

CO Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Monday, November 27, 2017

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Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Monday, November 27, 2017.

MCI: PC MPP Gila Martow asked Education Min. Mitzie Hunter about French-immersion teacher shortages in Halton/Peel regions. Min. Hunter responded that MCI was helping EDU with recruitment of French-language educators.

MSA did not receive any questions of interest.

Official opposition questions included the following topics: the Ontario budget, child care spaces and palliative care. NDP Questions today included questions about the hydro-rate reduction plan, violence against healthcare workers and gender-neutral birth certificates.

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: November 27, 2017 11:52 AM
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Transcript of Provincial Question Period

41st Parliament, 2nd Session

Monday, November 27, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Fedeli to Minister Sousa Re: Ontario Budget

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you very much. Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of finance. Life is unaffordable in Ontario. Families are working harder, paying more and getting less than any other province in the country. That's why the government needs to do more to alleviate the tax burden on the middle class. This weekend the Ontario P.C. Party and our leader, Patrick Brown, laid out our plan. The people's guarantee. One part of that guarantee was a 22.5% cut to income taxes for the middle class. Mr. Speaker, an Ontario P.C. Government would bring real change for middle-class families. Why won't this Liberal government –

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, it's a real honour to be able to stand before you and the rest of this House to acknowledge the tremendous work that Ontarians have done to bring our economy to where it is today. And recognizing that those possible because of the stimulus and balanced approach we were taking to ensure we recover from this global economic downturn that's been sustained for a long period of time, and yet Ontario leads Canada. It leads the G-7, and for that matter, Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to create more jobs than ever before. The member opposite, the critic, the leader of the opposition has long advocated for balanced budgets and, Mr. Speaker, the largest deficit in Canadian history was voted by the leader of the opposition for \$16 billion. That is their plan, Mr. Speaker. They're taking the province into deficit going forward.

>> MPP Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. I'll send a copy of the plan over to you. You can have a real look at it, because Ontario used to be a province where if you worked hard, spent wisely and saved diligently a family could get ahead. They could build a better future for their children. But that's not the case in Ontario any longer, Speaker. Families are struggling and some are falling behind. They need help. That's why we know Ontario families need lower taxes. 22.5% lower income taxes for middle-class families, Speaker, would make a significant difference in the lives of those trying to get ahead. But, Mr.

Speaker, we can't trust the Liberals to make life more affordable. Why should anyone in Ontario trust them?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, this government under the leadership of Premier Kathleen Wynne, we have instituted Progressive measures while at the same time becoming and managing our expenses. We are providing free tuition for students, free pharmacare for everyone under the age of 25. 100,000 more child care spaces. And the member opposite is advocating for cuts, cuts to education and cuts to health care, Mr. Speaker. That is their plan. And what we on this side of the House will take a balanced approach to ensure that we can afford the things that matter to Ontarians, while that side is cutting revenues and cutting across the board the very services that matter to us. We on this side of the House will always look after the people of Ontario.

>> MPP Fedeli: Thank you. Back to the Minister. That is a complete fabrication, Speaker. For 14 years, we have seen Liberal insiders get rich at the expense of the people of Ontario. And while the government lined the pockets of high-priced executives, middle-class families struggled. It's not their imagination. Middle-class wages have stagnated for 14 years while Liberal taxes and fees continued to rise. Thanks to this government, middle-class Ontario is poorer than the average Canadian. So, Mr. Speaker, we have to ask, when did the Liberals decide they were the government for the insiders and no longer for the people?

>> Minister Sousa: Page 76 of their plan made it very clear, Mr. Speaker. Over \$12 billion is what's being cut across the board to the people of Ontario. So the question becomes what are you going to cut? And furthermore, Mr. Speaker, they're making decisions only on election cycles. They don't want to go long term unless beyond., Mr. Speaker, we have to have a long-term vision on things that matter. Speaker, over 800,000 net new jobs primarily in the private sector. The economy is growing. People -- I recognize that many across the province don't feel the same benefits as others with our prosperity. I did so in the fall economic statement and I hope the member opposite will approve and support the fall economic statement. That does real plan for the real people of this province to make sure they get real prosperity going forward.

MPP Fedeli to Minister Sousa Re: Ontario Budget

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you. My question's for the Minister of finance. First they disparage the auditor general. Then they disparage the financial accountability officer. And now they disparage Kevin Paige, the former budget officer. In the 1990s, Ontario's average income was 10% above the national average. But in 2012, income in Ontario fell below the national average for the first time ever. In fact, between 2005 and 2015, Ontario families saw the slowest rate of income growth of any province in Canada. Once the envy of the country, middle class Ontarians now struggle. They work harder, pay more and get less under this Liberal government. Mr. Speaker, why has Liberal government spent 14 years allowing the middle-class families to struggle. To keep their heads above water?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, that is rich coming from that side of the House. We're providing for an increase in minimum wage that they are now denying the people of Ontario, Mr. Speaker. Stand up -- people of Ontario -- 5.9% unemployment rate the lowest it's been and it's 31 months below the national average. We will continually support everyone in this province for the sake of the families of this province, Mr. Speaker. They're putting at risk their live hood. They are instituting a much more expensive carbon tax, Mr. Speaker, to the people of Ontario. We recognize -- We need to make it competitive for business

as competitive for the people of Ontario where everyone can share in that growth. That is why we are increasing minimum wage to \$15, and they are not.

>> MPP Fedeli: Back to the Minister. This government brought in some of the largest tax increases in Ontario's history. Between the health tax, the H.S.T. And other fees, the Liberals have made life unaffordable. Families every day email and call our offices. They share their stories and they tell us they just don't have any money left. That is why we can't trust this Liberal government, and that is why a P.C. Government will reduce income taxes for the middle class. That's why a P.C. Government will increase the Ontario sales tax credits, and that's why an Ontario P.C. Government will make life more affordable for Ontario families, Speaker. That's what is fair. Why won't the Liberals make life affordable for Ontario families?

>> Minister Sousa: So, Mr. Speaker, we know their plan in the past. We hear it now going forward. It's not much of a plan because what they're going to do in order to achieve deficits no less, Mr. Speaker. They're promoting deficit spending going forward and we are going to balance this year, next year and the year after that. And in order for them to achieve even a little bit of that deficit that they're proposing, they're going to go back to firing nurses, closing hospitals, reducing funding for health care. And, Mr. Speaker, we have been disciplined and determined in our plan to recover and plan to come to balance and it's being achieved. Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are going to put our economy in harm's way by taking extensive actions which they're proposing which will definitely put us at a disadvantage over jurisdictions around the world. We will continue to support Ontario.

>> MPP Fedeli: Back to the Minister. Speaker, this is about trust. This is about looking out for Ontario families across Ontario. This is about making life more affordable. That is why we need to lower taxes in Ontario. After years of line rals raiding middle-class families to pay their Liberal insiders. If you want to know what the Liberals will do, just look at what they've done for the last 14 years. The Ontario P.C.S will make life more affordable. Speaker, why do the Liberals continue to make it harder for Ontario families to succeed?

>> Minister Sousa: It is all about trust, Mr. Speaker, and I can tell you this. We can trust this government to the continue to fight for the people of Ontario, while the opposition, you can trust them to cut the very measures that matter to Ontarians. I can tell you this, Mr. Speaker. When we provided for free medicare for everyone under the age of 25 for pharmacare they voted against that, Mr. Speaker. They'll take that away. When we were talking about providing for fre tuition for students so they can get a better start in life, they voted against that as well, Mr. Speaker. And that's what you can trust from that side of the House. We can also trust that the opposition, federally, when the leader of the opposition informs power, voted in the largest deficit in our history. And the largest debt increase in Canadian history to pay for the leader of the opposition. And the critic now stands here and suggests that somehow cutting revenue. As well as -- and, Mr. Speaker, cutting revenues and going into deficit spending is not what's best for people of Ontario. We need to provide for programs and services that --

MPP Horwath to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question's for the acting Premier. For over a century Ontario's public hydro system made our province an economic powerhouse that provided good jobs and prosperity for Ontario's families and businesses. But after decades of Conservative and

Liberal privatization, Ontarians are now struggling to pay hydro bills that are skyrocketing. People literally have to choose between keeping the lights on and putting food on the table. In Ontario in 2017, this is just unacceptable. Why did this Liberal government pick up and run with the disastrous privatization policies of their Conservative predecessors and cost hydro bills for Ontario families and businesses to soar even further?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and talk about Ontario's fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, which is seeing a 25% reduction, that's happening right across the province in every single House hold. When it comes to Hydro One, Mr. Speaker, r1 and r2 customers will be seeing even further decreases, Mr. Speaker. They're seeing anywhere between 40 and 50% in reductions in their electricity bills. And that's because millimetre on this side of the House we acted. We recognized that too many folks that were living in northern and rural parts of our province were paying proportionally more than others in other parts of the province. So, Mr. Speaker, we worked with Hydro One. We worked with poverty groups. We've worked with rural associations, and we changed the triple rp to actually bring forward a further decrease, Mr. Speaker, to now where they can see their bills dropping. Between 40 and 50% per month inspect, Mr. Speaker. We've actually brought forward that and the first nation delivery tax credit. That is actually changing the lives of many of those people right around the province, Mr. Speaker .

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, they acted all right all right. Hydro rates have gone up 300% under this Liberal government. In fact they went up 50% just under this particular Premier. Apparently the Conservatives think this shows good hydro policy because they plan to continue the disastrous Liberal hydro plan if they win next year. When the Liberal -- when the Premier sold off Hydro One, she told Ontarians that it was a good thing, that it would eventually actually mean lower rates for families and businesses. But earlier this year a privatized Hydro One demanded a 20% distribution rate increase on people's hydro bills. Can the acting Premier tell us how increasing hydro bills for Ontario families who are already struggling to keep up is a good thing, Speaker ?

>> Minister Thibeault: The good thing, Mr. Speaker, was our plan to actually reduce Hydro One customers' bills between 40 and 50%, Mr. Speaker, that that member and that party voted against. When looking at the decision that's before the O.E.B. Right now, Mr. Speaker, we've actually said all along and part of the fair hydro plan is that we're keeping the costs to the rate of inflation, Mr. Speaker. So again making the numbers up, the costs will be held to the rate of inflation. Also, Mr. Speaker, depending on Hydro One's draft rate order it's estimated that the bill impact for 2017 will be an increase of 0.1%, and for 2018, Mr. Speaker, 0.2%. But that the again, Mr. Speaker, also comes on top of the 40 to 50% reduction that we brought forward to the people of Ontario through the fair hydro plan. Changing the rrrp, increasing the oesp, increasing the first nation delivery credit --

>> Andrea Horwath: I don't think anybody believes that a 300% increase and that a 40 to 50% decrease is leaving people better off. Still 250% increase, Speaker. The privatized Hydro One is putting private profit ahead of public interests. Earlier this year Hydro One signed a deal to buy evista. We all remember that, an American energy company, for more than \$6 billion. The O.E.B. Told hide row one that they're spending their money poorly. The O.E.B. Said that profits should go into improving the grid and reducing bills for families and businesses. Instead Hydro One plans to spend \$6 billion on an evista investment, which will do nothing other than line the pockets of private investors. Can the acting Premier tell us how the lining of pockets of private investors and shareholders will keep Ontario families and businesses. From paying skyrocketing hydro bills?

>> Minister Thibeault: Once again, Mr. Speaker, we've seen bills that Hydro One customers, r1 and r2 customers drop between 40 and 50%, Mr. Speaker. That is actually significantly lower than where they were last year, and we're seeing -- we're getting accolades, Mr. Speaker, from poverty groups, from organizations that have seen the changes by the fair hydro plan that we implemented, Mr. Speaker. Not with any help from the opposition of course, Mr. Speaker, because neither one of them wanted to help low-income individuals. They never even talked about it in their plan, Mr. Speaker. First nations. They have seen their delivery credits disappear. Changing the lives of many of our first nations people that live

on reserves, Mr. Speaker, and we're getting thanks from first nation organizations. When it comes to the acquisition of evista, Mr. Speaker, there will absolutely be no rate impact affecting the people of Ontario. As I said before, Mr. Speaker, we're seeing a reduction of between 40 and 50%.

MPP Horwath to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My next question's also for the acting Premier. Last week we learned Hydro One wants to spend millions to install prepaid meters. Prepaid hydro meters so it can actually bypass Ontario's rules against winter hydro disconnections. With the prepay meters Hydro One won't have to disconnect anyone. The power will get cut off automatically if the customer doesn't feed the meter. Why is the acting Premier cracking down on families who are already struggling to keep up with their sky-high hydro bills? Why are they bringing in prepay meters to the pvince of Ontario?

>> MPP Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Hydro One said last week, as I said last week, Mr. Speaker, there is no prepaid meters being brought forward by anybody, Mr. Speaker. There is an opportunity for Hydro One to explore an idea for folks to opt in if they choose but again, Mr. Speaker, the NDP Sees that as something coming forward. There is nothing coming forward with prepaid meters, Mr. Speaker. And of course this is still being reviewed by the O.E.B., Mr. Speaker. That's the quasi-judicial economic regulator for the province that always puts first the interests of the ratepayers, Mr. Speaker. So that still even has to be reviewed by the O.E.B.. So there's two paragraphs in a 2,000-plus page document that is talking about the Hydro One application. And at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, if this was to be approved, it's an opt-in program. It isn't something that everyone will actually have, Mr. Speaker .

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, prepaid meters do not belong in Ontario, period. They do not belong in our electricity system. And this government needs to put a stop to it. And I don't care whether it's -- Or whether it's on the front page of their policy platform for the next election. It should not be happening in this province. It hurts families and it will be extremely expensive for folks. According to the auditor general, Hydro One customers already overpay for overpriced botched rollouts of the smart meter program. And now we learned that the privatized Hydro One, which apparently this government doesn't control, even though they said they would, wants its customers to pay yet again for now new prepay meters. Will this acting Premier explain why a privatized Hydro One. Force people to install prepay meters so they can once again disconnect families who are struggling to pay their bills in the winter months?

>> Minister Thibeault: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is a law now that this House passed that actually bans winter disconnections. So again making it up as she goes along, Mr. Speaker. But also let's look at those Hydro One prepaid meters. It's an opt-in program if it's approved by the O.E.B.. Mr. Speaker, it's an opt in. No family will actually get this put on them. It's an opt-in program for people who think this might actually help them. But when it comes to choice, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to choice it's that party that voted against -- it's that party, Mr. Speaker, that voted against reducing hydro rates between 40 and 50%, helping families in northern and rural parts of the province. It's that party, Mr. Speaker, that voted against the increase in the Ontario electricity support program, helping low-income individuals. It's that party that voted against first nations. And their delivery credits that actually have changed the lives of thousands, over 20,000 first nations people on reserve, Mr. Speaker. We'll keep acting to -- People of Ontario.

>> Andrea Horwath: If a poor family alow-income family has a choice between a \$300 reconnection fee and a pay in advance meter, what do you think they're going to do? It's no choice whatsoever, Speaker.

No choice whatsoever. This Liberal government sold off its majority ownership of Hydro One, Ontario's oldest and most important public asset without consulting the people of Ontario without a mandate. It was a massive betrayal of Ontario families, and they're only just beginning to pay for it. It's already demanded higher transmission rates and distribution rates and it's just applied again to increase the rates paid by remote first nations. And it wants to force families and businesses to pay to install prepay meters to get around the ban on winter connections. How can the Conservative model -- how can they model their hydro policies after Conservative -- In fact how can Conservatives still in their policies model their new election platform on what the Liberals are doing -- So badly?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're happy to see the Conservatives recognize finally that the 25% reduction is the best way that you can help people in this province lower electricity bills, Mr. Speaker. Also Hydro One customers and six other jurisdictions, six other L.D.C.S are seeing their rates lowered by 40 to 50%, Mr. Speaker. It's this government that invested in making sure that we spent \$70 billion rebuilding a system. It's this government that made sure that we eliminated coal from our electricity supply, Mr. Speaker. When you do that, Mr. Speaker, when you eliminate coal, we've reduced in Ontario, in Ontario 23% air pollution deaths, Mr. Speaker, have been reduced in southern Ontario. 41%, Mr. Speaker, hospitalizations. And that's thanks to the investment of this government. No less, Mr. Speaker, both opposition parties voted against that.

MPP Jones to Minister Matthews Re: Child Care Spaces

>> MPP Sylvia Jones: After 14 years, families work harder, pay more and get less. My question's for the Deputy Premier. One example are hard working parents struggling to find and pay for child care. Let's say they have a House hold income of \$55,000 and they have two children 3 and 5. Patrick Brown and the Ontario P.C.S think families deserve deservable help to cover their child care costs and that's why we would create a new Ontario child care refund. Our plan means that families would be eligible for over \$10,000 in child care costs. Families need child care spaces they can afford and our people guarantee does just that. Why have the Liberals allowed child care costs to become the most expensive in the country?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. And the party opposite has demonstrated their ability to promise anything to get elected. And then as soon as they get elected change their mind, Speaker. So these are the same old Tories, Speaker. They will cut services families depend on. You know, I'm not making this up. If you turn -- Speaker, if you turn to page 76 in the magazine that was released this weekend, Speaker, you will see in a small as font as possible, \$12 billion in cuts. Make no mistake about it, Speaker. very services that families are -- Threatened with cuts. We've seen it before. It's a fine tradition, Speaker, in that party. \$12 billion in cuts. We want you to come clean and say --

>> MPP Jones: I will take no lessons from this government. Spend money. Start acting like it. Where in your platform did you say you were going to sell off Hydro One? Ontario families are working harder than ever to build a better future for their children, yet they don't feel like they're getting ahead. In Ontario child care has become increasingly unaffordable and out of reach for families. Ontario has the highest child care costs in the country. This means even if parents are able to find a child care space, they may not be able to afford it. That's your Liberal legacy. Life has become so unaffordable. Mr. Speaker, why has this Liberal government allowed child care costs. To become the most expensive in Canada?

>> Minister Matthews: Speaker, let's be clear. This magazine contains a number of initiatives that are designed to be popular. I get that. But the big hole, Speaker, is where is the money coming from? And it's hidden, Speaker, on the bottom of page 76. I will happily send page 76 over to the member opposite in case she hasn't had a chance to read and right through to the very end of the platform, Speaker. Oh, then look. Maybe read it and you'll see page 76 -- Down at the bottom. \$12 billion of mystery cuts. Where are those cuts coming from? It is coming from closing hospitals? Is it coming from cutting home care? Is it coming from closing schools? Is it coming from ending free tuition? Is it coming from ending pharmacare, Speaker? Where are you going to find \$12 billion?

MPP Forster to Minister Flynn Re: Violence Against Healthcare Workers

>> MPP Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Every Ontarian working should be safe on the job. But here in Ontario today, health care workers are being put in harm's way day in and day out. Violence against health care workers is pervasive and is getting worse as hospitals overcrowding and underfunding continues as part of the Liberals' cuts. Nurses, personal support workers and frontline staff are experiencing physical trauma, verbal abuse, sexual harassment and assault. In fact we've seen nurses come forward who have suffered fractured legs and arms, bites, human bites and even stab wounds. It's simply unacceptable and it has to stop. So why is this Liberal government doing nothing to end this epidemic in the workplace of violence and not keeping our incredibly dedicated health care workers safe?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the Honourable member for that very important question. I'm glad she's asked that question, Speaker, because it's something we are doing about -- it's something we are doing something about and it's something that we understand has become an issue in our health care facilities. What we have done, Speaker, is we've invited all parties to a leadership table that's been in existence now, Speaker, for going on two years. They did a year's worth of work, Speaker, focusing direct LI on the hospital sector. This was organized labour. This was management. This was a nurses' union, Speaker. This was a Minister of labour. The Minister of health was very active on the committee. Speaker, we came forward with the first phase of that directly aimed, Speaker, at hospitals. As we move into phase two, Speaker, we're going to look at places where personal support workers would work. We're going to look at places where things like family, family health teams. Those types of things, Speaker. It is an issue. We need to deal with it. People in Ontario need to know they work in safe workplaces. We're acting on it, Speaker.

>> MPP Forster: Speaker, this has been going on for years. Health care workers need action, not talk. Violence has been normalized and swept under the rug inside our hospitals and inside our long-term care homes, and this government's cuts and layoffs are only making the problem worse. When there aren't enough staff to provide the care to high-risk patients, workers are always put in danger. They do their best to provide great care with the protection and support they need. All too often these nurses and personal support workers suffer physical, verbal and sexual assaults and sometimes they're never able to return to work again. What will this government do to start funding proper staffing levels in hospitals and in long-term care homes to stop the epidemic of violence that's hurting our health care workers?

>> Minister Flynn: Speaker, the workplace violence prevention leadership table has worked really well, Speaker, and I believe it's offensive to the members of that committee, who have been working on it, Speaker, for between a year and two years now. And these are people from organized labour. These are the nurses themselves, Speaker. These are the patient advocates. These are the people, Speaker, that are front line. These are the people that realize that there's an issue there and are working very, very hard

to solve those issues, Speaker. We as the Minister of labour are going to get into each and every one of those hospitals. We're going to explain what needs to be done. We're going to make sure that people understand that violence in the health care sector is not an option, will not be tolerated. There's zero tolerance, Speaker. We are going to make sure that the people who are patients, doctors, nurses, employers understand if you work in health care in Ontario, Speaker. Nobody gets hurt in that situation.

MPP Martins to Minister Hoskins Re: Palliative Care

>> MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Speaker. My question this morning is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. We know that our government has been committed to ensuring that Ontarians have access to high quality compassionate palliative and end of life care in their home or as close to home as possible. We also know that everyone in Ontario deserves to age with dignity. This has been a priority for residents of my riding of Davenport. Our government began investing in hospice and palliative care in 2005, when \$115.5 million was invested in the end of life care strategy. Since then we have been making massive strides and we know there is still more to come. Our government is investing a total of \$155 million in hospice and palliative care over the next three years. With last year's 2016 budget announcing a commitment of \$75 million in additional funding over the next three years. Account Minister please share with us what these investments mean for the future of hospice and palliative care here in Ontario?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you. And thank you to the member from Davenport for giving me an opportunity to discuss the important Ontario investments that we're making in palliative care. And let me take the opportunity as well to welcome those joining us today from hospice palliative care Ontario and thank them for their tireless efforts. To ensure every person and family in this province can quickly and easily access the finest standard of hospice palliative care when required, Mr. Speaker. And I'd also like to recognize my parliamentary assistant MPP Fraser, the MPP For Ottawa south, who has been at the fore. Of creating an Ontario-wide strategy for both palliative care and end of life care, Mr. Speaker. There has been no greater advocate for palliative care in this legislature than my parliamentary assistant and the F.C.C. -- MPP For Ottawa south, Mr. Speaker. He has travelled across the province to hear from patient groups, caregivers, diverse communities and health care providers and the result has been our strategy, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Martins: Thank you, Minister, for sharing that with us. Also thank you to the member for Ottawa Centre for his advocacy and great work on this particular file. Last month our government announced a new program to support the creation of new and expanded hospices across Ontario. Through this program, eligible hospices can apply for significant capital funding to help with the construction or renovation costs of more than 190 beds that will serve more than 2,000 additional clients and their families each year. Residential hospices are so important as they provide expert care in home life environments giving families and friends the care they need to be with their loved ones at one of the most vulnerable times in their lives. Access to hospice and palliative care is so important to my constituents and to communities across Ontario. Can the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please inform this House of the other initiatives that will improve the hospice and palliative care in Ontario?

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Minister, for sharing that with us. Also thank you to the member for Ottawa Centre for his advocacy and great work on this particular file. Last month our government announced a new program to support the creation of new and expanded hospices across Ontario. Through this program, eligible hospices can apply for significant capital funding to help with the construction or renovation costs of more than 190 beds that will serve more than 2,000 additional clients and their families each year. Residential hospices are so important as they provide expert care in home

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MPP Yurek to Minister Hoskins Re: Palliative Care

>> MPP Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Speaker, in 2014 Ontario's auditor general highlighted the dismal state of palliative care in Ontario which has resulted in inequitable access, inefficient use of funding and a patchwork of varied services and standards across province. Health quality Ontario is estimated only about 30% of patients get the palliative care they should. This will only grow due to a rapidly growing demand in aging population. Now we've learned through internal documents obtained through freedom of information request government will fall 35% short of its only goal of expanding hospice access. Speaker, could Minister explain why this ministry will not be providing the recommended amount of palliative care beds?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I've just spoken about the investments that we've made. We were the first government to begin funding hospices in this province. I find it curious, and I think it's a 78-page "People" magazine that the opposition has created, that there is not a single mention, not even one time is the word palliative mentioned in that 78-page document. But, Mr. Speaker, I'm so excited about what just came out in the "Globe and mail." The headline "Patrick Brown's fiscally risky economically dubious plan for Ontario." "Give Ontario Progressive Conservative leader full marks for salesmanship with the manifesto." The problem with the people's guarantee. "Is that it's a bit too clever, fiscally risky and economically incoherent," Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Yurek: What we do know is that after 14 years of this Liberal government, we have a rationed health care system, decreased hospital services. We have increased staff layoffs and we have a demoralized health care professionals. Speaker, this province needs change and the people guaranteed change -- In the province. Speaker, back to the Minister, research shows that access to a palliative care approach is better not only for its patients but for families. It reduces stress, improves quality of life and patient satisfaction and places less burden on caregivers. Due to this government's waste and mismanagement patients across province are not receiving the proper care they need and often go without palliative care. Ontario needs 1,300 hospice and palliative care beds but have now only 341 of these beds are available in this province. Speaker, I spoke to a palliative care physician this weekend in London that's falling apart with access to palliative care and this government is ignoring the situation. If this government continues to make -- Access to care, it's time for them to follow through on their promises. Speaker, will the Minister explain to this House why. They are falling short --

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, maybe there's a volume two of their "People" magazine. Mr. Speaker, in 78 pages, not a single word reference to palliative care. We should have had this conversation last week and I would have alerted the member opposite to the importance of actually developing a strategy on this. But the P.C.S have no plan for Ontario but what they do have and now it's in black and white -- they can't walk this back -- they have a document that tries to hide \$12 billion in cuts. And it's there for everybody to see on page 76, where they are -- they talk about value for money audits. In brackets. Indicating a cut. A cut from the 12 billion-dollar cut over the next mandate which is what's proposed. It's even worse than what was proposed by Mike Harris when he was in power, Mr. Speaker. So we know exactly what their plans are. Promise the world. Make a glossy document and cut, cut, cut.

MPP DiNovo to Minister MacCharles Re: Gender-Neutral Birth Certificates

>> MPP Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Speaker, six months ago this government refused to issue Joshua M. Ferguson a birth certificate reflecting their correct sex designation. In Ontario nonbinary folks still cannot amend their birth certificate to anything other than male or female categories. While jurisdictions like Newfoundland and northwest territories have already acted, in Ontario, a human rights complaint has been filed against this Liberal government. It has been six years since Toby's law passed. Why is this government dragging its feet? How long, Mr. Speaker, does it take to change a form?

>> Minister Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member for Parkdale- High Park for this question and her tremendous work on this file. Speaker, our government does value acceptance, respect and diversity. We're committed to ensuring all Ontarians are treated ethically, equitably including the trans and nonbinary community. And similar to the driver's licence and health care policies we've already implemented, we are developing that gender-neutral option for Ontario's birth certificate. We've taken significant steps to develop that certificate for Ontarians, and my plan is to deliver that no later than spring of 2018. And we're working with other levels of government, particularly the federal government, to make sure we get this important identity document right. And I'll be pleased to provide more details in the supplementary.

>> MPP DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again back to the Minister. It's been six years, and as the Minister said, we already have the "X" option for driver's licence and health cards. So what's the problem? Why is the option not available for birth certificates? A birth certificate is a foundational document without which Josh was unable to get a passport with a correct sex designation. This limits their ability to travel and exercise basic human rights. The government already admitted that there are negative consequences for those who don't have identification congruent with their gender identity. I ask the Minister to look at Joshua Ferguson, who is here in the gallery today, and commit to issuing a birth certificate with their correct sex designation right now.

>> Minister MacCharles: Speaker, I too want to acknowledge Joshua Ferguson and guest here today to address this important issue. We know the federal government has indicated it is moving forward to remove sex designation from passports, and for the time being they have an interim measure I understand that will be added to the passport to direct the reader of the passport to ignore the indicated sex on the certificate and read as an "X." Now that that's occurred, Speaker, Ontario will continue its work on developing a system for the issuance of nonbinary birth certificate. We've consulted significantly on this issue in this community with thousands of respondents, and we want to get this right. We also, Speaker, introduced a new policy to help trans and nonbinary persons live according to their gender identity. These rules will help guide ministries in how they Collect -- And use information and I was very pleased today to receive a letter from our human rights commissioner commending the support and leadership of this government on this very policy.

MPP Vernile to Minister Ballard Re: Climate Change Action Plan

>> MPP Daiene Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of the environment and climate change. Speaker, we know that climate change is a real and imminent threat. In fact it's possibly the greatest global challenge that we face today. The world has seen an increase in weather related events in the past decade, and scientists are attributing this in part to climate change caused by human activity. Speaker, a recent study shows that more than half of Americans believe that climate change contributed to the severity of the recent hurricanes in Florida and in Texas. And Ontarians are worried, too, including people in my riding of Kitchener centre. In fact about one third of Ontarians anticipate significant consequences in the next two decades due to climate change and virtually all Ontarians are expecting a food price increase. Speaker, could the Minister please explain to this House what actions are we are taking to deal with climate change in Ontario?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the hardworking member for Kitchener Centre for that important question. Speaker, our government is well aware that climate change is a growing threat to the live livelihoods and well-being to people across the world including here in Ontario. And I can say Ontarians know we are not immune to climate change and they are concerned and they want a plan that takes meaningful action. So to help Ontarians adapt to climate change, Speaker, we're creating a new organization to give municipalities, indigenous communities and businesses the most up-to-date climate data. This data will help Ontarians make decisions informed by a better understanding of the risks imposed by climate change, Speaker. Working with climate change adaptation experts we're going to undertake a provincewide risk assessment. To better understand -- prioritize our actions. Our government is taking strong actions to help Ontarians adapt to climate change.

>> MPP Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to thank the Minister for his dedication and for his answer. Another stat for you. 70% of Ontarians expect that our province is going to experience more forest fires, more very severe storms and hot Summers and that we're going to see a loss of habitat and the extinction of plants and animals in the coming decades. We know that Ontario will be facing challenges as we continue to adapt to climate change. Speaker, this government is prepared to address those challenges head on with a plan that is smart, responsible and affordable. Because of bold and innovative action that we have taken, Ontario is now recognized as a global leader in the fight against climate change. Speaker, could the Minister please describe how this government has a plan to tackle climate change while creating fairness and opportunity in this province?

>> Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you again to the member from Kitchener centre. Speaker, our government is helping Ontarians fight climate change in their everyday lives through millions of dollars of investments in green solutions. You know, Speaker, Patrick Brown and the P.C.S have said that they would scrap our climate change action plan and cut these investments. Speaker, just this morning I was at sick children's hospital announcing an important investment to help our hospital fight -- Thank you, Speaker. Let me continue. I was at sickkids hospital announcing an important investment to help our hospital fight climate change while increasing patient comfort. These are exactly the kinds of investments in Ontario's future that the party opposite is threatening to cut, Mr. Speaker. You know, our plan is more than putting a price on carbon, Mr. Speaker. Investing in Ontario's future. Mr. Speaker, Patrick Brown wants you to pay more for everything so that he can pretend to care about climate change.

MPP Martow to Minister Hunter Re: French-Language Education

>> MPP Gila Martow: [Speaking in French]. Voice of Translator: To the Minister of education, Mr. Speaker. As the francophone affairs critic, I've approached as many different -- I've had interactions with parents that are frustrated by the lack of services and lack of francophone education in their regions recently. The school board has considered to eliminate the francophone education services in Halton. The Minister's help has been required to ensure francophone education. Why is the minute -- has the Minister not acted? Ette [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Minister of education. [End of Translation]

>> Minister Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. And I want to thank the member opposite for this question, because it gives me an opportunity to talk about all of the work that we're doing to support French language education in this province. And there's no question the demand for French as a second language has increased by 76% I believe. And that's a recognition that having a second language is an advantage. And parents and students are choosing more options in French as a second language. There's a recognition that the supply of French language educators is outstripping the demand and that is the reason why we have a plan in place that has been developed with the input of French language stakeholders to increase that supply of French language educators. And we're doing things that are -- Innovative like working together with the ministry of citizenship and immigration to recruit those people who have education training in French language and to support --

>> MPP Martow: [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Once again to the Minister. The popular French immersion programs are essential in terms of using the French in Ontario., Mr. Speaker, we know for a number of years that there are not enough teachers in French in order to adequately ensure that the French immersion program is supported and offered in January 2016 I spoke about the waiting list in the region of Peel for students. Why does it take an impending election for the Minister of finance to act? [End of Translation]

>> Minister Hunter: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has it wrong. Yes, she recognizes that there is an increase in the demand for French language education which necessitates an increase in French language teachers. And, Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what our plan that we have in place is \$. We are recruiting more French language teachers and we're doing that in a targeted way. We're working with the teachers' Colleges in Ottawa and in other locations to do just that. And, Mr. Speaker, we believe that every student in this province deserves the best education possible. We've seen an increase in our graduation rate by 1% since 2003, Mr. Speaker. And we are going to continue to invest in education, unlike the party opposite, Mr. Speaker, that just put out a plan this weekend that had no reference. To the plan for education other than a \$12 billion cut, which will impact our school board's -- In this province, Mr. Speaker

MPP Horwath to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Wait-Times

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: My question's for the acting Premier. There's an overcrowding and hallway medicine crisis in Ontario's hospitals thanks to the Conservatives HOL closed 28 hospitals, fired 6,000 nurses and closed over 7,000 hospital beds and the Liberals who have cut or frozen hospital budgets for years, Speaker. A young man from Ottawa knows this all too well. On Friday Ottawa hospital was at 108% occupancy he was waiting in the overcrowded E.R. In pain with a back injury. He asked for help. He said he needed to lie down because the pain was so bad. That's when he was told to lie on the dirty floor in the emergency waiting room. Can the acting Premier explain why Ottawa hospital system so overcrowded that a young man in pain was told to lie on the floor instead of on a stretcher while waiting for medical care?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we understand that across this province, for a variety of reasons, there are hospitals that are facing challenges. Regardless of that, they are providing the best possible, the absolute highest quality care. I know and I commend the Ottawa hospital, the civic site, Mr. Speaker, for the work that they're doing now with the individual to get to the bottom of precisely what happened during that incident, Mr. Speaker. I know that the leader of the third party understands there's often a complexity surrounding a specific incident and occurrences but the Ottawa hospital is looking into it and doing that as appropriate as they should with the individual. But, Mr. Speaker, what we've done in the past weeks is we've created and added the equivalent of six new community hospitals. Across this province. 1,200 new acute care beds, 500 plus transitional beds and 200 beds of supportive housing and affordable housing for seniors, Mr. Speaker .

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker frontline staff are caring dedicated individuals who are doing the best they can under the immense pressure that decades of cuts from both Conservatives and Liberals have made on our hospitals. A nurse who witnessed the incident said this and I quote -- I have been on the other side and I understand the frustrations of the staff attempting to give quality care with limited resources after staff and bed cuts. I know how deflated they feel when they're unable to do so. The Liberal government has allocated 45 temporary beds to Ottawa hospitals and only half the amount of money that it actually takes to run those 45 beds. This will not solve the overcrowding crisis. When will the Liberal government take this crisis that has been years in the making seriously and make drastic improvements to our hospitals to make sure nothing like this ever happens again?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are making substantial investments, as I mentioned. More than 1,200 acute care beds across this province, the equivalent of six community hospitals. But since the leader of the third party introduced her question with a comment about the P.C.S record, I feel it incumbent upon me myself to also remind Ontarians that they closed, themselves, not the NDP Party when they were in government, 9,600 acute care beds, including, Mr. Speaker, 13% of all the mental health beds and I believe it's 24% of the acute beds in hospitals, Mr. Speaker. And then remarkably their Minister -in-waiting, their Minister of cuts announced an additional half billion dollars in cuts should they have formed government in 2014, cuts that would have come to health care and education. It's very similar to the P.C. Platform. Cuts of \$12 billion. I don't know if there's a race going on or not, Mr. Speaker. But it's worrisome.

MPP Qaadri to Minister Hunter Re: Indigenous Education in Schools

>> MPP Shafiq Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of education Honourable Mitzi Hunter. As part of our key support of pluralism and diversity, we will believe all students -- history, culture and contribution and perspectives of first nation, métis and Inuit in Canada. [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: We must honour northerly and celebrate the -- [End of Translation] Commitment to reconciliation with indigenous peoples and put forward a series of actions on this journey together. One of the commitments we made as part of the truth and reconciliation commission called to action to discourage the use of team names and logos and mascots considered offensive. Speaker, I understand the ministry of education has taken steps to fulfil this call. Speaker, to the Minister, what are we in fact doing to make schools safe -- And accepting for all?

>> Minister Mitzi Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I want to say thank you to the member from Etobicoke North for this great question. It's a very timely question. Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to

supporting all Ontario school boards in their efforts towards reconciliation and rebuilding of relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous people. Through trust, understanding and mutual respect. We know that perpetuating stereotypes, biased or false generalizations about indigenous peoples, cultures and tradition can have a negative impact on individuals, staff and communities, as well as with school CLI -- the school climate itself. That's why in January we released a memo asking for us to do a review of existing team mascots and logos and work closely with their indigenous education board leads, indigenous education advisory councils, students and council staffs answer. About school teams' logos and mascots and to work with those communities. To look into these issues, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker. I think it's important of course that our government is taking action to make sure our schools are welcoming environments for all students. Our government's committed, Speaker, as you'll know in working together with indigenous partners and build trusting, respectful and mutually beneficial relationships within schools and make our schools safe and inclusive and accepting for all whether indigenous or non-indigenous. Important to ensure our education system is inclusive and respectful. I know there are a number of initiatives coming forward bringing this to fruition. [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Will the Minister be able to elaborate on the measures that the government is implementing? [End of Translation]

>> Minister Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you again to the member for Etobicoke north. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I want to say thank you for all the partners for their work to help create a more inclusive environment for all students. Last week we spent a follow-up to boards requesting they -- students wearing indigenous themed sports clothing and costumes to school. We've asked boards to take steps to promote a safe and inclusive and accepting school climate including with respect to safe school policies and practices such as school dress codes and bullying prevention plans. Together we can ensure that our schools are safe, inclusive and welcoming environments for all students. We also recently released our province's first ever education equity action plan to provide more resources to boards to identify and eliminate discriminatory practices, stereotypes. So that all students, regardless of background, are supported. Our government remains committed to supporting safe, welcoming, respectful and inclusive learning environments for all students.

MPP Hardeman to Minister Matthews Re: Cost-of-Living in Ontario

>> MPP Ernie Hardeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Deputy Premier. We've been warning this government that living in Ontario is becoming more and more unaffordable. This morning the Ontario food bank association released their annual hunger report. Half a million people needed a food bank last year just to make ends meet and put food on the table, an increase of more than 150,000 people in the last year alone. Daily bread food bank's users are spending 70% of their income on housing because of the lack of supply of rentals and yet this government's policies have resulted in thousands every rental units being cancelled. Deputy Premier, when you look at the impact on these families, do you still think your housing policies are fair?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Speaker, I know the Minister responsible for poverty reduction will want to speak to this. But I do need to -- I need to make it clear, Speaker, that in the new platform, the magazine that has been released by the party, I'm looking and I'm not seeing anything that would respond to the very concern that you have raised, Speaker. So in fact quite the contrary, because your plan contains \$12 billion of cuts, Speaker. We remember the last time you were governing that your party was in government, Speaker. Social assistance rates were slashed and then they were frozen. Minimum wage was frozen. So you've got 12 billion dollars to make up and you haven't even begun to address the

issues related to poverty, Speaker. So I'm looking forward to volume 2. I'm sure it's going to be in that one.