

CO Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript - Wednesday, March 29, 2017

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Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Wednesday, March 29, 2017.

MIT did not receive any questions of interest.

MCI did not receive any questions of interest.

MSW did not receive any questions of interest.

There was an MSA question of relevance.

MPP Sophie Kiwala asked about the Seniors Active Living Centre Act component of Bill 87. Min. Dipika Damerla responded that the Act would modernise the framework for elderly person centres. In supplementary Min. Damerla added that 80% of elderly person centres were consulted in order to update this component of the Act.

Electricity costs and healthcare continue to be the most asked about topics.

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

From: Stinson, Jeffrey (CAB)
Sent: March 29, 2017 12:13 PM
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Transcript of Provincial Question Period

41st Parliament, 2nd Session

Wednesday, March 29, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown to Premier Wynne, (Sandals) (Naqvi) Re: Partisan Advertising

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The Premier has forced the auditor general to essentially become a rubber stamp to allow clearly partisan government advertising to be approved. This is not acceptable. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier do the right thing and restore the auditor general's oversight of government advertising?

>> Premier Wynne: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I would just say to the member opposite that Ontario was the first and remains the only jurisdiction in the entire country that had legislation to prevent partisan advertising, Mr. Speaker. That is the reality. And while partisan advertising is now banned, it is still mer miss -- permissible and continue to be permissible and important for the government to inform the people of Ontario about initiatives that impact their lives. So let me give some examples of the kind of things

people need to know about. Getting the flu shot, updates to the sex-ed curriculum, consumer protection, sexual violence and harassment awareness. Organ donations, Mr. Speaker. And letting families know about our fair hydro plan is important, too, Mr. Speaker. There are aspects of the plan, the increases to the Ontario energy support program, that are application based, Mr. Speaker. Premier Wynne: It's important that they go to the website and that they understand what's available to them, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The Premier says this government hasn't, hasn't taken away the a.g.'s oversight. Who do we believe? This Liberal government, under multiple OPP Investigations or the auditor general who has clearly said that the powers have been stripped, that there's partisan ads running on the air right now as we speak? What fantasy world are they living in? They're running ads right now. They're abusing taxpayer dollars right now. They know it's wrong, Mr. Speaker. But this is a government that's had a history of abusing taxpayer dollars. So rather than pretend you have not stripped the auditor general of that right to have oversight, will the Premier do the right thing --Patrick Brown: And stop running these partisan Liberal ads at the expense of taxpayer dollars?

>> Premier Wynne: Treasury board.

>>Minister Liz Sandals: Yes, thank you very much. You know government advertising plays an important role in informing Ontarians, and I think we all know that sexual violence has a devastating impact on the lives of victims and their families, and it's far too prevalent in our society. If you look at the who will you help campaign launched in March 2015, it challenged existing attitudes, and what were the results? The who will you help campaign was viewed by over 7 million. Generated more than 85 million views worldwide. The important thing is there were results. Within six months. 55% strongly agreed that they had an obligation to intervene when witnessing sexual harassment.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. These are diversion tactics. They're mentioning ads that the auditor general did not have problems with. What we're seeing right here is the auditor general has pointed back that the government took away oversight and has now taken advantage of that by running ads that are clearly partisan. That should be paid for by the Liberal party but instead they're charging the taxpayers. I don't want diversion tactics. I don't want talking points. They've stripped the powers from the auditor general to abuse taxpayer dollars for self-interest vanity ads. I'm asking the government to do the right thing. Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. Rather than talking points, yes or no? Will you restore the powers of oversight that you took away from the auditor general?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Programs the leader of the opposition can explain why they did not do the right thing in 2004 and voted against the bill that introduced the mt stringent limitations of partisan advertising in the province -- in our province. Why did,hypeaker, the member from Simcoe- Grey, the member from Renfrew- Nipissing- Pembroke, the member from York Simcoe, the member from Parry Sound- Muskoka, the member from Haldimand- Norfolk, the member from Oxford All these members I just named, Speaker, still serve in this legislature. Why they did not -- Why did the E.C.E. Members did the right thing in 2004, Speaker, and voted for a bill that put an end to Mike harris-style partisan advertising? Speaker, we all remember that advertisement of Mike Harris whaif where he flicked the lights off on

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Hoskins) Re: Hospital Wait Times

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. We have many great

phenomenal physicians here today with the Ontario medical association. And I'm sure members across the aisle have been hearing from these physicians in communities across Ontario. I know I heard about the Canadian institute for health information's annual report. The report revealed patients are waiting longer for cataract surgery. Last year, only 70% of patients had their surgery within medically accepted time frames. This was down from 86% in 2012. The facts speak for themselves. Patient care is being diminished. Mr. Speaker, cataract wait times are getting worse, not better. How much longer is this government going to fail patients?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me -- I know that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is going to want to speak to this as well. But I just want to welcome the O.M.A. And the members to queen's park today, Mr. Speaker. The doctors. Obviously doctors are an essential part of the health care system, Mr. Speaker. They're essential to the delivery of a strong and sustainable health care system. We're working to deliver on our mandate in health care, Mr. Speaker, to improve access, reduce wait times, improve the overall patient experience, and we want to do that in partnership with all of our health care providers. We want to do that in partnership with doctors, Mr. Speaker, so we are going to work to continue to improve that partnership. I look forward to having an opportunity to meet with some of the membership today and I know that members across the House will be -- Thank you very much to the O.M.A. For being here.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. It's a bit rich hearing from the government here today in the House when they vilify and disparage our physicians across the province. It's not right. Physicians devote passionately, dedicated in their work life to care for patients. The reality is we have 29,000 doctors who go to work and put patients first. And this government is not putting patients first. You know, I didn't get an answer about cataracts. Maybe I will in the second response. But what I want to know is what is this government going to do about the chronic underfunding of health care? Everywhere I go in Ontario, I hear about hospitals that are struggling to make ends meet. I hear about physicians -- Speaker, whether it's hospitals that are underfunded, whether it's nursing cuts or whether it's physicians who -- Patrick Brown: Diminished morale because of this government's cuts. It's not right. And what I'm asking of the government is can I get an answer on cataract times? Patrick Brown: One physician in this province that actually support this is government? The record of health care is embarrassing, Mr. Speaker. Premier Wynne: So, Mr. Speaker, you know, I am going to take this opportunity to do a shout-out to my dad. He's 91 years old, Mr. Speaker.

[Applause] He started practising medicine in Richmond hill in 1952, Mr. Speaker. He practised with three other doctors. He was on call every other weekend. He did -- when York central hospital was built, which wasn't until I was in my teens, Mr. Speaker. Until then, he had his rounds at what is now south lake but was York county, Mr. Speaker. We'd go up with him while he did his rounds and we'd wait out on the lawn. Many Thanksgiving dinners, many Christmas dinners were interrupted by kids being born, Mr. Speaker, that he would go and deliver because of course he was practising during the baby boom. Mr. Speaker, I know exactly how hard doctors work. I know exactly how committed they are --

[Applause] To the system, Mr. Speaker. And I will do everything in my power to make sure that we work in partnership with the docs in this province.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. Unfortunately those words are hollow when you have a Minister of health who disparages and vilifies physicians across the province. Those words ring hollow when you introduce health legislation routinely in the House and don't consult -- This government introduces health legislation and doesn't include doctors. They're not at the table. They have no voice. It's not right. For three years they've been working without a contract. You know it's not a big secret that we have a pretty ugly relationship right now between the province's physicians and the government. We have 29,000 hardworking doctors, and they deserve some respect. They deserve a voice. And what I'm asking the Premier to actually -- if you're not going to answer my question on cataracts, can you at least tell us -- Mr. Speaker can the Premier at least tell us when physician also actually be at the table?

>> Premier Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

>> Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, want to welcome Ontario's doctors, including medical students who are here today for many meetings with -- and I encourage all of my Colleagues on all sides of the House to take those meetings and listen to what the doctors have to say. But, Mr. Speaker, we -- the Premier a number of weeks ago indicated that we were committed to binding arbitration, that we were committed to making that the first item to be discussed when we sit down with our doctors, and I'm pleased to say, Mr. Speaker, that last night those negotiations did begin with the first order of business, to negotiate a process and an agreement for binding interest arbitration with Ontario's doctors so we can move forward to other aspects of hopefully an agreement with our physicians in the weeks and months ahead, Mr. Speaker.

[Applause]

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Hydro rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the Premier, Speaker. The cost of electricity has gone up over 300% under the Liberal government, including 50% just since this Premier took office. Families, businesses, municipalities and public institutions like schools and hospitals are suffering under the crushing weight of their hydro bills. Yesterday it was revealed that the new C.E.O. Of Hydro One took home \$4.5 million in 2016. Does the Premier think there's anything at all wrong with this picture, Speaker ?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, you know I'm very concerned and have been for some time, starting in 2013, Mr. Speaker, we were working to take costs out of the electricity system in order to reduce people's electricity bills, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that more needs to be done. That's why our fair hydro plan is going to take 25% off people's bills come summer, Mr. Speaker, and for people who live in remote and rural communities, Mr. Speaker, they're going to see a 40 to 50% --

>> Premier Wynne: We're going to hold those increases for at least four years, Mr. Speaker. We understand, we understand that the improvements that have been made to the system had a cost associated with them, Mr. Speaker, and that's why the fair hydro plan is in place. That's why people will see that come summer, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, \$4.5 million for the new C.E.O. Of the privatized Hydro One, which is ten times more than the average of other hydro C.E.O.S in Canada. If the Premier plans to poll Ontarians to see what they think of this \$4.5 million C.E.O. Salary, she should save her money, because I can tell her straight up, people are outraged and they are insulted by this salary.

[Applause] When will this Premier stop the privatization of Hydro One and put an end to this outrageous situation?

>> Premier Wynne: Minister of energy.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Please today rise and talk about the subject, Mr. Speaker, because I do know that the salaries are high and much higher than those of the vast majority of Ontarians. I know, Mr. Speaker, many Ontarians are struggling to pay their electricity bill and that's why we brought forward the 25% reduction for businesses, small businesses, farms and families, Mr. Speaker. But when it comes to Hydro One, Mr. Speaker, they've transitioned into a very good company, Mr. Speaker, publicly traded company and not a government agency, Mr. Speaker. And let's look at what they've done over the last little bit, Mr. Speaker. They've made \$60 million in productivity savings. They've improved their health and safety performance to the best on record, Mr. Speaker. They've advanced multiple initiatives for customers aimed at reducing their electricity rates, Mr. Speaker, and they took the initiative as well, Mr. Speaker, of reconnecting all of their disconnected customers back in December, Mr. Speaker. Now I know the majority of the executive compensation is contingent on –

>> Andrea Horwath: Mr. Speaker it's unfortunate that all of the benefits are going to the top executives and the shareholders of the corporation. Instead of the people of Ontario. But at the same time that the Premier is defending this \$4.5 million C.E.O. Salary, her Minister of energy seeps completely comfortable with the idea that mandatory use pricing is no big deal. Talk about being out of touch, Speaker. \$4.5 million for a C.E.O., while this Premier is punishing parents for cooking their dinner at dinner time and seniors for staying home during the day. Does the Premier think this is the right thing for the people of Ontario, Speaker ?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course we're pleased to act and help those families, Mr. Speaker, with a plan that's actually going to reduce their bills by 25%, Mr. Speaker. Not a plan that is pie in the sky, Mr. Speaker. Not a plan that's going to wait decades and decades before they'll even think about talking about helping low-income individuals, Mr. Speaker. We have acted. We have acted because we've listened to the people of Ontario and brought forward a plan that will reduce their bills by 25%, Mr. Speaker. That's significant. When it comes to time of use, Mr. Speaker, again it show that is they have no idea on the system, Mr. Speak. We are making significant savings. A 5% savings on conservation, Mr. Speaker, which then takes more costs out of the system because we don't have to build more generation. It just show that is they're pie in the sky when it comes to electric ris -- tristy, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Sale Hydro One

>> Andrea Horwath: My next question's for the Premier. Talk about pie in the sky, they didn't come anywhere near reaching the targets that they set in terms of taking energy off the P.Q. And conservation so let's not pretend what the facts are around here. The Premier told Ontarians repeatedly that the government would be able to maintain control over Hydro One, even when the sell-off was complete. If that's the case, and the Premier does have control over Hydro One, why hasn't she done anything about the outrageous salaries that the C.E.O. Is currently Collecting?

>> Premier Wynne: Minister of energy.

>> Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are a shareholder in Hydro One, Mr. Speaker, and that is something that is very clear. And when it comes to -- again, Mr. Speaker, the importance of recognizing that, yes, these salaries are high and yes, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that they are much higher than the vast majority of

Ontarians, and we also know that Ontarians are struggling to pay -- many Ontarians are struggling to pay their electricity bills. That's why, Mr. Speaker, we brought forward our plan. The fair hydro plan is the single largest electricity bill reduction in our province's history, Mr. Speaker. We're making sure that low-income individuals will actually have their bills reduced by 25% plus, Mr. Speaker, the Ontario electricity support program which will help them even more. Low-income individuals. Were not even mentioned in the NDP's idea, Mr. Speaker. We're making sure we're helping every family in this province, Mr. Speaker ,.

>> Andrea Horwath: Somehow people are supposed to be happy that the Liberals have increased their bills by 275%, Mr. Speaker. I don't think they're happy about that.

[Applause] If the Premier is unable, unable to rein in the C.E.O. Salary even when she says the government maintains control at Hydro One, can she explain to Ontarians why she has spent years trying to sell the clearly false idea that even when the Hydro One sell-off is complete, the government will maintain control of it?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know once again we've talked often about sale of Hydro One and the benefits that we're going to be doing as investments and infrastructure. The one thing that the third party doesn't talk about, Mr. Speaker, is our government acting to eliminate coal. We now, Mr. Speaker, do not have coal part of our electricity system. And this morning, Mr. Speaker, we heard from kids. We heard from children that live in our province that now can actually go outside and play because we no longer have smog days, Mr. Speaker. Because of the investments that we've made as a government, we're actually benefitting families right across the province, and we recognize, Mr. Speaker, that that costs more, that that costs more, Mr. Speaker. \$50 billion is what we invest today make sure that people can go outside and breathe. And while they wouldn't do that, Mr. Speaker.

>> We did. And now we're making that as affordable as possible for people right across the province, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker the Premier is defending a ludicrous \$4.5 million C.E.O. Salary. She refuses to stop her wrong-headed sell-off of Hydro One. Even though it's now very, very clear that the government will have no control whatsoever of this new corporation. She and her Minister clearly do not understand the struggles that families are facing with time-of-use pricing. When will this Premier show Ontarians that she is actually serious about more than buying support for the next election in the face of sinking poll numbers, do what's right for the people of Ontario, not her political party, and stop the disastrous sell-off of Hydro One?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's under the leadership of this Premier, Mr. Speaker, that we are investing in infrastructure right across the province, Mr. Speaker. It's under the leadership of this Premier, Mr. Speaker, that we are reducing bills by 25% on average, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we continue to talk about the investments that we made, we spent \$50 billion, Mr. Speaker, investing in a system that was left in Tatters by both opposition parties, by freezing rates, cancelling ideas, not moving forward at all, Mr. Speaker. They kept kicking to the curb the electricity system. We didn't do that, Mr. Speaker. We invested. We built clean system reliable system

MPP Yurek to Premier Wynne (Hoskins) Re: Doctor Salaries

>>MPP Yurek: Speaker, my question's to the premier. Speaker, the liberal government has waged an ongoing battle with Ontario's doctors. Many times they create the illusion that doctors' Billings equal their take-home pay. Instead of working with doctors, time and again the minister and this premier have unilaterally cut patient services and attempted to blame the doctors for this government's own mismanagement. Speaker, with the O.M.A. Present here today, will the premier stand up and apologize for her government's treatment of doctors –

>> Premier Wynne: Minister of health and long-term care.

>>Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I'm encouraged, greatly encouraged that a number of weeks ago the O.M.A. Named a new negotiating team for themselves. Shortly thereafter the government named its new negotiating team. The premier and I expressed our commitment that the first order of business as part of negotiations, that first episode of sitting down at the table together, that episode that took place last night, Mr. Speaker, for the first time. The first order of business would be to agree on a process for binding interest arbitration. We're confident with this renewed spirit of collaboration, with the commitment that the premier and I have made, with the -- quite frankly the talented and committed individuals at the table. I think both ontarians and the membership of the O.M.A. Can be satisfied that we have the right people at the table, I believe. To truly work together on this challenging but attainable task, Mr. Speaker.

>>Minister Yurek: Thank you, speaker. Back to the premier. Speaker, where was this talk three years ago before they started the notification of doctors? Why weren't they doing this three years ago? Mr. Speaker, recently it was revealed that the government created their negotiating strategy through polling and not what was in the best interests of patients. Everything they did through the media was calculated to sway the public's opinion against doctors. Instead of working with the O.M.A. To find a solution to best patient care, this government spent money on polling and devised schemes to vilify the profession. Speaker, according to the financial accountability officer, this government will need to cut an additional \$2.8 billion from the health care system. Is this premier going to base her decisions on current polling numbers or work with the frontline health care professionals to make the best decision based on patient care?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, that question has so many parts to it. I think it's easy -- I'm going to go back to the initial question from the leader of the opposition where he referenced wait times in this province and he referenced the report that indeed I know he cherry picked from it. There is more work to be done but hip replacements, 85% of ontarians have their hip replacements completed within the medical benchmark. 6% higher than the national average. Knee replacements 12% higher than the national average. 99% of radiation therapy within the medical benchmark. The lowest wait times for M.R.I.S, C.T. Scans. The shortest wait types from G.P. To specialist, from specialist to treatment. On average ontarians are receiving care more than four weeks earlier than the national average. We have some of if not all of the shortest wait times in this country, Mr. Speaker. Wait times for general surgery have done down by 13% medical oncology 39%. We have done this, Mr. Speaker, because of our doctors. Because of our nurses. Because of all those out there -- Working so hard --

MPP Sattler to Premier Wynne (Hunter) Re: Violence in Schools

>>MPP Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Speaker, today osstf's released findings from its study on violence in the workplace, find buildings that echo earlier and equally shocking results from etfo. 41% of osstf members reported an increase in violent incidents in their schools over the

last five years. None said that violence is decreasing. Yet in this context of rising violence, four out of five osstf members were either unaware of or unable to access violence reporting forms and more than half said that they are often pressured not to report a violent incident. Speaker, after five years, the situation is worsening, not improving. What will it take for this government to show education workers that it is serious about protecting education worker health and safety?

>> Premier Wynne: Minister of education.

>>Minister Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite, who is the critic for education for this very important question. Mr. Speaker, under no circumstances is violence acceptable in our schools. We want our schools to be safe and healthy places for students, for teachers, for education workers. And that's something that we want to make very, very clear. Mr. Speaker, I've met with the membership of osstf and I've been very, very clear with them that I recognize that we have to take this very seriously. The concerns around reporting that the member opposite asked. I am concerned about that. We want to ensure we create a culture in our schools that promotes safety. And that's what we're working towards and working together with o.s.t.f.on that.

>> MPP Sattler: Speaker, the numbers from osstf and etfo are alarming and provide an urgent call to action, action that is needed across ministries including education, labour, health and children and youth services. Osstf -- osstf reports in at least one classroom per board per day a student is removed due to a violent outburst. The mental health needs of both students and education workers are being ignored putting young people and education workers at risk. Yet 25 school boards are receiving \$8 million less funding in special education grants, and school staff with specialized mental health training, like psychologists and social workers, are being cut. Speaker, how does the Premier plan to make schools safer when she won't even provide the basic supports that students need to succeed?

>>Minister Hunter: Mr. Speaker, we are working with all of our partners in education. We have a provincial health and safety working group that is strengthening the culture of training and access to information to staff on violence prevention, Mr. Speaker. For example we have designated one half of a P.A. Day -- Mr. Speaker, we have designated one half of a P.A. Day for our elementary teachers this past year for health and safety training. We've also added new mandatory content on supporting students with special needs in the enhanced four-semester teacher education program. Mr. Speaker, here's what we're investing in special education. We've increased our investments by 70%, Mr. Speaker, to \$2.7 billion. We have increased the number of education assistants by 6,300, Mr. Speaker. We know -- That there's more that we need to do on this issue and that's why we're working together across all aspects of the sector including with the Minister of labour.

MPP Martins to Minister Matthews Re: Post-Secondary Tuition

>> MPP Martins: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of advanced education and skills development. Our government realizes that students should be able to -- Our government realizes that students should be able to access higher education based on their ability to learn, not their ability to pay. We know that making postsecondary education more affordable is part of our plan to grow the economy, create jobs and build an inclusive future for Ontario. We have heard about exciting changes to osap this past year to make osap more generous for all students across the province, and I've had the opportunity to share this news with many of the students in Davenport. Cot Minister give this House an update on how the osap changes are progressing some.

>>Minister Matthews: Thank you to the member for Davenport for this very important question. Just this morning the Premier, the Minister of education and I were at bishop marrocco Thomas Burton catholic secondary school to launch the new osap application. Starting this September, over 210,000 students in this province will have free tuition. Nair grants -- their grants will be greater than the cost of their tuition. Speaker, that mean one in three postsecondary students in Ontario will have free tuition and many middle-income students will have more generous student assistance than they have ever had before. The changes we have made are truly transformational. Here's our new deal with students. You work hard. You get the marks. You get accepted to postsecondary and we're going to make sure that money does not prevent you from achieving.

>>MPP Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister of advanced education and skills development for her answer on the great news for all students across Ontario. Speaker, I've heard the Premier say many times that Ontario's advantage is our people. I know that this means ensuring that our people have the best possible opportunities to access education. However I know for many aspiring students, including those from my riding of Davenport, and especially folks who are returning to school as adults, the costs of going back to school can be daunting, not to mention confusing. With all these grant improvements to osap, what are we doing to make sure people know how much help they can get?

>> Thank you, Speaker. I confess that I have been showing the osap calculator on Ontario.ca/osap to anybody who will let me show them that. Speaker, what it demonstrates is that there's tremendous support available for students. It means changes for everyone but especially mature students, Speaker, that are eligible for more grants than ever before. Let me give you one example. If you go to Ontario.ca/osap, use the calculator. If you're a single parent, you've got three kids, you earn \$60,000 a year and you're going to College, you're eligible for grants totalling \$16,000, Speaker. Way more than tuition. And an additional \$8,700 in loans if you want them, Speaker. Tuition, also support for your family. For these changes have the impact we need them to, everybody needs to be sharing the news including members opposite.

MPP Nicholls to Minister Leal Re: Hydro Costs for Agriculture

>>MPP Nicholls: My question's to the Minister of energy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People across southwestern Ontario were shocked when the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of energy commented on greenhouses moving from Ontario to Ohio saying and I quote, part of what caused them to move were the high levels of humidity. Greenhouse growers were actually astounded, Mr. Speaker, by his comment, because our area has always been high in humidity. Humidity. That's not the deal breaker. The cost of energy is the deal breaker, said Jim de Mena, president and C.E.O. Of Redd sun farms. Speaker to the Minister -- why is this Liberal government spewing hot air about real costs of greenhouse relocations and lost investments?

>> Minister Leal: Speaker, I want to thank the Honourable member from Chatham Kent Essex for his question this morning. Last Thursday, I had the great opportunity to be in the wonderful riding of Durham with my Colleague Mr. Anderson, to announce a \$19 million support package for the greenhouse energy in the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, I am very please today share this information with my fine Colleague from Chatham-kent-essex. Ontario's greenhouse sector is a major contributor to the provincial economy. We appreciate the government of Ontario's support and recognition and the need to invest in our future, as well as to work with our members on challenges facing Ontario's greenhouse sector. This funding will support the continued growth of our sector, its capacity to create jobs. Provide a reliable supply of greenhouse products.

>>MPP Nicholls: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Minister, not sure which one. Support package is probably code for life support. De Niro farms in leamington used less natural gas this past February than they did over the same period in 2016. The result -- the bill more than doubled. Of course there was no line item on natural gas pills showing the new cap and trade costs. Kind of makes me wonder if the government lobbied the O.E.B. To bury the cost in the delivery charges. But thankfully, Mr. Speaker, union gas created an online tool which determined De Niro farms paid over \$15,000 in cap and trade costs, bringing their total monthly bill to just over \$30,000. So to the Minister -- How can De Niro farms and other greenhouses cope after this government more than doubled their natural gas bills?

>>Monister Leals: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Honourable member for supplementary, because I have some more quotes. Here's one from George kovesi, who's a friend of a member from Chatham-kent- Essex -- we are extremely pleased with the announcement made by Minister lille today. We are very optimistic with the prospects continue to work with the government to determine how we can assure a vi Brant and sustainable future for our province's greenhouse sector. Mr. Speaker, it's better than that. Today's announcement -- announcement confirms the government of Ontario's understanding of the greenhouse. Contribution to the economic success -- invest many, innovation, job creation, productivity and world competitiveness. This funding announced by Minister lille, our Minister of agriculture of food and rural affairs will help keep our quality grown-in Ontario products as the first choice for North Americans.

MPP Gelinas to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Wait Times

>> MPP Gelinas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Premier. Health care in Ontario is at a tipping point. Families and seniors need the Premier to cut wait times and to stop overcrowding in our hospitals. But instead of listening, this Premier has LED us -- let us all down, by doing tremendous damages to the relationships with the good doctors of Ontario. Many of them are with us today. This morning we've learned that the Premier actually spent money on -- and get that, Speaker -- not one, not two, ten polls to try to win her war with the doctors. Why does this Premier think it is right to spend public money on polling and on P.R. When every dollar should be going to good health care for the people of Ontario?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. To be honest, I think the party opposite wants it kind of both ways. They constantly are asking us and reminding us to speak to Ontarians, to consult with them on the direction that our government is going and the policies we should implement, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, when the ministry of health consults with Ontarians across the province, in person, online through letters, through polls, we do it in a variety of ways on a myriad of issues, Mr. Speaker, to help inform us. The government on the best ways we can put patients first in the province, they complained. This method of reaching out to Ontarians is important. I'll be happy to talk more in the supplementary.

>> MPP Gelinas: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier. People want shorter wait times. They want faster appointments with their doctors. But instead of solving the overcrowding in our hospitals, the Premier froze funding for four straight years. Instead of working with the good doctors to improve care, the Premier made unilateral cuts to physician funding. Instead of cutting wait times, this Premier's watching the E.R. Wait grow longer than it's been in a decade. Instead of putting every dollar into better frontline care, this Premier is spending money on polling, on P.R. To help the Liberal party. Why does the Premier think her job is to put the Liberal party first and the needs of patients at the back of the line?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we continue to make substantial progress on wait times, and I have to counter the myth that the opposition member is perpetrating. A recent Fraser institute report concluded that Ontario has the shortest wait times in the country wmedian wait times 4 weeks lower than the national average. P.R., our wait times for the sickest patients have been cut by 29%, while volumes have in fact increased by 40%. E.R. Waits for the least sick have been cut by 15%. The wait time alliance report card on wait times straight As for Ontario by the way notes that Ontario continues to receive straight As for wait times in five key service areas, hip replacement, knee replacement, cataracts, cancer, coronary, bypass. Ontario by the way was the first to measure wait times in many important areas. We were certainly the first when it comes to either the P.C. Party or the NDP Party. That didn't bother to measure wait times at all, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Salary For ECC Employees

>>MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister responsible for early years and child care. In my riding of Barrie, we are lucky to have a great early childhood But I have heard from many students they are finding it hard to be motivated to pursue their passion of becoming an E.C.E.. They're concerned about the low wages in the field and worried they may not be able to pail for their student loans or even for their own family's child care needs. Average salaries for E.C.E. Graduates have increased over the past five years to \$31,000. However, they are still lower than the average salary of College graduates, which is \$35,000. Making recruitment and retention of E.C.E.S difficult for child care operators. As a student and graduate. This can be discouraging. Can the Minister responsible for early years and child care tell me and my constituents what is being done to ensure students pursue their educational passion?

>> Minister Nadoo-Harris: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the hardworking member from Barrie for this very important question. Speaker, we recently held public consultations across the province on child care and heard from many early childhood educators about the challenges that they face when it comes to low wages. That's why. That's why we're investing in these professionals. So our government is supporting a wage enhancement for eligible providers working in licensed child care. And we're ensuring there's ongoing annual funding. So for 2017, the ministry is allocating more than \$188 million to support the wage enhancement and the home child care enhancement grant. That means eligible staff and home child care providers can receive a wage enhancement of up to \$2 an hour plus 17.5% in benefits. And eligible home child care providers working with an agency could receive a grant of up to \$20 a day. Mr. Speaker, these investments are part of our plan. They're the right thing –

>> MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for that answer. A wage enhancement is a step in the right direction. I'm glad to hear that our government is helping those who are ready to enter the work force and who are passionate about their careers. It's important that we recognize the value of those who are shaping and caring for our youngest learners. It's equally as important to make sure we retain the hard working professionals who are already doing this crucial job. They are the front lines of our child's path through education. Account Minister tell me more about what she is doing to help encourage early childhood educators to stay in this field?

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to answer the member's question. Speaker, our government has committed to creating new licensed spaces for 100,000 more children over the next five years. Think about that. This is not only an investment in our children's future. It's an investment in our economy and in Ontario families. Because with the addition of 100,000 new spaces we will see an estimated 20,000 new E.C.E. Positions created in Ontario. That's 20,000 new jobs, Speaker, through the wage enhancement and this new job creation, we can help create and close, I should say, the wage gap between registered early childhood educators working in kindergarten and child care professionals working in licensed child care settings. We will also stabilize licensed child care operators by

helping them keep their E.C.E.S and other child care programs -- And we will support more employment and income security. But, Speaker, this is about laying a foundation that will put our children on a path to success.

MPP Thompson to Minister Leal Re: Employment in Agriculture

>>MPP Thompson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. On March 7th, the Minister of agriculture spoke about Canadian agriculture literacy month and the importance of educating young people about opportunities in the agri-food sector. But there was a glaring omission. In 2015, I brought forward a motion, growing agri-food jobs, which passed with support from all parties, Speaker. It recommends that the government add a component to the grades 9 and 10 careers and guidance curriculum on agri-food career opportunities. Sadly, Speaker, the Minister failed to mention what progress has been made on implementing it when he gave his speech. We all remember when the Premier issued the agri-foods job challenge. But due to inaction, the Canadian agricultural and human resources council is now warning that there will be a significant labour shortage by 2025. In light of the Canadian agricultural literacy month. Will the Premier commit to seeing this important component of the curriculum implemented in time for next school year?

>> Premier Wynne: Minister of agriculture, food and rural affairs.

>> Minister Leal: Thanks so much, Mr. Speaker. I want to appreciate the question from the Honourable member this morning. And I know her longtime commitment in improving agricultural literacy in secondary schools right across the province of tomorrow. With regards to the agri-food challenge, the Premier gave us a challenge to create 120,000 new jobs in this sector by the year 2020. I can report to you, Mr. Speaker, and all members of the House today that we're well on our way to meeting that goal. We've created 42,000 jobs to date. So if you extrapolate that, we will meet that target by the year 2020. But more importantly, Mr. Speaker, every day, as I'm travelling across the province of Ontario, when I'm in community Colleges to see their graduates, when I'm at the university of Guelph to see their graduates. Everybody's looking forward to careers in agriculture in the province of Ontario.

>>MPP Thompson" Speaker, no one believes or trust that is Minister. Back to the Premier. When I met with the president of the treasury board -- When I met with the president of the treasury board, she assured me my motion would be considered. Just last week, the Minister of education proved that she can quickly jump the task when she announced the financial literacy pilot project. Speaker, why is the Premier, the Minister of agriculture, the president of the treasury board, the Minister of education and the entire Liberal Cabinet choosing to ignore the needs of Ontario's agri-food sector?

[Applause] There are two and a half days left in the agricultural literacy month. So will the Premier, the former Minister of agriculture, commit to adding agriculture to the guidance and career curriculum? Thank you.

MPP DiNivo to Minister Thibeault (Del Duca) Re: Hydro Fees and Public Transportation

>>MPP DiNivo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Skyrocketing hydro costs have made it more expensive to take the TTC. Last year the TTC's hydro bill was up 13% from the previous year, even though it used about the same amount of electricity. Since the current Premier assumed office four years ago, the TTC's hydro rates have gone up by over 40%. The Premier said she wants to fix this quote-unquote mistake, but the TTC will not see the 25% in hydro bill reductions that she's promising in ads, ads by the way paid for with public dollars. Why did the Premier exclude the TTC from the-from-her hydro plan?

>> Premier Wynne: Minister of energy.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Honourable member for the question. Mr. Speaker, when it relates to Ontario's fair hydro plan, the first thing I think it's important for me to say about the TTC is that every rider on the TTC will be getting that 25% reduction, Mr. Speaker. On top of that, every single individual in Ontario's 444 municipalities will benefit from Ontario's fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker. But when it comes to the city of Toronto, which the TTC is part of, Mr. Speaker, they're going to see a 2 to 4% reduction in their electricity bills, Mr. Speaker. That's a modest reduction I know, Mr. Speaker. But there are also many other things that we do for municipalities, and we have many other programs that actually also help municipalities manage their energy costs, Mr. Speaker. For example the Ontario municipal energy plan program provides funding to municipalities. To help them plan for more efficient energy usage. We also helped with \$92 million from the green investment fund, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Dinivo: Thank you. Again back to the Premier, Mr. Speaker. I repeat, the TTC's hydro rates have increased by more than 40% since the Premier assumed office four years ago. The Premier's hydro plan will make bankers rich but it won't do anything to rein in the underlying costs of privatized hydro, which is making everything more expensive. The Premier's plan won't lower the TTC's hydro bills by 25% or even 17%. Why is the Premier spending public dollars to promote a hydro scheme that makes bankers rich while allowing the TTC's hydro rates to keep rising out of control, driving up fares and making life more expensive for transit riders?

>>Minister Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I thank the member opposite for her questions today. I -- you know, I can understand from the tail end of the second question that, at the root of what she's asking about, it relates, Speaker, of course to making sure that transit in Toronto and transit right around the province of Ontario is not only there but that it's accessible and affordable, Speaker. That member knows I've had the opportunity to say this repeatedly in this House and elsewhere, there is no government in Ontario history that has done more to support public transit in the city of Toronto and in the other 98 communities across Ontario that have transit, than this government under the leadership of Premier. That member knows a couple weeks ago we announced we will be doubling the provincial gas tax over the next four years providing the city of Toronto alone an additional \$170 million, provincewide total of additional \$35 million annually, Speaker, to all of the communities that have transit systems. We'll keep building. We'll keep getting it right.

MPP Kiwala to Minister Damerla Re: Senior Living Centers

>> MPP Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of seniors affairs. Minister I want to again congratulate you on becoming Minister for Ontario's first ever ministry of seniors affairs. Plau this is an important step that affirms our commitment and leadership towards care for seniors. Minister, I know

that you have been very busy in your new portfolio and you have travelled all across province, including visiting Christine McMillan and the Oasis group in my riding of Kingston and the Islands. Yesterday as part of bill 87, the seniors active living centre act was introduced in the House. If passed, this act will be a stronger, more flexible legislation than the current elderly persons centre act. This is great news for the over 260 existing centres that provide services to over 100,000 seniors. These are important and timely changes, and I'm hoping that the Minister.

>>Minister Damerla: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member from Kingston and the Islands for the important question. Speaker, our proposed seniors active living centres act was developed in recognition of the changing nature of demographics in Ontario. Mr. Speaker, over the next 25 years, the seniors population in Ontario is projected to double to 4 million people. And it's important that people are able to age in our province in a way that allows them to be active, healthy, safe and socially engaged. And elderly person centres play an important role in this. This act, Mr. Speaker, aims to modernize the framework for elderly person centre so they reflect the realities of today's seniors better. One very symbolic change, Mr. Speaker. Is that all demand, we are renaming the elderly person centres to seniors active living centres.

>> MPP Kiwala: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the Minister of seniors' affairs for her answer. This sounds like great legislation that I'm sure all members in this House will get behind. I have no doubt that the seniors' association of Kingston region in my riding will be pleased with the changes. With 675 dedicated volunteers, a spectacular number of dedicated community partners caring for our community's seniors in Kingston and the islands, and I would like to extend my warmest thanks to their continued effort and passion. Minister, I have to ask how did you determine what changes you would want to make to the current legislation? The E.P. C.s serve people of different backgrounds of different levels of health, skills and education of differing interests and speaking different languages. They also have --Program flexibility. Seeing how this program affects seniors across the province from Wawa to Windsor, large city and rural communities.

>>Minister Damerla; Thank you, Speaker. I again want to thank the member from Kingston and the Islands for her great question. Her question was how did we determine what changes to make to the seniors active living act, and, Mr. Speaker, the answer's very simple. We went to the seniors of Ontario to surveys, consultations and stakeholder input, we were able to hear from almost 80% of the elderly person centres, soon to be renamed seniors active living centres, and got a full picture on how to move forward with improving the program and the enabling legislation. Some of the proposed changes include empowering local communities, opening the program to potential future partnerships and reducing the administrative burden. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Harris to Minister Hoskins Re: Medical Drug Funding

>> MPP Harris: Thank you, Speaker. The question's to the Minister of health. Speaker, today Queen's Park has been again been visited by sufferers who continue to wait for provincial approval of a life altering treatment that's already been given the go-ahead by Health Canada. Sufferers of polycystic kidney disease, P.K.D., deal with the painful effects every tumours that can swell impacted kidneys up to the size of a football. Last year Health Canada approved the first ever P.K.D. Treatment, and yet Ontario has refused to cover this treatment under the public drug plan. Speaker, members of the P.K.D. Foundation are meeting with the Minister's office today. Some are here of course in the gallery. Will the Minister tell these patients why he's not covering the treatment that they so desperately deserve?

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. I welcome those who are here today to speak about polycystic kidney disease, which is indeed unfortunately a prevalent, all too prevalent but also very challenging condition for anyone to have. I think the member opposite should know by now, Mr. Speaker, that there's a process in place that the health Canada approval for a drug generally for specific indication is only the first and one step in a multistep process. At that time, once it's approved by health Canada, there's a requirement that it be examined for evidence of effectiveness, efficacy, and that historically needs to be done separately by each province and territory. Now we've created a process. In fact it's done nationally one time and that's the process we're applying here to review the evidence after health Canada's approval efficacy.

>> MPP Harris: We understand treatment is not for every patient. However P.K.D. Sufferers are here today with doctors who have outlined exactly those that would benefit and yet continue to wait for this important treatment. We've seen this story before. Rare disease sufferers continue to wait for action from the Minister's so-called working group that he used to shoot down our call for a rare disease select committee. Our committee would have been completed its work by now. We still await word of the actual work from the Minister's working group, even though we hear the report is in fact sitting on your desk. Rare disease patients are tired of waiting and P.K.D. Patients need answers. Speaker, will the Minister commit today to approve treatment for those P.K.D. Patients that will benefit from this important treatment and table the report his working group has completed? Thank you.

>> Minister Hoskins; Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I -- I assume it's ginarc the member opposite is referring to. He's nodding his head. The common drug review. In fact the common drug review recommended ginarc not be listed for the treatment of polycystic disease because it was not shown to definitively improve outcomes for patients with that disease. Tairbly the common drug review noted a number of safety concerns associated with the drug including liver injury, low sodium, gout, poly uriah, thirst and skin cancers. So it's important, Mr. Speaker, first of all we take the politics out of this. We leave it to the clinical experts, the frontline doctors, the scientists, the academics to review the evidence. They've invited the manufacturer to come forward if they have additional evidence. In the spirit of collaboration and transparency, I've identified specifically why that negative recommendations to date --