

CO Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Tuesday, April 25, 2017

From: "Herman, Alan (MCI)" <alan.herman@ontario.ca>
To: "@MCI-L-Comm-MCI-MO Top Issues" <mci.l.comm.mci.mo.top.issues@ontario.ca>, "
@MCI-L-Comm-MCI Top Issues" <mci-l-comm-mcitopissues@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "
@MCI-L-Comm-OSS-MO Top Issues" <mci.l.comm.oss.motopissues@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "
@MCI-L-OSS All Staff" <ontariosenior'ssecretariat@mcl.gov.on.ca>
Date: Tue, 25 Apr 2017 12:24:19 -0400
Attachments: 20170425 - Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript.doc (119.3 kB)

Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Tuesday April 25, 2017.

MCI did not receive any questions of interest.

There was an MIT question of interest:

MPP Mike Colle asked a question about U.S. tariffs against Canadian softwood lumber. Min. McGarry responded that the government has increased the amount of Ontario wood in large-scale building construction in the province, as well as had provided additional funding to the forestry industry to reduce costs for road construction and maintenance on public access roads. The hiring of Jim Peterson as Ontario's softwood advocate was also raised.

MSA did not receive any questions of interest.

Opposition questions varied, with a slight emphasis on health-related questions.

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

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

Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Tuesday, April 25, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

Table of Contents

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne
Re: Basic Income

MPP Brown to Minister Sandals
Re: Government Polling

MPP Singh to Premier Wynne (Hoskins)
Re: Provincial Pharmacare

MPP Gelinas to Minister Hoskins
Re: Provincial Pharmacare

MPP Yurek (Hillier) to Minister Hoskins
Re: rural Access Medical Treatment

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault
Re: Hydro Rate Reduction

MPP Martins to Minister Sousa (Ballard)
Re: Affordable Housing Act

MPP McDonell to Minister Hoskins
Re: Hospital Wait Times

MPP Singh to Minister Flynn
Re: Basic Income

MPP McMeekin to Minister Jaczek (Ballard)
Re: Poverty Reduction Pilot Program

MPP Scott (Martow) to Minister MacCharles (Flynn)
Re: Hearing Society Strike

MPP Fife to Minister Naidoo-Harris
Re: Childcare Fees

MPP Colle to Minister McGarry
Re: Dairy Farmer Protection

MPP N. Miller to Minister Mauro
Re: Ring of Fire Development

MPP Gretzky to Minister Ballard (Flynn)
Re: Hearing Society Strike

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne Re: Basic Income

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Yesterday, Minister of the crown made a \$150 million announcement. That's no small amount of money. What was the Minister's response when she was asked where the money was coming from. She said, this is a direct quote, I'm actually not quite sure where it's coming from. Can you believe that, Mr. Speaker? She actually said she had no idea where the funds were coming from. Mr. Speaker, can the Premier tell us where the money is coming from for that announcement.

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Some members in the party opposite might know, has talked about this and worked with researchers. To have the opportunity as a government, Speaker, to put in place a pilot project on a basic income at a time when work is uncertain, Mr. Speaker, when we have a global economy that is uncertain, we know that finding the data, getting the information from this basic income pilot is extremely important, not just here in Ontario Mr. Speaker. Internationally, there's a great deal of attention being paid to the outcome of the pilot, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier, and I didn't get the answer to the question where the funds were going to come from. The Minister has no idea. Mr. Speaker, the reality is, and this might be a news flash for this government, money doesn't grow on trees. It has to come from somewhere. The spin afterwards it could come from the budget. The budget doesn't pay taxes. The

budget doesn't pay fees. Taxpayers pay fees. Taxpayers work hard. A government right now completely disrespectful to taxpayer funds make an announcement with no idea how they're going to pay for them, Mr. Speaker, the government made an announcement yesterday. They had no idea where it's coming from. Can the Premier show this legislature the decency to tell us where that 150 million is going to come from.

>> Premier Wynne: I look forward to Thursday, Mr. Speaker, how it will be laid out very clearly how our balanced budget builds on the platform, Mr. Speaker, we have put in place over the last number of years. We have been working hard to invest in the people of this province which we have been doing all along. To balance the budget, Mr. Speaker, actually gives us the opportunity to make the next step, to further invest in the people of this province and do the things that we know are necessary in order to build the inclusive economy that we know is necessary for this province and for the people struggling with uncertainty, Mr. Speaker. Now, I'm not surprised that the leader of the opposition doesn't support the basic income pilot. I'm not surprised at all. This is a party that has a history of cutting public services, Mr. Speaker, of actually undermining the foundation of the social safety network and the services that have been delivered in this province. This is a good thing, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: If the Liberals were sincere about their announcement they would have some idea how they're going to pay for it. After 14 years, Ontarians work more, pay more and get less in Liberal Ontario. It worries me Mr. Speaker when they make announcements with no clue how it's going to be paid for. If there's one thing they're good at, it's raising taxes. When they make an announcement with no clue how it's going to be paid for, the reality is it's new taxes. Mr. Speaker, can the Premier assure us they're not going to pay for this announcement through new taxes.

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I can assure the member opposite of is we will be bringing in a balanced budget on Thursday, Mr. Speaker, a balanced budget that will allow us to make investments in the lives of people in this province. A basic income pilot, Mr. Speaker, is part of that, making sure that we have the evidence to demonstrate whether such an initiative would actually been able to be rolled out across the province, Mr. Speaker, whether it would help with the precarious employment and the realities of displacement because of technology, Mr. Speaker because of -- the changing nature of work, Mr. Speaker, this is a huge opportunity. To get evidence that will help us to make good decisions going forward, not just us but internationally, Mr. Speaker

MPP Brown to Minister Sandals Re: Government Polling

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. We know the Liberal government gave the gandolph group \$3 million of taxpayers money to complete polling. Let's remember the gandolph group is leadbitter Liberals' campaign manager David hurley. Mr. Speaker, can we get some assurances today from the Premier that this thank you to David hurley ended at the 3 million mark. Can the Premier assure us no more taxpayer money is going to be used to fund the gandolph group?

>> Minister Liz Sandals: Just a second, I have to give it to president of the treasury board. We will sort this out. And the government advertising act is very, very clear. If we -- the people who get government advertising contracts actually go through a competitive procurement process. So if anybody, any firm, has a contract to do government advertising, that firm has gone through a procurement process. Some of them might have been Liberal. Some might have Tory ties. Some might have NDP Ties. Some might have no ties. It doesn't actually matter because what they all have in common is that they go through a public procurement process.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier, I can appreciate why the Premier doesn't want to be on the record. \$3 million to the gandolph group, \$3 million and the Minister says there's a strict process. Is the qualification to be on the Liberal campaign team? This doesn't add up. The reality is that the research that has been released publicly, they're not even using the polling. The polling said 70% were against the fire sale of Hydro One. They don't care. They proceeding. 80%

oppose ending healthcare services. They cut the budget anyway. You don't use the polling. The impression left, this is simply a thank you to your campaign manager. Be honest to the people of Ontario and explain why the \$3 million is spent on the Liberal campaign manager.

>> Minister Sandals: Thank you, and my apologies. You're usually asking about advertising. Sorry. I didn't catch it. But the answer is actually to say if you are going to mark research for the government, you must go through a competitive procurement process. And the gandolph group like incredibl-- anybody else who does market research for the government of Ontario has gone through a -- And the decisions about which surrender is suitable after there's an additional bid, a bureaucratic process, not a government process or a political process to arrive at the --

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier, I appreciate the Premier could answer this for the House. This Liberal thank you program worth millions of dollars go out to the campaign officials, one of the questions they polled was interesting. They're asking what the public support would be for raising the hst. Of course, the vast majority of Ontario, 69% oppose the idea. They have ignored all the previous polling. Can we now assume we're going to see a raise in the hst. Can the Premier assure the House today that the hst is not going to be raised?

>> Minister Sandals: Yeah. Thank you. And apparently the member opposite hasn't quit understood yet that this sacompetitive process. We have a number of tenders on our market research vendor of record list. For example, I'm quoting from the 2014-15 account which you have access to. The other market research included forum research, ipsos Reid, strategic counsel, e-cost research, harris/decima research. So it isn't just one firm. A variety of firms have been the winner when it comes to competitive procurement of government contracts for market research. In fact, it doesn't matter what you procure. It is a competitive program.

MPP Singh to Premier Wynne (Hoskins) Re: Provincial Pharmacare

>>MPP Jagmeet Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Question to the Premier. More than 2 million Ontarians do not have drug coverage. One in four Ontarians cannot purchase the drug medications that they need to save their lives. Ontario is one of the wealthiest provinces or one of the wealthiest countries in the world. It's simply inseparable in the current situation. People are going without the medication that will save their lives. This is just unbelievable. Does the Premier think that it's okay for this to go on in our province?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, as a government we know how critical it is for the people to have access to affordable and quality healthcare close to home. That includes pharmacare, Mr. Speaker. We believe that increasing access to pharmacare is a good idea. And we understand that this is an extremely important issue for the people of Ontario and the Minister of health has been engaged in this conversation across the country, Mr. Speaker. We understand that this is a very important idea. And I appreciate the question from the member.

>>MPP Singh: New Democrats believe in national pharmacare. We have been waiting for national pharmacare for 50 years. If Tommy Douglas had waited for the federal government to act, we would have American-style healthcare here in Ontario. I don't think that people should have to wait. I don't think that people should have to wait for the federal government to act in order to have access to medication that will save their lives. Ontario new Democrats are going to do something about it. That's why we have announced our plan for pharmacare. How long is this government going to have people wait before they get the coverage for life saving medication that they need so separately?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the member opposite just my own views on this and the views of this government, that we believe how critically important it is that Ontarians and Canadians across this country have access to the drugs that they need, the prescribed medications that will keep them well, Mr. Speaker, or will get them well if they fall ill. It's an issue that the Premier has been championing for a long time. And I am really pleased, Mr. Speaker, that after three years of our advocacy on the national stage that the NDP Has finally decided to come to

the table and joining our efforts to provide that access because, Mr. Speaker, they haven't addressed it prior to publicly until very recently.

>> MPP Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I believe our healthcare system, new Democrats believe our healthcare system should include medical coverage. People should not be in a situation where they cannot access life saving medication that they need. People shouldn't have to wait for Ottawa to maybe one day hopefully get its act together. Why does the Premier think it's okay that people are waiting to receive desperately needed coverage to receive the coverage that they need right now.

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I know that this is an important issue to this government. It's an important issue to me as a healthcare practitioner. I have the opportunity -- I was reviewing. I wrote an op Ed way back in December of 2014 that spoke to my own experience as a physician because the practice that I have worked in for over 20 years is exclusively immigrants and refugees, primarily from the horn of Africa. And they're individuals of lower socioeconomic status, Mr. Speaker. And I spoke of the many, many times where I knew if I gave a prescription to these individuals, those families, it's unlikely they would have resources to fill it. I would have to go into my sample door to actually provide them with a sample prescription. I knew they couldn't afford to get it from a pharmacist. I understand how vitally access is to get it from a pharmacist. I understand how vitally access is to.

MPP Gelinias to Minister Hoskins Re: Provincial Pharmacare

>> MPP France Gelinias: [Voice of Translator]: Nickle belt, thank you to the Premier. [End of Translation] Again this morning, the Minister of health agreed with my leader and NDP That pharmacare is the unfinished business of medicare that we envisioned 51 years ago. New Democrats, we want to finish that business. We want people to get the life saving medication that they need. And we are ready to do something about it. Why aren't the Liberals?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, you know, I'm proud of many of the activities that this government has been responsible for when it comes to prescription drugs. 170,000 seniors no longer paying the hundred dollar annual deductible. Mr. Speaker, 170,000 more seniors in this province since last year's budget receiving their medications with any annual deductible at all and with the copayment reduced from \$6 down to 2d Mr. Speaker. I am proud of the work we have been doing nationally with the pan-pharmaceutical alliance as well where we nationally have saved \$700 million through bulk purchase and bulk negotiating, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Gelinias: Back to the Premier. The Premier may want to wait for her federal cousin. But Ontario cannot afford to wait. We cannot. pharmacare. Does the Premier believe people in Ontario should have universal access to medication?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, you know, we announced earlier this year that we would be providing hepatitis C treatment to anyone with a diagnosis of hepatitis C infection. At a cost, Mr. Speaker, of hundreds of millions of dollars to Ontarians. But this is almost a cure. In 95% of the cases, it's results in a cure and it's a dramatic new development in this field of treatment of hepatitis C. These are the kinds of investments we're making constantly adding medicines to our formulary, the evidence proves efficacy in value in providing and treatment important treatment to Ontarians. And, Mr. Speaker, last time I checked it, because we would welcome not only the advocacy here. Last time I checked, Alberta does not have a pharmacare program either. We would appreciate the advocacy in talking to their cousins in Alberta on this important issue.

>> MPP Gelinias: Mr. Speaker, my question was about universal access. When people get the medication they need, we all agree it saves lives. But the Liberals have left Ontarians waiting and waiting and waiting even longer for the drug coverage that they need. Pharmacare isn't something that people should be waiting for. New Democrats, we get that. And we're ready to do something about it. Why don't the Liberals get it?

>> Minister Hoskins: So, Mr. Speaker, you know, it's clear. Our government's position on access to medicine is crystal clear. For many years now, we have pointed out the fact that one out of ten Canadians, probably one out of ten or more Ontario families are unable to access the medicines that they need because of financial limitations, Mr. Speaker, and that's not right. That's why we have so strongly advocated for increasing that access, why we continue to advocate for it. We take measures like we did last year, 170,000 more seniors that do no longer have to pay a hundred dollar deductible, no longer pay that \$6 copayment. It's now \$2. But I appreciate -- Just I'm glad the NDP has come to the table. We need their help as we continue to give access to medicine.

MPP Yurek (Hillier) to Minister Hoskins Re: rural Access Medical Treatment

>> MPP Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is the Minister of health and long-term. Speaker, section 20.1 of the local health systems interprovincial act prevents LNs from giving services based on the geographical areas. Speaker, is the Minister aware of any deviations from this specific policy?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, clearly the member opposite has one and I'm going to come here about it in the supplementary. Mr. Speaker, it's important to reiterate that this House as well as to Ontarians that what -- at least in his first question, what the member opposite has stated, that there are no boundaries in terms of access to medicine. So an individual perhaps that resides in Thunder Bay is welcome to access the health services that are available in SickKids hospital or Ottawa Civic hospital, that there are no restrictions for any type of community service that's provided. Rather healthcare service that's provided. I'm interested in the supplementary. I suspect I'm going to hear of some concern. I want to work with you. That's not permitted in this province. Let's find a way to address it effectively.

>> MPP Randy Hillier: You're absolutely correct, Minister. We do have an example. On April 21st, the Ottawa hospital sent out this memo informing doctors in my riding that department of medical imaging's breast imaging program is experiencing significant delays. Their solution as outlined in the memo would be that they would only accept patients from the Champlain LN region. This prevents people in my riding from going to Ottawa to get necessary services. It is in direct conflict with the Minister's statement and it's in direct contradiction to the legislation. Speaker, will the Minister direct the Champlain LN and the Ottawa hospital to accept patients from outside their LN and contact the doctors in my riding and assure them that this memo is false and has no effect. If I could send the memo over.

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to receive this information. And I look forward to seeing the memo. Frankly, I kind of like it as well when members ask to speak with me directly or grab me at the end of question period and solve a problem. But, you know, I appreciate that there might be an ambition to score a political point at the same time. I'm interested, Mr. Speaker, in solving problems. And I think almost every member on that side of the legislature knows or I even have personal experience of how hard I have worked with them to improve or correct or augment health services in their jurisdiction. That's the way I work as health Minister. I'm happy to work on this issue. We dramatically expanded breast cancer screening services across the province. I anticipate that those services are available over a wide swath of that region. But I'm going to look into it specifically.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Speaker, thank you. My question to the Premier, late last week, the government quietly announced it had approved massive increase in the salary ranges for opg executives. The top salary of the opg CEO is now \$3.8 million, which is double his current salary. Meanwhile, starting next week, ratepayers who have been unable to pay their hydro bills will start losing their electricity. How does the Premier explain to families who may lose their electricity why

they have to pay more to give an opg CEO a hundred percent increase in salary.

>>Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, when it comes to opg salaries, Mr. Speaker, we do have a framework in place to ensure that they are paid comparatively, Mr. Speaker, and paid fairly. And when we have people running our nuclear facilities, Mr. Speaker, and having a 40-year history of safety, we want to ensure that these people are paid not at the top, Mr. Speaker, not at the bottom, but paid right in the middle of the pack within their sector. When it comes to looking at rates that are happening for folks right across the province, Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to hear last week that the Ontario energy board's decision will begin to lower rates even further on May 1st in anticipation, Mr. Speaker, of our government's fair hydro plan. So that's going to mean on May 1st, the oeb's decision will have rates reduced by 17% by May 1st. The opposition parties have a pamphlet for their plan, we're acting, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Tabuns: Again to the prechIt not surprising that a Premier who thinks ratepayers should pay twice as much for the opg CEO also thinks rate pairs should pay twice as much for hydro. The connection between skyrocketing hydro CEO salaries and skyrocketing hydro disconnections could not be clearer. It speaks to the values of this government, which treats hydro ratepayers as cash cows for senior executives, for private financiers and for other friends of the Premier, at the same time dismissing the struggles of ordinary Ontarians until, of course, this government is backed into a political corner. Why does the Premier always put the interests of the executive class ahead of the needs of ordinary Ontario families? Why?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to rise and talk about how this government is putting the needs of Ontarians first, Mr. Speaker, not on the last page of the plan like the third party, Mr. Speaker. They don't even mention first nations, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to offering hel. This Premier and this government, Mr. Speaker V done that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to the Ontario electricity support program, Mr. Speaker, we increased that by 50%, Mr. Speaker, ensuring that families and individuals struggling when it comes to their electricity prices will receive more help, Mr. Speaker. That is what this Premier and this government does. On that side of the House, Mr. Speaker, they have no plan and they can't even make up a plan that works.

MPP Martins to Minister Sousa (Ballard) Re: Affordable Housing Act

>> MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of finance. The housing market in the greater golden horseshoe has experienced dramatic housing increases in recent months. Housing prices in Toronto are up 33% from this time last year. Mr. Speaker, while our hot housing market is tied to the confidence people have of the Ontario economy, we know that many are struggling with housing affordability. In my own riding of Davenport, I have heard from so many hardworking young families about the difficulty that they're having entering the housing market. Just last week, I was so proud to stand by the Premier as she along with yourself and the Minister of housing announced the introduction of Ontario's fair housing plan. Mr. Speaker, this announcement was wonderful news for the constituents in my riding of Davenport who are working so hard every day for a safe affordable place to call home. Could the Minister please share with my constituents and all the members of this House what this plan means.

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member from Davenport who attended that press conference and is navigating and fighting not only for supporting those who are renting and who are being subject to valuations beyond their control but also trying to advocate for young families get a starter home and allowing them to get equity built in their homes. Given the spike and great increase year over year that occurred, she's advocating along with this caucus to go into the marketplace. Speculators with deep pockets crowding out families trying to get a start. I congratulate her and her team and our caucus for finding ways to cool the market to ensure that everybody has a better chance. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister for his answer. My constituents in the riding of Davenport were also excited to hear that Ontario is also proposing to expand rent control

as part of the fair housing plan. This is an issue I have had the pleasure to write to the ministry of housing about previously and most recently in February. Minister, as you are aware, many tenants across the GTA including in my riding of Davenport have been faced with unacceptable rent increases. In one case, tenants in the south end of my riding received a shock when their rent on their two-bedroom condo nearly doubled from \$1,160 a month to \$3,320 a month. With so many constituents living in rental housing, it is so important for our government to let those people know that it's unacceptable. Speaker, through you to the Minister -- Minister.

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. And to the member for her question. She has indeed be a tireless advocate on this important issue. Speaker, we heard stories of unreasonable and shocking stories in today's rental market. Pauline is fearful her family will be forced out of their condominium due to an unreasonable rent hike. Stories like Pauline and her family is why we introduce the rental fairness act yesterday in the House. Our bill will expand rent controls to all private rental units, including those built after 1999. In addition, this bill includes a suite of other measures that protect tenants. Speaker, by passing this bill, a quarter of a million people would be protected from unreasonable rent hikes. Speaker, whether you're a senior on a fixed income or a young person just starting off, all Ontarians deserve rent that's affordable.

MPP McDonell to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Wait Times

>>MPP Jim McDonell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of health. The health of Ontario hospitals is suffering from a critical lack of funding. Community hospital occupancy rates are so high, patients have to be accommodated in hallways, empty office spaces or any cubby hole staff can find. Ministry people dismiss the concern saying the real number happens at midnight. Would this Minister really stand next to a senior heart attack patient and tell them in a stretcher on the hallway and tell them that they really only count if they're still alive that night.

>>Minister Eric Hoskins: Well -- Mr. Speaker, of course, as the member opposite knows we have made substantial new investments in our hospitals on two fronts, Mr. Speaker. On the operating side, we have increased the operating budgets by about 3% this year alone, Mr. Speaker, close to \$500 million. And on the capital side, Mr. Speaker, we have made what I believe I'm confident is the largest most substantial capital investment in hospitals in this province's history, 12 being dollars over a 10-year period. And we're seeing the results of both of those actions. In many cases quite dramatic increases in hospital's operating budgets, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP McDonell: Thank you. Back to the Minister, Speaker, the cornwallis community hospital reported occupancy rates. High incidence of avenue level of care of patients based in longest wait times in Ontario for proper placement. Yet, when questioned, the government says they have twice as many beds as they need until 2030. Someone doesn't know what's going on. And it isn't the waiting patients. Ministry, if as your figures say, we have too many beds, then why are the alc patients in cornwallis waiting over a year to be placed?

>>Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I feel like it's perhaps a two-part answer that is required here. When it comes to Cornwall community hospital itself, I'm proud to say we increased their operating budget by \$4 million last year, a \$5.4 million increases when it comes to the operating budget of that hospital alone. That's why bier making our investments since coming into office have built more than 10,000 brand new long-term care beds where we're redevelopment an additional 30,000 beds between now and 2025, Mr. Speaker. We're also looking at other opportunities to ensure whether it's in the home or in the community or in long-term care or in the hospital where pashtss and clients are getting the highest quality of care at the best possible place for them and where they want to be, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Singh to Minister Flynn Re: Basic Income

>>MPP Jagmeet Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. After nearly 14 years of Liberal government for far too many hardworking Ontarians, good paying full-time jobs are a thing of the past. What have they been left with with this Liberal government? Worries, Mr. Speaker. Worries about how they're going to pay their bills, their hydro, their rent. Worries about how they're going to make a good future for their kids. Now the changing workplace review is in. What are you waiting for? Where's the action? Not the talk. Where's the action from this government to actually implement changes for the people of this province.

>>Minister Kevin Flynn: Speaker, thank you very much. Speaker, the member must be a maple leafs fan. He knows a bandwagon when he sees one. We have been working very, very hard of this, Speaker. We want every family to benefit from the growing economy. Even as we create new jobs, Speaker, we need to be aware that the world is changing. With these changes come new challenges, Mr. Speaker. We're addressing concerns head-on through the changing workplaces review. The Premier said yesterday, it's more about just protecting people's wages and their ability to earn a good living. What we're doing, Speaker, is creating a framework for an economy that focuses on decency. Ontario workers need us to get this done right, Mr. Speaker, not just quickly. The NDP Called this process a waste of time. I couldn't disagree more, Speaker. Workers in the province of Ontario couldn't disagree more.

>>MPP Singh: Mr. Speaker, if this was a hockey game, this Minister would get a penalty for delay of game. Mr. Speaker, too many Ontarians have reached a tipping point. That's why new Democrats have committed to a \$15 minimum wage, to an easier path to the middle class through unionization, to the say pay for the same work for people working through a temporary job agency, for drug coverage for all Ontarians. We want hardworking Ontarians to be lifted out of poverty, not to be stuck in it. What is the Premier going to do today, not for her friends but the hardworking Ontarians of this province? What is she going to do for them today? We need action now.

>> Minister Flynn:Speaker, thank you to the member for the question. Speaker, we have made sure that the province of Ontario follows a very consistent, a predictable and an impartial process when it comes to minimum wage increase in the province of Ontario. Contrast that to between 1996, 2003 Speaker, the party opposite froze minimum wage for seven years, Speaker, at \$6.85. Since 2003, Speaker, we have increased the minimum wage by more than 70%, Speaker. What we did is we went out, Speaker, we consulted with organized labour, business, poverty advocates, Speaker. We consulted with anybody that had an interest in the economy and the healthy economy of this province, Speaker. And we have got a predictable system in place. We're having an increase this year, Speaker, as we have year after year after year. Speaker, if this was a football game, the NDP Fumbled the football.

MPP McMeekin to Minister Jaczek (Ballard) Re: Poverty Reduction Pilot Program

>>MPP Ted McMeekin: I want to take a moment as a cancer survivor to thank the cancer society who is doing such great work all across Ontario. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of community and social services. Speaker, our government has always taken a leadership role in sploerp creative and innovative ways to reduce poverty and support people living on low incomes. In the 2016 budget, our government committed to testing how the basic income might help people on low incomes better meet their basic needs while improving their education, employment, and health. Speaker, yesterday morning, I was thrilled, thrilled to host the Premier in Hamilton and Minister s of housing and community and social services when the Premier announced details of Ontario's basic income question. I understand it's built on feedback. I want to know through you. Can the Minister of this House please tell us more about Ontario's basic income pilot?

>>Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for his long time championing of this very interesting idea. Speaker, the basic income pilot will be testing a new approach to income support in a careful step by step way to ensure we get it right. We're starting small using the lessons learned as we build the pilot out in further phases. Our ultimate goal is to better understand whether this approach could help people living on low incomes in their every day

lives. Beginning later this spring, the three year pilot will launch in two regions, Hamilton including brandtford and Brant county, Thunder Bay and the surrounding area. A third location, Lindsay, will be added in the fall. Speaker, up to 4,000 participants will be included in the pilot across the three sites at full implementation. As I said yesterday, I am pleased that I'm not going to be losing anything from my social assistance budget as we move forward into this important project. Thank you.

>> MPP McMeekin: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the Minister. Speaker, my constituents were excited to hear the news yesterday. We know that though Ontario's economy is in a relatively strong position, many people are not feeling that growth in their every day lives. People are struggling to keep up with the rising cost of living and facing precarious employment with little job security or benefits. Ontario's basic income pilot will be, I think, a great opportunity to study whether a basic income can support vulnerable workers and give people the security and opportunity they need to achieve their potential. Speaker, will the Minister tell us more about this innovative pilot project, including who will be eligible to participate and how much support it will receive?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for his tireless advocacy on behalf of the most vulnerable across Ontario. Speaker, the basic income pilot will help us test way to make every day life easier for Ontarians by removing Barriers that stand in the way of improved health, employment and housing for too many among us. Study participants will be randomly selected, 18 to 64 years old living in one of the selected test locations for the past 12 months or longer and living on a low income. We're using a tax credit model, Mr. Speaker. The Ontario basic income pilot will ensure participants receive just under \$17,000 a year for a single person less 50% of any earned income, just over \$24,000 a year for a couple. Again, less 20% of any earned income and up to an additional \$6,000 a year for a person with a disability. Mr. Speaker, testing the basic income model.

MPP Scott (Martow) to Minister MacCharles (Flynn) Re: Hearing Society Strike

>> MPP Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister responsible for accessibility. The Canadian hearing society provides vital services to tens of thousands of culturally deaf, aural deaf, deaf or hardened hearing persons across Ontario. Unfortunately an unresolved labour dispute at chs brought their important work to a halt for over 6 weeks now, which is having a damaging impact on the lives of deaf individuals in our province. For example, many seniors that cannot hear are literally shut in their homes in isolation while also dealing with chronic health conditions. These are life and death situations, Mr. Speaker. So my question to the Minister is, what is the government doing to protect the deaf community in this situation and what backup measures have they put in place to ensure that the Ontario deaf community isn't falling through the cracks.

>> Minister Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. And I want to thank the member opposite from PC party for this question. It's important. I have met with this group on many occasions and have received the recent correspondence as well. They are strong advocates for the deaf community in Durham and beyond. And they do fantastic work. And they are pushing forward on a number of fronts including visual smoke detectors. I know the Minister of labour will comment in the supplementary on the labour issues. I want to acknowledge the work. I have a meeting upcoming with them as well. We can talk about these issues and coordinate our efforts at the ministry of labour. So thank you for raising the question. Thank you.

>> MPP Gila Martow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is also to the member of accessibility. Members of the Canadian hearing society have been on strike since March 6th and are demonstrating in front of the ministry today. Recently Kevin hannand from Thornhill sent a letter from the hearing society on Spadina at Thornhill to request repairs to his hearing aid. The society told him he will be put on a wait list until the strike is over. Mr. Speaker, this is a vulnerable community whose lives have been put on hold. Will the Minister please tell us what she is doing to ensure that Ontarians who require sign language translators, hearing test, and hearing aid repairs are not left in silence.

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: I do appreciate the question, Speaker, and I appreciate the member opposite for showing her support for the parties that are involved in this negotiation. I also have talked to members of the third party on this, Mr. Speaker. During the labour dispute, the government foefz. It's assured responsibility, Speaker. We have some of the best mediators in the country, Mr. Speaker, work right here at the province of Ontario. We have had somebody in. We have had somebody involved with the parties. We remain available to assist them. To bring them back to the bargaining table. What we are doing, Speaker, is encouraging the employer and the employees in this case and the union to make every effort to resolve those differences, bring them back to the table, Speaker. We're confident if they work together, these parties can reach a settlement. We have a strong history in the province of Ontario, Speaker. Of resolving these differences without strikes or lockouts almost 99%. In this case, we need to do a little bit more work, Speaker, and we will.

MPP Fife to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Childcare Fees

>> MPP Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the premier. Premier, parents, families and advocates know we don't have a childcare system in Ontario. What we have is a crisis. We don't have affordable for family. We don't have quality not-for-profit childcare spaces. The Ontario consolidation for better childcare said we need every dollar of this childcare expansion going to our kids. There is simply no room for profit. When there's a political profit, that's when this government wakes up. Unfortunately, they were too late on the hydro crisis and they were too late on the housing crisis. Speaker, what will it take for this liberal government to wake up to the childcare crisis in this province?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I want to thank the member opposite for this question. Now, I understand that the Ontario consolidation for better childcare was here today to talk about childcare in the province. And absolutely creating safe and healthy environment and giving our kids the best start in life is the most important thing we can do. Our plan is to transform the way that childcare is delivered in this province. And it's great to see a young ontarian in the house today with us. We are here, you know, really, voices for parents and families. We know that parents -- for parents finding an infant, a toddler or preschool childcare spot can be very challenging. Current capacity isn't there. That's why we're committing to build a hundred thousand youth spaces and transform the way we're delivering childcare in the province.

>>MPP Fife: Thank you, premier. Families cannot wait any longer. Parents face the highest childcare costs in Canada. Childcare fees in Ontario cost 50% more than undergraduate tuition in the province. 24% of the eces here today make less than \$15 an hour. Speaker, we know that public and not-for-profit childcare spaces provide the highest quality. This government won't commit to building a system based on quality. For 14 years, families have waited as costs have risen and wait lists have grown. They cannot wait any longer. When will will Ontario seek quality, affordable accessible childcare system that puts children ahead of profits.

>> Minister Naidoo Harris: Thank you, speaker. Speaker, I just want to say that we are transforming the way we deliver childcare in this province, absolutely. We are currently working on a five-year roll out plan, which under development. What we're committing to do is create accessible, affordable, responsive quality spaces. What we have done is gone across the province holding consultations with thousands of people. We're now in the process of making sure that our plan is good and strong. The third party does a lot of talking. But the bottom line is even in their recent vision statement, childcare was only one paragraph of what they put out as part of their plan. So there were no timelines. There were no funding numbers. We actually have done our homework. We're getting ready to ensure that we create a space for a hundred thousand new children in childcare in this province.

MPP Colle to Minister McGarry Re: Dairy Farmer Protection

>> MPP Mike Colle: The Minister of natural resources and forestry, Speaker, Minister, as you know, last week the government south of the border attacked our dairy farmers and our dairy industry. This week, they're attacking our forest industry and our forestry workers. Many Ontarians are very concerned of what's happening and they're wondering what the impact of new exorbitant tariffs and duties threatened by the states will do to our workers in our softwood lumber exports and in this industry. What actions is our government taking to stand up to these abusive imposition of tariffs and attacks on our dairy industry and especially on our –

>> Minister Kathryn McGarry: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to thank the member from Eglinton-Lawrence for his question. Speaker, I am disappointed that the US Government has decided to impose unreasonable duties putting unnecessary financial pressure on Ontario's lumber producers and remanufactures. We believe that fair and open trade is the best outcome for consumers on both sides of the border. Our government is standing alongside our forestry sector and the families that depend upon it. Our government has been working with various partners to increase the amount of Ontario wood used in large scale building construction across the province. And that's not all, Speaker. I'm also proud to say that we have just provided \$10 million in additional funding to the forestry industry to reduce costs for road construction and maintenance on public access roads. Ontario is standing alongside our forestry sector to protect the well paying jobs and important economic benefits that this sector provides for workers and their families.

>> MPP Colle: Thank you, Minister, for your response. As you know, many small communities throughout Ontario depend on jobs in the forestry sector. I don't have to tell you that. And I think we need to all stand together and say this is not acceptable. So, therefore, on behalf of not only the workers in the forestry sector but everybody in Ontario who's worried about theseut arbitrary increases in tariffs and what they're going to do to jobs and this important industry wonder what concrete steps the ministry has taken and will take to ensure we don't let them get away with this.

>> Minister McGarry: Thank you, Speaker. And I appreciate the member's concern over this important issue. Our 15.5 billion dollar forestry sector plays a significant role in 230 communities across Ontario and in the management of Ontario's boreal forest in support of climate change initiatives. We recently hired our chief negotiator, Jim Peterson. Jim will advocate for free and open trade for Ontario's softwood industry. In Canada, negotiating trade deals is the responsibility of the federal government. That's why we're asking the federal government to listen to the Ontario and Québec forestry industries and create a loan guarantee program. I have met with Minister s Carr and Freeland many times on this issue. We cannot let the predictability of our southern neighbour affect the job and well-being of people here in Ontario as we depend against this unfair decision. We will support industry partners responding to their concerns and vigorously representing their industry in Ottawa and Washington.

MPP N. Miller to Minister Mauro Re: Ring of Fire Development

>> MPP Norm Miller: My question is for the Minister of northern development and mines. In the three years worth of public polling your government tabled quietly in February, one poll by the Minister of finance found that 65% of northern Ontarioians were very concerned and 29% were concerned about their local economies. In total, 94% are concerned or very concerned about their local economies. Speaker, does the Minister agree that developing the ring of fire will boost the northern economy and alleviate some of these concerns.

>> Minister Mauro: Speaker, thank you to the member for the question. Maybe I will deal with the ring of fire piece in the supplementary. Start by talking about the difference in the level of support that has come from this government to the municipal sector as opposed to the level of support that did not come from the opposition Conservatives when they were government from 1995 to 2003. Speaker, it is very clear and obvious to the municipal sector across the province the province of Ontario, not just in northern Ontario but that the financial assistance that has flowed from a variety

of programs through this government started in 2003 has better positioned businesses right across northern Ontario and has better positioned local resident taxpayers when it comes to the communities that they live in. No thanks to the work that went on with eight years of no support from a Conservative government but tremendous support to a variety of programs from this Liberal government since 2003. Those programs are in place. Those programs continue. Local taxpayers are better as a result.

>> MPP N. Miller: Mr. Speaker, I guess the Minister didn't hear my question. 94% of northerners are concerned about their local economy. That's very disturbing. Northern Ontarians need this government to do something to give them some hope. Mining, especially the ring of fire, offers that hope. This government has made lots of promises but delivered very little on this file. This government has more than once announced funding for transportation infrastructure in the ring of fire region. So my question, Mr. Speaker, would the Minister please tell us how many dollars have been spent on transportation infrastructure in the ring of fire region. And when can we expect to see the physical evidence of some actual work being done?

>> Minister Mauro: Speaker, when it comes to support for northern communities, you just heard the Minister. Mr. Speaker, when it comes to support for northern communities and businesses based in northern Ontario, you just heard the ministry of natural resources and forestry run down quite a significant laundry list of supports we put in place to help 230 communities in northern Ontario that rely on the forest industry like bringing back forestry roads programs that were downloaded by both the previous opposition parties. The NDP When they were in government and the Conservatives when they were in government. Mr. Speaker, specifically on the mining sector, the member knows they want to focus on one project, that's fine. They want to score a few political points. You want to talk about mining. Perhaps the member opposite can ask and speak to why new goals, just operated a mine four hours west of Thunder Bay, 6 people on a construction site, 450 people who remain employed in that operation once it's open. Mining is continuing to move forward. They want to focus on the one project. It's doing very well. Exploration is up.

MPP Gretzky to Minister Ballard (Flynn) Re: Hearing Society Strike

>> MPP Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Workers at the Canadian hearing society are entering their 7th week off the job. People who are deaf or hard of hearing are not getting the support they need to thrive. The result, people like Paul in Sudbury who had been forced to tell his father that he's going to die, to sign to him that he's going to die rather than simply hold his hand during his final moments. Speaker, workers at the Canadian hearing society are here today along with allies fighting to have their work valued. Does the Premier agree that it's time for the employer and the union through a third party, get these issues dealt with and let these workers get back to serving a vulnerable community?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Speaker, thank you and thank you to the member for that question, Speaker. I know the member opposite more than any -- more than many in this House, Speaker, believes in the Collective bargaining process, right? Speaker, we know we can get those parties back to the table using the skilled mediators we have in the province of Ontario. We can reach an agreement, Speaker. We always do. 99% of the cases of Collective bargaining agreements, Speaker, in the province of Ontario are reached at without any Lockett, strike, without any action at all, Speaker. Speaker, we're encouraging the employers and the unions to get back to the table to resolve their differences, Speaker. It's how it's done to the province of Ontario, Speaker, and it works in the province of Ontario. As I said to a previous answer, Speaker, 99%, almost 99%. Speaker, almost 99% of Collective agreements are reached without any action, Speaker. Last year, we had 18 work stoppages in the province of Ontario, Speaker.

>> MPP Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker, again to the Premier, while this government constantly passes the puck on their responsibilities to protect workers and vulnerable populations, they have done nothing to rein in executive salaries at taxpayer funded organizations. The chs receives more than \$20 million for services from the province each year. Unfortunately a large portion of this has gone

to exorbitant wage increases for top executives, including a 75% increase for the CEO in just three years. All the while, frontline staff, many of whom are deaf or hard of hearing themselves, haven't had a wage increase since their contract expired four years ago. I invite the Premier to join me, workers, and allies at the rally today to support the workers of the Canadian hearing society and recognize the importance of their service to the community. Will the Premier finally give vulnerable populations the respect and attention they deserve?

>> MPP Kevin Flynn: Speaker, we have got a very lightly skilled mediation team, a conciliation team, Speaker, in the province of Ontario that I think is second to none. It's got a tremendous record for helping to resolve disputes such as this. Speaker, we have been involved with the parties. Speaker, my job as the Minister of labour is to be impartial and to ensure that we're doing everything we possibly can to bring these parties back to the table, Speaker. We don't like strikes. We don't like to see lockouts. We don't like to see people not receiving the services. Last year, Speaker, 18 work stoppages. When the NDP were in power --139 work stoppages, Speaker .