals continue to allow a member of the Legislature who has been accused of seeking a bribe to sit as a minister of the crown. This just goes to show that integrity is a foreign concept when it comes to the Liberal Party. I wasn't surprised yesterday when the Premier defended her Minister of Energy. But maybe the Premier has seen the light. Maybe she's willing to restore the integrity and trust in the Premier's office that Ontarians expect—like it used to be. I'm going to ask her again: Is the Premier finally ready to accept the resignation of the Minister of Energy?

>> Min. Deborah Matthews: I was hoping for a moment that the member was standing up to apologize for his behaviour yesterday. Seeing as that didn't happen, I feel like I must remind the people opposite about a particular case that they probably remember—it didn't happen that long ago, in 2009—when the current PC member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock resigned her seat and accepted a paid position on the same day. The Sudbury Star reported: "Scott Trades Seat For Head Office Job." The Sudbury Star went on to say that, PC "Laurie Scott was given the job Friday of getting the opposition party ready for the next election in exchange for giving up her seat in the ... Legislature." The Peterborough Examiner: "In exchange for giving up her seat, ... Scott is taking on the 'enormous responsibility' of election readiness chairwoman."

>> MPP Clark: Ontarians will expect you to apologize for not asking for the minister to step aside—until the court case is complete. Speaker, since the Premier is so staunchly defending her Minister of Energy, the same way the Premier defended Pat Sorbara here in the Legislature, I hope she is willing to defend her actions in a court of law. I know that she doesn't have to attend or testify in court, and I know the Premier doesn't always do the right thing. But here's her chance to avoid another mistake. Will the Premier waive her privilege and appear as a witness? Will the Premier testify in the trial of Patricia Sorbara?

>> Min. Matthews: There's a more recent example that I think raises a lot of questions when it comes to the ethical cloud the member opposite speaks about, and it relates to the Scarborough-Rouge River by-election. I think all of us remember the very embarrassing flip-flop, flip-flop-flip of the Leader of the Opposition on the sex ed curriculum. So there was a candidate who was very clear about her opposition to the sex ed curriculum—she wasn't flip-flopping at all; she was clear—her name: Queenie Yu. She was a candidate in the Scarborough-Rouge River by-election. But then what happened, in some mysterious and secret exchange, was the PCs' top aide sent an email to Queenie Yu, flip-flopping on sex ed the very—

MPP Bisson to Minister Naqvi Re: Sudbury By-Election

>> MPP Gilles Bisson: I'm not sure what that had to do with the question, but my question is to the Premier. For years, this government has been putting their interests first. Bad ethics are okay as long as there's a legal loophole to get out of it. It's time to close those loopholes. This afternoon, I'll be introducing a bill to put voters first and make it clear that asking for a bribe is just as big an ethical violation as offering a bribe. Will the Premier support this bill?

>> Min. Yasir Naqvi: The only thing that I know about this bill so far is what the member opposite said in a media scrum, where I believe he wasn't able to answer most of the questions that the media put forward to him. I look forward to reviewing the bill when he gets the chance to table the bill, I'm assuming, this afternoon. The member opposite has been a long-standing member of this House, so therefore I know that he knows the process of this Legislature very, very well. He knows what it takes to have a second reading debate. I'm sure that he has a slot at some time where he will debate the bill. Speaker, I'm sure there will be a slot when he will debate the bill. I look forward to

being part of that debate. Then the matter goes to committee. Then you get hear from the public. The member knows—

>> MPP Bisson: Well, Minister, you're arguing that this is somehow complicated. It's pretty simple. It's illegal either to accept a bribe or to solicit a bribe. That's all we're trying to do here. There's nothing complicated. It seems to me and, I think, it seems to most Ontarians that, if it's illegal to offer a bribe to somebody not to stand for office or to stand for office, the same should be true as trying to solicit. So I ask you the question again: Will your government support this legislation when we call for the bill to be passed? Will you—yes or no—support it?

>> Min. Naqvi: I'm not going to determine whether or not I'm going to vote on a bill without even looking at the bill. What kind of question is this? You know, it's a simple bill and it's simple concept. Show me the bill. Let's have a debate on the bill. I look forward to having those considerations. Speaker, you're talking about an ongoing process. What the NDP is doing is nothing less than playing politics. There are two individuals, who are presumed innocent, who are part of the process. They have been only engaged in sully the name of an honourable member of this House. Their whole motivation for this bill, from what I understand so far by listening to the member opposite, is to try to sully a member's name even further. Let's have a debate. I look forward to your bill. I'm sure he's got that bill drafted....—is to try to sully a member's name even further. Let's have a debate. I look forward to your bill. I'm sure he's got that bill drafted. Sometime soon there will be a debate. There will be deliberation. We'll get to hear from other people like the Chief electoral officer on that.

MPP Vernile to Minister Hunter Re: Education Funding

>> MPP Daiene Vernile: My question is for the Minister of Education. We know our government is increasing investments in education all across Ontario and, thanks to those increased investments, graduation rates are up, test scores are up and more students are attending college and university. We all know the Conservatives ran on a plan to make deep cuts to our education system, and many of us remember the turmoil with teachers and the education system when they were in power. We reject that approach. We're taking a different path by making unprecedented investments in the future of students, and those investments are paying off, no matter where a student goes to school. Could the minister please tell this House about how the changes to the funding formula are benefitting rural Ontario schools?

>> Min. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank our brilliant member from Kitchener Centre for that question. Unlike the members of the PC Party, we believe that no matter where a student goes to school, they should have all the resources they need to succeed. That's why we've made changes to the funding formula to benefit rural Ontario: Increased funding to support the higher cost of purchasing goods and services for small and rural school boards; increased funding for transportation, which recognizes the greater distances travelled in rural areas; invested in top-up supports to rural schools to fund the heating, lighting and maintenance costs; and provided funding for additional principals. Even though the local PC member wanted to fire education workers in their communities, we increased—Speaker, even though the local PC member wanted to fire education workers in their communities, we increased our investments to these important rural schools because our party believes that, no matter where you go to school, students should have the resources they need to succeed.

>> MPP Vernile: I'd like to thank the minister for her answer. Our government has shown it is committed to ensuring that students in rural Ontario have an equal opportunity for an excellent education. In the 2015-16 school year alone, this government is providing \$3.7 billion in funding towards rural school boards. Again, the Conservatives have an abysmal track record when it comes to education. We've seen that the only policy they want to talk about is sex ed, except they can't even seem to decide where they stand on that. When they were in power, they thought a good education policy was to run government-funded ads attacking our hard-working teachers. Given this history, can the minister please inform this House of our long track record of increasing investments in rural school boards, even when the PC members were against it?

>> Min. Hunter: I want to thank again the member from Kitchener Centre. We've worked hard to make Ontario's education system one of the best in the world. Our graduation rates are at 85.5%. Your question, however, was specifically about rural school board, so let's look at Leeds–Grenville. For example, for Leeds–Grenville Catholic school boards, funding has increased by approximately 54.5% and per pupil funding has increased by 73% since 2003. Since 2003, we've also supported 16 new schools that are either open, under construction or planned, including North Grenville District High School, Thousand Islands Elementary School, ??St. Mark and Meadow View Public School. Even though the member from that area ran on firing teachers in his own community, we will continue to build Ontario's education system up—

MPP Yurek to Minister Hoskins Re: Healthcare Funding

>> MPP Jeff Yurek: My question's to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. The government continues to ration health care. Yesterday, the Fraser Institute concluded that patients across the country are waiting longer than ever for care, including Ontario. Wait times were up by 10% this year. Surgeries have been cancelled—patients across the country are waiting longer than ever for care, including Ontario. Wait times were up by 10% this year. Surgeries have been cancelled across the province because the government no longer funds health care 12 months of the year. When will the government properly fund health care and work with our front-line health care professionals to deliver top-quality care?

>> Min. Eric Hoskins: I'm happy to answer this question with regard to the information that has come out from the PCs' favourite institute—I think the Fraser Institute—that specifically looks at wait times across the province. I'm pleased to say that overall, when you measure wait times, the Fraser Institute has indicated that we have the shortest wait times in all of Canada in this province. It's really quite exciting. It shows the result of our investments in wait times specifically, nearly \$100 million focused just on wait times this year alone. The time to get from a GP to a family doctor, for example, to a specialist, we are the shortest in the entire country: 25% below the national average. When it comes to that all-so-important time from specialist to the procedure or the surgery or the treatment that you require, we're the second and shortest wait times in the entire country at 20% below the national average. We're making important improvements. I'm happy to continue to address this in the supplementary.

MPP Yurek: It's nice that the government picks and chooses what report to look at. But if you look at the commonwealth report, the commonwealth report has shown that Canada—The Commonwealth Fund report shows that Canada is 12th—compared to other countries in the world. The minister is happy with being the best of the worst. This side of the House wants us to be the best in the world and they are far from doing so. Wait times aren't the only problem in the health care system. The government continues to grow the bureaucracy to the detriment of front-line health care professionals. Yesterday, the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario came out against Bill 41. Last week, the OMA came out against Bill 41. He's burning out our health care professionals. After all this feedback, the minister of health calls the OMA a bunch of liars. Will the minister—Withdraw.

>> Min. Hoskins: We were talking about the report he referenced, the Fraser Institute report. In all of Canada, we have the shortest wait time to get a CT scan. We have the shortest wait time in all of Canada to get an ultrasound. We have the shortest wait time in all of Canada to get an MRI. Wait times for general surgery have gone down 13%—in the last year alone. Wait times for medical oncology, from 2015 to 2016 have gone down by 39% in the last year. Elective cardiovascular surgery waits have gone down by 36%—all from the same report that that member happily referenced. There is more work to be done, but I think we should all be proud of a health care system that's delivering to Ontarians and is the shortest in terms of wait times overall in the entire country and the indicators that I've demonstrated as well, those important indicators in terms of getting to a specialist and getting your treatment: We're the best in the country.

MPP Tabuns to Premier Wynne (Murray) Re: Grassy Narrows

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: My question to the Premier. Yesterday in response to our question asking the Liberal Government to commit once and for all to clean up the Wabigoon River of the mercury that has poisoned the people of Grassy Narrows, the minister of the environment said and I quote, 'We will get the clean up to the satisfaction of the chief and the health of the people of grassy narrows.' This morning Chief Fobister of grassy narrows made this statement, quote: 'I invite the Premier to put this historic commitment in writing and sign it allong...and sign it alongside me in proper ceremony, so we can know it is real.' Will the Premier immediately contact the Chief to sign the commitment for clean up of grassy narrows once and for all?

>> PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have had conversations with the chief, I have been to grassy narrows, Mr Speaker, and we we are committed to doing everything in our power, as the minister of the environment said, we are committed to doing everything in our power to clean up grassy narrows, Mr. Speaker, to take that mercury out of the ecosystem, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that we do everything, and we are as diligent as we can be and as we have been in other situations like the one that the member for the Nickle Belt raised yesterday. Mr. Speaker that's why there's three hundred thousand dollars to support water sediment and fish sampling in the area. But, Mr. Speaker, as I have said many many times, we are not going to act in contradiction of science that would say that if we take certain actions we will make the situation worse. We're not going to do that. So one of the Japanese experts who has recently made a report has said "it is possible that things get worse because of the turning of the soil and the water," unquote. Mr. Speaker, we will do everything in our power but we will not make the situation worse.

>> MPP Tabuns: Sorry again to the Premier. The minister said the Liberal government will get clean up to the satisfaction of the chief and the health of the people. It couldn't be clearer. The people grassy narrows, desperate for help, heard the words of the minister. My colleagues and I heard the words of the minister. The media heard the words of the minister. Again. Now that the Minister has finally committed, when will the premier sign an agreement with the chief of grassy narrows and when will she begin the cleanup of grassy narrows once and for all?

>> MINISTER GLEN MURRAY: And I think the member opposite would know the significance of what I'm about to say. My colleague the minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation accepted a pipe during a pipe ceremony when he and I spent the day with the Chief. If you understand the significance of what it means to accept a pipe from a chief and both of us participated in the pipe ceremony that is one of the most profound commitments I have ever seen taken on by a minister. Maybe you can show some respect because this is important and not interrupt. I listen carefully here because I think this is an important issue. So when that pipe was accepted that is a profound commitment by this government and by two ministers to see this through. As a matter fact the chief and the first nation has been quite specific in tabling Dr Rudd's report, which is two pages of actions, more specifically, we have committed to. We are already months into (inaudible) fulfilling those commitments and funding it, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Hoskins Re: Healthcare Funding

>> MPP Ann Hoggarth: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I know health care is a top priority for our government. Providing all Ontarians with timely access to the care they need, whether at home, in their community or in one of the outstanding hospitals, is of the utmost importance to our government but also to me as the member from Barrie. I know our government increased funding for health care by \$1 billion to \$51.8 billion this year, and because of these continued investments in our health care system, we have seen major progress in Ontario. Last week, in the fall economic statement, our government reaffirmed our commitment to investing in Ontario's health care system with a brand new announcement of an additional \$140 million for hospitals across Ontario. Can the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please tell us more about

the progress Ontario has made and about the investments we continue to make to provide patients with high-quality care?

>> Min. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question from the member from Barrie. Of course, earlier this year in the spring budget, we announced the \$345 million investment in our hospitals. In addition to that, taking the total to over \$1 billion investments—in palliative care, in preventive medicine, in mental health, in a whole set of initiatives, including reducing our wait times. I think it bears repeating: the Fraser Institute report that came out yesterday has agreed with us that we're making significant progress in reducing wait times, where we're the best in the country. We're 25% below the national average and we're first in the country—the shortest wait times for CTs, MRIs and ultrasound. There's more work to be done, Mr. Speaker, but it demonstrates that that focused investment in our health care system, the more than 2% allocated this year alone, that is having an impact which is being seen and felt by patients across this province.

>> MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, minister, for that response. I know that all the hospitals across Ontario will be excited to hear that our government is continuing to make important investments that will help patients and their families receive better care and quicker access to services at every hospital across Ontario. These investments will translate to better care for Ontarians, lower wait times, and as a result, improved health outcomes ... at every hospital across Ontario. These investments will translate to better care for Ontarians, lower wait times, and as a result, improved health outcomes. We all know the Conservative Party has a terrible track record when it comes to health care. When they were in power they thought good health policy was seeing how many hospitals they could close. Our government is taking a different approach and we're seeing the benefits of this approach throughout the province. Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, can you inform this House about the investments our government is making throughout Ontario, but especially in rural communities, to improve health care?

>> Min. Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we recognize that our rural and small-town communities have unique challenges when it comes to the delivery of health services. I'm proud that I've worked very hard, quite frankly, with all parties and with all members of this Legislature to ensure that the provision of those programs and services that Ontarians depend on are maintained. Just to take one example: In terms of our commitment, we are working very closely with Brockville General Hospital. It's in the riding of Leeds–Grenville. As part of that \$140-million announcement that was in the fall economic statement that goes to our hospitals, an additional \$3.2 million is going to Brockville General Hospital alone, Mr. Speaker. When you look at that increase in addition to the funding that they received earlier this year through the budget and through the LHIN, that's a 15% increase in the hospital funding for that one hospital alone in Brockville, which I know is very important to the member.

MPP Pettapiece to Minister Duguid Re: Hydro Rates & Business

>> MPP Randy Pettapiece: My question is for the Premier. Mike Carter operates Food Town, an independent grocery store in Milverton. Mike wanted to reduce his hydro bill. He also wanted to do his part to conserve energy, so he participated in Hydro One's Small Business Lighting program to help install energy-efficient lighting. But he went further: He also replaced his freezers and refrigerators, a very major investment. My question, Speaker, is pretty simple. Having done all the right things, having invested tens of thousands of dollars to become more efficient, does the Premier agree that Mike should expect a lower hydro bill?

>> Min. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I'm absolutely sure that the member would have shared with Mike, with regard to his business, that as of January 1 he'll be getting an 8% cut in his hydro rate. They mock at that, Mr. Speaker, as though \$600 to \$800 a year isn't much to a small business. If it's around \$4,000 in costs, which sounds about right for the kind of business he's running, that's \$600 to \$800 that will be going back in Mike's pocket because of the very important decisions that this government has made, decisions that you obviously don't support. Maybe the member should explain to Mike why he doesn't think Mike's entitled to that \$600 to \$800 that our discount is going

to provide him.

>> MPP Pettapiece: I'm glad the minister brought up the 8% reduction. Speaker, if the Premier had any common sense, the answer would have simply been, "Yes, his bill should go down." But in Liberal Ontario, it's never so simple. Milverton Food Town lowered its consumption, and because Mike now averages less than 50 kilowatts per month, how did Hydro One respond? They jacked up his delivery charge. They switched him from something called "general service demand" to "general service energy." The result? His delivery charge more than doubled, all because he's not using enough energy. His overall bill is up 30% and it's not even winter. Speaker, I would like the Premier to answer Mike's question: "How do you even begin to justify something so stupid?"

>> Min. Duguid: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Energy has taken a number of measures to reduce the costs of power in many different ways within the system—trying to improve the system. He's looking at more efficient ways of delivering the services and he's continuing to do that. But what he's bringing forward July 1 is something that's really important to small businesses, to families and to organizations across this province: an 8% reduction in their energy bills as of January. Mr. Speaker, that's important. That's going to help small businesses like Mike's small business. On top of that, Mr. Speaker, for those small businesses we've also gotten rid of the capital tax for Mike's business. We've also harmonized the sales taxes. That's saving businesses like Mike's thousands of ... of the capital tax for Mike's business. We've also harmonized the sales taxes. That's saving businesses like Mike's thousands of dollars in administration costs. We've also got a number of issues. We've also reduced corporate capital taxes. Our capital taxes for businesses like Mike's are now 13% lower than the American average. That's a substantial amount of assistance for our small businesses but, as the Premier said on the weekend, we've still got more work to do .

MPP Horwath to Minister Ballard Re: Combatting Homelessness

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Speaker, a question to the Premier. In my city of Hamilton, Joanne prior manager of ... and community services has sounded the alarm bells that homelessness and prevention programs has run out of money. In part because of soaring electricity rates which have created a critical need for programs that help vulnerable people with assistance for hydro bills. Vulnerable people in Hamilton and across the province are paying the price for this Premier's mistake of selling off Hydro One. A vague apology won't save the homelessness prevention program or help pay the bills. Stopping the sell-off of Hydro One and getting costs under control will. What concrete steps will the Premier take to ensure that vulnerable people in my community and in communities across this province don't fall through the cracks because of soaring hydro bills?

>> Min. Chris Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker, and thank you for that very important question. You know, cycle, first and foremost, the manager who has raised this alarm was a very valued member of our expert panel on ending homelessness. We really value her input and the work that she did and continues to do within the city of Hamilton. There are a lot of fantastic programs that the city is running. Our government, Speaker, recognizes the moral imperative to end homelessness in Ontario. As part of our efforts to end homelessness we launched the community homelessness prevention initiative on January 1st of 2013. Cipi as it's called fund 100%. It's a 100% provincially funded investment. It aim to improve access to adequate, suitable and affordable housing and homelessness services.

>> Andrea Horwath: Advocacy organizations around the province, Speaker, like campaign 2000, are all reporting an increase in child poverty rates. In Hamilton, the connection between increasing poverty and the sell-off of Hydro One and the increasing hydro rates is absolutely clear. And I'm really glad that this Premier's Minister values Ms. Priol's opinion. I will quote her again. Quote -- we've basically run out of money. We've had a huge spike in October that we didn't inspect in terms of people needing help with their hydro bills. A program -- end quote. A program aimed at preventing homelessness in the city of Hamilton has actually run out of money to help vulnerable people because of skyrocketing hydro bills. When will this Premier do the right thing for the people of Ontario and stop any further sell-off of Hydro One. And ensure that hydro bills come down for the

long term and the short term?

>> Min. Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. So I mentioned chip funding and the chip program in the first go-around, you know. I can say that the, starting in 2017, we've increased funding by \$15 million each year for the next three years to that fund. That's an awful lot of money. If that will bring the total investment in that program to over \$2 billion by 2019/20. Significant investment that recognizes our government understands it's the moral imperative to end homelessness in Ontario. Under chip the city of Hamilton, it's received in 2015/16 over \$1 million. That's going up by about \$200,000 more each year. Coming. So, Mr. Speaker, it's also important to note that municipalities, they're empowered to choose how those funds are used based on their local needs.

MPP Kiwala to Minister MacCharles Re: Combatting Human Trafficking

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister responsible for women's issues. Human traffic something a devastating crime and a human rights violation that results in serious and long-term trauma. Some of the most vulnerable poor people in our society are at most risk of being trafficked. It overwhelmingly targets young women, girls and boys and in particular those in indigenous communities. It is our duty to act decisively and effectively to protect them from exploitation. I know our government takes this issue very seriously and recognizes the devastating impact human trafficking has on victims and their families. So, Mr. Speaker, could the Minister share with the House what our government is doing to combat human trafficking in Ontario? I know how much it means to the province.

>> Min. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member from Kingston and the Islands for this very important question. Our government is taking strong action to end human trafficking. Speaker, we've listened to experts, service providers and most importantly survivors to develop our groundbreaking and comprehensive strategy on human trafficking. It's a \$72 million four-year plan that imposes greater consequences for traffickers, creates stronger protections for those at greatest risk of being trafficked and provides better support for survivors of human trafficking so that they are never trafficked again. Speaker, our human trafficking strategy helps not only the girl next door but women of all ages, racialized, indigenous women and even boys, Speaker. We know human trafficking in Ontario disproportionately affects indigenous community, which is why we have developed a \$100 million long-term strategy. To end violence against indigenous women. We're working hard with a number of ministries on this very important strategy.

>>MPP Kiwala: Thank you for that answer, Minister. \$72 million is really a huge investment to combat human trafficking, and I know that in Kingston and the island, the Kingston police force is also working on this issue. I'm proud of this government for taking such a strong stance on this issue and sending a clear message that human trafficking is not tolerated in Ontario. Ending this deplorable crime takes the coordination and co-operation of many ministries across government, and that is exactly what we're doing. Mr. Speaker, could the Minister go into some further detail about what our government's ministries are doing? And I know it takes a lot of collaboration and to build an effective framework. What we're doing to build an end to human trafficking. In Ontario?

>> Min. MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. The member's right. We have made quite a bit of progress since the strategy was announced this past June. Our antitrafficking coordination office, Speaker, has been established and our government has named Jennifer Richardson as the director of the new provincial antihuman trafficking coordination office. That will be run from the ministry of community and social services. Ms. Richardson is an expert in sexual exploitation issues and will bring best practices and lessons from her experience in Manitoba to here in Ontario. As well the police College is working with police stakeholders and other experts and develop their human trafficking course. In addition to hiring three victim witness service workers, the ministry of Attorney General will establish human trafficking prosecution team with six new crowns, Speaker. We are expanding the benefits available under -- Quick response program to better serve victims and we're increasing funding so that our service providers can better support victims of human trafficking as part of victim crisis Ontario program. So lots going on.

MPP Smith to Minister Duguid Re: Hydro Rates

>> MPP Smith: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. My question this morning is for the Premier. Premier, we've heard numerous stories this morning about how people are doing what the government tells them and trying to keep their hydro bills down. And the vic Johnson community centre in mississauga, hockey arena, did just that. They actually spent \$40,000 to bring in energy-efficient L.E.D. Products, new L.E.D. Lights. It cost them \$40,000. They did actually save a lot of electricity. They used 43,500 kilowatt hours less electricity but did their bill go down, Mr. Speaker ? Their bill actually went up \$23,000 anyway. Speaker, only in Liberal Ontario could you cut your electricity usage by that much and still have your bill go up. Now I know there's a lot of hockey fans in the legislature. I'm not sure if the Premier's one or not. We have red Kelly the hockey hall of famer in the House here with us today. But the manager of that facility wants to know, I'd like the province to tell us how they're going to fix this and we all want to know, Premier. We heard your mea culpa. How are you going to fix it?

>> Min. Duguid: We have responded to similar questions like this in the past, but I can't resist, Premier -- and I'm sorry to the member opposite, you've brought up hockey. Red Kelly was in the House today. And those of us that are old enough to remember will remember when Lanny McDonald, Darryl Sittler, Ian Turnbull and Borje Salming LED the Leafs to the Stanley Cup semifinal. But what did they power that on? Speaking of energy and power, what did they use? Something we haven't thought about before. Pyramid power. Maybe pyramid power is the answer, Mr. Speaker, to the member's question. Anyway, I just want to -- let me just close by saying the member's question was a serious one. Some people are wondering what I'm talking about if they didn't follow that. The member's question was a serious one. We take it very seriously and will continue to work hard to bring down the price of electricity for those citizens.