

CO Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Tuesday, February 21, 2017

From: "Gloyd, Matt (MCI)" <matt.gloyd@ontario.ca>
To: "@MCIIT-L-Comm-MCI-MO Top Issues" <mci.l.comm.mci.mo.top.issues@ontario.ca>, "@MCIIT-L-Comm-MCI Top Issues" <mci-l-comm-mcitopissues@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "@MCIIT-L-Comm-OWD-MO Top Issues" <mciit.l.comm.owd.motopissues@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "@MCIIT-L-Comm-OWD Top Issues" <mci.l.comm.owdtopissues@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "@MCIIT-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, 21 Feb 2017 12:14:34 -0500
Attachments: 20170221 - Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript.doc (120.83 kB)

Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Tuesday, February 21, 2017.

MCI did not receive any questions of interest.

Of interest to MIT Minister Chan responded to a question from MPP Vernile on North American trade.

Of interest to OWD Minister Naidoo-Harris responded to a question from MPP Fife on economic opportunities for women.

OSS did not receive any questions of interest.

Questions today focused on electricity costs and winter disconnections.

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, February 21, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

Table of Contents

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne
Re: Hydro Rates

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Thibeault)
Re: Winter Disconnections

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne
Re: Hydro Rates

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne
Re: Eliminating Winter Disconnections

MPP Yurek to Premier Wynne
Re: OHIP Coverage

MPP Bisson to Minister Thibeault
Re: Eliminating Winder Disconnections

MPP Potts (Dong) to Minister Moridi (Duguid)
Re: MaRS Discovery District

MPP Smith to Minister Duguid
Re: Job Creation

MPP Tabuns to Minister Del Duca
Re: Public Transit Investments

MPP Fraser to Minister Hunter
Re: TVO

MPP Clark to Minister Hunter
Re: Rural Schools

MPP Vanthof to Minister Sandals
Re: BPS Executive Salaries

MPP Vernile to Minister Chan
Re: Ontario - U.S./NAFTA Trade

MPP N. Miller (Thompson) to Minister Thibeault (Duguid)
Re: Hydro Rates and Businesses

MPP Fife to Minister Naidoo-Harris
Re: Economic Opportunities for Women

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro Rates

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. I want the Liberals to be aware of the F.J. Davy home, a long-term care home with 374 beds in Sault Ste. Marie. Their hydro bill -- Their hydro bill has gone up 39% and that's an additional 165,000.... Mr. Speaker, the government may laugh and heckle, but this is a seniors home. This is a long-term care home where their hydro bill has gone up 39%, \$165,000 in a year. It is not a laughing matter. Seniors in Sault Ste. Marie are having services, critical services cut. The home said they had no choice. It's hydro or cut services for seniors. So rather than heckle I would like an answer, Mr. Speaker, from the Premier. How can you allow this to continue to seniors in our province?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I want to just welcome everyone back and I want to -- I want to say that it is no laughing matter, Mr. Speaker. It's absolutely essential that the leader of the opposition and the people of Ontario understand that we, we understand that there are issues around the cost of electricity in this province, Mr. Speaker. I don't know the specific instance that the leader of the opposition is talking about in that particular home, but I certainly would be happy to get more information from him, Mr. Speaker. But I have made a commitment that the affordability of electricity in this province is of paramount concern, Mr. Speaker. We have made a number of changes, including the most recent 8% reduction across the board, but I have committed, Mr. Speaker, and our Minister of energy is working to bring forward a proposal before our budget. That would further reduce electricity costs across the province, Mr. Speaker

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. The F.J. Davy home is just one example of how electricity is hurting even more than family House holds. Catherine crane, executive director of the Huntsville hospital foundation told the Huntsville Forrester about a return fund-raising e-mail card that she received. I'll quote what the card said -- sorry, no donation this year. The money went to paying my Hydro One bill. Mr. Speaker, it's unbelievable. How can the Premier justify the fact that families have gone from being able to donate to charity, now needing charity simply to pay their hydro bill. It is unacceptable.

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know the reality is that I have been talking to people across the province. I have made a commitment that we will be bringing forward further, further decreases to electricity costs, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that, over the last number of years, we have made billions of dollars of investments into our electricity system. We inherited an electricity system that was degraded, Mr. Speaker, that had not been invested in, that had not been kept up. Mr. Speaker, electricity in this province was unreliable. We've made those investments and now we're confronting the reality that people have across the board seen unacceptable increases. We've made reductions, Mr. Speaker. We know that there's more to be done, particularly, particularly people living on fixed incomes and low income, Mr. Speaker. And people who are dealing with delivery charges that are out of whack, people in rural and northern communities, Mr. Speaker. We know there's more that has to be done.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, these rehearsed talking points are getting tired, and the people of Ontario aren't believing them. You know the Premier said she gets what ratepayers are struggling with in rural Ontario. Let me share an example. Matt recently tweeted a picture of his hydro bill from Lanark highlands to the Premier. I'm sure you've seen it. It was tweeted to you. His bill listed \$4 worth of hydro used and a shocking \$110 used for delivery. Mr. Speaker, how can the Premier justify that an individual here has a hydro bill for only \$4 for electricity and \$110 in delivery charges? It's out of whack.

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I appreciate the leader of the opposition quoting me because I just said that. I just said that delivery charges that were out of whack, Mr. Speaker, that were disproportionate that that's one thing I have heard about repeatedly, Mr. Speaker, as has the leader of the opposition and as has the leader of the third party and as -- As has every member in this House, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that the investments that have been made to make sure that this electricity -- Clean and reliable, that there's a cost associated with those -- We know there's more needs to be done to across-the-board help people with their electric tris bills, Mr. Speaker. To deal with the disproportionate cost of distribution in particular parts of the province, Mr. Speaker, and to help people living with low income to deal with their electricity prices. Those affordability issues are what are driving the changes. That we have already made and that we will bring forward before the budget, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Winter Disconnections

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Premier said that they're going to get to deliver charges. They've been in office for almost 14 years. What's their new line? Just give us another 14 years and we'll try to get to it? People are tired of waiting. But since I can't get an answer on delivery charges, let's talk about -- I am disappointed, Mr. Speaker, that a motion was put forward to the House today and the government said no. They could have ended it today. I don't want to delay a week. I don't want to delay another day. We need action today. So my question, Mr. Speaker, is we'll put this motion forward right again after question period rather than games, rather than partisan games. Will you support the motion, yes or no? Yes or no?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me just say that, for a good portion of the time that this government has been in office, we've been fixing the electricity -- And let me just say --, Mr. Speaker, there are two things that have happened this morning as one of the first orders of business today, the government House leader has introduced -- A motion that fast-tracks bill 27, Mr. Speaker. So I appreciate the support. But on top of that -- On top of that, Mr.

Speaker, the Minister of energy has actually been reaching out to all of the local distribution companies in the province, Mr. Speaker, and the vast majority of them are already in compliance with no winter disconnections. But what we have said, Mr. Speaker. If there are any out of compliance then -- If there are any that are still out of compliance at the end of -- by midnight tonight, Mr. Speaker, then we will bring forward a piece of legislation that we hope would get support and we'll move to get those disconnections stopped, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The Premier says she's been fixing hydro bills for 14 years. Let me say please stop trying to fix it. You're taking competitive energy bills to among the highest in North America. Now back to winter disconnects. A source at Ontario energy board told global's Alan Carter the Minister can issue a directive to stop winter disconnections -- Mr. Speaker, so we know from Alan Carter, the Minister could have issued a directive to stop winter disconnections according to the Ontario energy board, rather than actually act immediately, he talks about -- he doesn't seem to realize he has a majority. Doesn't want to support the motion put forward today. What I'm asking, Mr. Speaker, is no more games. Will you support the motion today? We can't afford to wait another day. Will you do the right thing and support the motion today? Not tomorrow. Not in a week

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to be able to rise and welcome everyone back to the House. As the leader of the opposition should know, Mr. Speaker, I can actually send tasks to O.E.B. But I can't give them directives. He should actually Mr. Speaker -- So maybe, Mr. Speaker, that the leader of the opposition can talk to the new Clerk and find out the information about the process that we can do in this House, Mr. Speaker, because he does not have the information. I'm talking about playing games -- Talking about playing games, Mr. Speaker, the leader of the opposition is doing just that. We had a bill in front of this House that could have stopped winter disconnections in June, Mr. Speaker, but they didn't support it in June, Mr. Speaker. So they didn't support it in October, November, December, Mr. Speaker. We now have our opposition motion -- not our opposition motion, our motion brought forward by the House leader, Mr. Speaker, that actually will see bill 27 come to fruition by next week. If we get everyone's support, Mr. Speaker, we can have it passed by then and ensure that we'll have the law of the land taken care of for winter disconnections, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, directly to the Premier. We don't want to wait another week. We've been hearing that same tune for a year now. This needs to be addressed. Seniors are hurting. Families are hurting in Ontario. Let me share you the story. On Friday, a 76-year-old man told listeners on the Andrew... radio program that he'd been without power for four months and the Minister of energy is saying wait another week. Mr. Speaker, how many other seniors is the Premier going to let freeze in the dark before we do the right thing? Mr. Speaker, directly to the Premier -- Mr. Speaker, directly to the Premier. I don't want to hear the Minister of energy blame the opposition, blame seniors for not understanding their hydro bills, blame Alan Carter for getting it wrong. My question's directly for the Premier. Will you support the motion in an hour when it's before us and you can end this in an hour. You can end winter disconnects in an hour if you do the right thing. No more games, Premier. No more games.

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only one I'm blaming, Mr. Speaker, is the leader of the opposition for not actually passing this in June, Mr. Speaker. We have a bill ready to go. By the end of the day today, Mr. Speaker, I ask all L.B.C.S to voluntarily comply. We have a significant number of that doing so, Mr. Speaker, and if they choose knows -- not to do that we will make sure that the law of the land will be brought forward tomorrow and there will be no more winter disconnects, Mr. Speaker. But the only party that has been playing games with this issue, Mr. Speaker, is the leader of the opposition and his party. Rather than talking up programs that are available or talking about ways that we can actually help people avoid disconnects, he just stands up and shakes his fist and offers no plan, Mr. Speaker. We have plans. We're making sure we're bringing forward issues that will address winter disconnects, Mr. Speaker. We're going to make sure this is taken care of by tomorrow, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro Rates

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Premier. I met a woman named Charlene who lives in Sault Ste. Marie, Speaker, and she has three kids. She already has two jobs, Speaker, a full-time job and a part-time job and her husband has a full-time job. They try to do the laundry and cooking during off-peak hours but their work schedules and their kids make it pretty hard to have that happen, Speaker. Every month they end up with a \$400 hydro bill and a disconnection notice. They're living off their overdraft, Speaker. When I met Charlene, she was almost in tears. Can the Premier tell Charlene and people like her, all across Ontario, what she thinks she should be doing about it?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's two issues in that question that the leader of the third party raised, and the first being that electricity prices are very burdensome for many people across the province. I recognize that, Mr. Speaker. I have spoken with people like Charlene, the person that the leader of the third party references, and I recognize, Mr. Speaker, that on top of what we have already done, the latest thing which is the 8% reduction that is on all bills now, Mr. Speaker. We need to do more. And I have committed, Mr. Speaker, that we will bring forward a plan to further reduce electricity bills before the budget. On the disconnection issue, Mr. Speaker, I've been very clear. It's unacceptable. We've had a piece of legislation before the House. The Minister of energy has been reaching out to local distribution companies. Most L.D.C.S have got the message, Mr. Speaker, there are no disconnections. Premier Wynne: In the majority of them. If there are any outstanding, Mr. Speaker, by midnight tonight, we will bring forward a stand-alone piece of legislation to ban that practice.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I've talked to people to get to the end of the month and have to decide between buying groceries or paying the hydro bill to keep the lights on. This is 2017, Speaker. And we live in a province with huge potential. Nobody, nobody should be faced with that sort of choice. That does the Premier expect people to do, Speaker ?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, as I've said, I know that there are people in Ontario who are struggling with their electricity bills, Mr. Speaker. I know that. And we have been working very hard, and by that I mean we've been meeting with organizations, with individuals, whether it's the Minister of energy or me, my staff. We've been looking for solutions, Mr. Speaker, that can make real changes in the electricity system that are sustainable, Mr. Speaker, that over time will continue to reduce electricity costs, Mr. Speaker, and in the immediate term will give relief across the board, because we know that the investment that we have made in the system to make it clean, to make it reliable, to make it a system that everyone can count on across the province, that there was a cost associated with those changes, Mr. Speaker. We need to take more costs out of the system. We need to reduce those bills, and that's exactly the proposal that we will bring forward before the budget.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, people are hurting and the Liberal government still doesn't seem to get it. They won't stop the sell-off of Hydro One, which is going to make things even worse here in Ontario. The Premier in fact said that the only way to build transit was with money so she sold off Hydro One to get that money. The hydro money. Now we're hearing that she's going to take money from schools, from hospitals and from transit to subsidize hydro. No wonder people are cynical, Speaker. When is the Premier going to start fixing the problems that people face rather than the problems that the Liberal party faces? Stop the sell-off of Hydro One and begin fixing our electricity system.

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that the leader of the third party knows that there is absolutely no relationship between the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One and electricity prices. I know she knows that, Mr. Speaker. And so what she's trying to do is conflate those issues and make it sound as though somehow there is a connection. And then she's setting up the next piece of her strategy, which is that anything we do is going to be to the detriment of something else in government. Not true, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that we are investing in transit. We must invest in transit in order to foster economic growth in this province. And we at the same time, Mr. Speaker, need to deal with the electricity prices, which have increased across the board because of the investments that we have made over the last number of

years to make sure that our grid is clean and that it's reliable, Mr. Speaker. We're going to continue to reduce electricity costs.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne Re: Eliminating Winter Disconnections

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Through you, Mr. Speaker. If the Premier wanted to stop people from having their hydro cut off, she could do that. I already said to the Premier, Speaker. Instead she won't do it unless she also gets her way on a 158-page omnibus bill or the latest political grandstanding by her Minister of energy. Account Premier explain why political credit is more important than stopping people from having their hydro cut off?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, nothing could be farther from the truth. It's extremely important to me that we have action on this. That's why it was included in the bill that was before the House in June, Mr. Speaker. But we've said very clearly that if all of the L.D.C.S in the province, if all the local distribution companies in the province have not moved to stop disconnections, winter disconnections by midnight tonight, then we will bring forward a stand-alone piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, that I hope will get expeditious passage in this House, and that will be then the rule that there will be no winter disconnections across the province, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: The Premier had an opportunity just a few minutes ago to pull that section out of bill 27 and pass it today, not tomorrow. She had that opportunity a few minutes ago, Speaker. But because it was coming from the opposition, not from the government, she refused to do it. It appears that the Premier will only agree to keeping people's power on if she and her Liberal party gets the political win. Shame on her. Can she explain -- can the Premier explain to someone facing a disconnection notice in the province of Ontario why she's putting the interests of her political party, the Liberal party, before the interests of Ontarians?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the point is a procedural one. The reality is that it amounts to exactly the same thing, that people across the province will no longer be subjected to disconnection orders, Mr. Speaker, and my expectation actually would be that by midnight tonight, all of the L.D.C.S would have agreed to stop this practice, Mr. Speaker, so that neither piece of legislation is actually necessary because they will already be in compliance.

>> Andrea Horwath: About the whim or the good nature of the utilities. It should be the law in the province of Ontario that people's electricity bills do not get cut off. That's your job. That's your responsibility. Not -- Last year 60,000 people had their hydro cut off. Suddenly today, facing immense political pressure, the Premier has apparently seen the light -- not the light today. Maybe the light tomorrow. One again, Speaker, this is politics at its worst. That's what this Liberal Premier dishes up regularly in this province. That's why the people of Ontario are so disappointed and so fed up with the Liberal party and this Premier. So when is she going to start making decisions. That are based on the best interests of the people of Ontario and not the best interests of her Liberal party?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I would say to the leader of the third party that this issue was before the House in June. The leader of the third party did not make an issue of this in June, nor -- work to expedite the piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker. This is of great concern to us, which is why the Minister of energy has communicated with all of the local distribution companies in the province and has said that winter disconnections are unacceptable. My expectation is that they will be in compliance by midnight. If that's not the case, Mr. Speaker, we will bring a piece of legislation tomorrow to make that the case if we get expeditious approval by the House, Mr. Speaker

MPP Yurek to Premier Wynne Re: OHIP Coverage

>> MPP Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question's to the Premier. Speaker, 3-year-old Madison ambrose' family has to raise over \$140,000 to receive lifesaving surgery out of the country.

This government has created a rationed health care system and Madison and many other children are unable to access the health care they need. Instead families are left on their own to rely on the generosity of others to raise the much-needed funds to travel out of country. Speaker, the Premier and Minister of health already know the results of the recommendations from their expert panel regarding the surgery. Mr. Speaker, families cannot wait any longer on ohip's dithering. Will the Premier direct her Minister to fund Madison's surgery today?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, first of all let me just say that I can imagine no more trying and tragic situation than a family that has an ill child looking for, looking for support, Mr. Speaker, and looking for procedures that will alleviate that child's suffering. There just is no worse situation I can imagine. The reality is that in Ontario, Mr. Speaker, we have a health care system that is based on evidence, that looks at the scientific evidence behind procedures, Mr. Speaker. I don't know the specifics of the case of Madison but I will certainly make sure that any information that the member gives me will be passed on to the Minister of health. But in situations where there is not a surgery available here in Ontario and it is available elsewhere, if it's something that is supported by -- Mr. Speaker, then there is support for that surgery out of country. But, Mr. Speaker, the decision that is we make in Ontario have to be based on medical evidence.

>> MPP Yurek: Back to the Premier. This isn't an ... surgery. This is a surgery covered by the ministry website however the ministry does not fund it in Ontario. The red tape they've created, the layers of management they have created in the health care system have made it an impossible nightmare for Madison's family to have to apply for the financial assistance the Premier is just referring to. Speaker, the surgery, again, is not experimental and it is on approved surgery on the ministry's website. Speaker, her Minister is unwilling to fund the surgery in Ontario. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier make the commitment today to fund the surgery when Madison goes to St. Louis?

>> Premier Wynne: So, Mr. Speaker, you know what I'd like to do is get the information from the member opposite. I will say, Mr. Speaker, that, in my own constituency office I can remember situations where there was -- there was a need to connect a family with the ministry, with the Minister 's office to have a further conversation. I'm quite happy to do that for the member opposite, and I'd like to have the information. I just don't have enough information. It's interesting to me that it is something that is covered but is not being funded. I'm not sure how that is happening and what the questions or concerns are around this particular situation. I'll need more information. I'll certainly take it up with the ministry of health and I appreciate the member opposite raising it, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Bisson to Minister Thibeault Re: Eliminating Winder Disconnections

>> MPP Gilles Bisson: It was just bad humour on my part. The serious question and the question is to the Premier. Every party in this House has expressed support for legislation to stop winter disconnects. But the Premier refused to support Andrea Horwath's motion this morning that was dealt with first thing today. Instead, she would rather hold those vulnerable people hostage, refusing to help people and rather help the Liberal party. So my question is this. Why is it that you always choose to do what's good for the Liberal party and not necessarily what's good for the people of Ontario?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, we brought forward this issue back in June, Mr. Speaker. We wanted to address this issue in the spring, Mr. Speaker. And now we're getting close to that again. But unfortunately the opposition parties didn't want to play nice on this one, Mr. Speaker. We could have had this passed by then. But, Mr. Speaker, we've now acted. We've made sure and I've written a letter to all the L.D.C.S asking them to comply with no more winter disconnects, Mr. Speaker. We sent that letter out last week, and we have a majority of those. We have a majority of those L.D.C.S, Mr. Speaker, acting on that and respecting that right now, Mr. Speaker. However, however, Mr. Speaker, if a few L.D.C.S don't act by midnight tonight, Mr. Speaker, we are more than happy to bring forward legislation that will end this winter disconnection program, Mr. Speaker, as soon as this legislation is passed and we expect we would get support from the opposition on this, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Bisson: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. This House couldn't deal with it in June. Why? Because you prorogued the House. Who are you trying to kid? The issue here is very simple. We've been pointing out since last November that people are being disconnected. We've asked for legislation that was introduced, a motion this morning by my leader, the fast track legislation so we can deal with the debate. Instead what do you do? You say oh, no, no. I don't want to do it and give anybody else credit. I've got to do it so I can help the Liberal party get some good press tomorrow. So we're going to wait for another day and we're going to do what's good for the Liberal party. I'm going to ask you once again. Why does it always come down to what's good for the Liberal party and not good for the people of Ontario?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I need to remind the Honourable member that the prorogation ... on a Thursday and we were back on the Monday in September. And they could have easily passed this bill then, Mr. Speaker. But again I also know there's alternative facts on the other side, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that this was an issue for the people of Ontario in June. Why didn't they, Mr. Speaker? They need to ask themselves why didn't they see that back in June when we did as a government, Mr. Speaker? We made sure that this bill was brought forward, making sure that we can end winter disconnects, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately they played political games with it, Mr. Speaker, not this side of the House. We now make sure that there will be no more disconnects by all L.D.C.S complying with the letter that I sent. We will know by midnight tonight, Mr. Speaker. And if there are a few that don't comply, we will make sure the law of the land will make them comply. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Potts (Dong) to Minister Moridi (Duguid) Re: MaRS Discovery District

>> MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of innovation, research and science. Now a key promise of our government's mandate was to create high quality and high paying jobs for Ontarians. And to do that the Minister of research innovation and science has made a number of very strategic investments to grow the innovation economy. Now at a time when the term bailout was being used frivolously by members of the opposition, this government made the strategic decision to loan Mars the capital they needed to finish their innovative research hub. If the opposition had their way Mars would be a gigantic sinkhole at the corner of university and College or maybe been sold off to the private sector at incredible loss. This government showed immense amount of leadership in the face of very ardent criticism and that leadership has paid off, Speaker. So I would like to ask would the Minister please inform this House on the very great success of the Mars discovery district?

>> Min. Reza Moridi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for -- Mr. Speaker for that very important question. Mr. Speaker, it is my distinct pleasure to inform the members of this House that the decision to bridge finance Mars has been an incredible success., Mr. Speaker, the Mars -- take three years ahead of time at zero cost to the people of Ontario, paid off with interest. Mr. Speaker, thanks to our investment Mars has created over 6,000 jobs and increase in our annual G.D.P. To \$1 million. Leading technology firms that are opening innovation labs right here in the city of Toronto. Mr. Speaker, I must take a moment and thank the Premier for her extraordinary leadership for investing in the future of the economy of this province. Its impact will be seen for years and decades to come in this province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Han Dong: Thank you, Speaker. Minister, this is great news for our government's effort to build a globally competitive innovation hub in Trinity- Spadina. I'm please today hear MaRS is not only paying off its loan but has also become a commercial success. As I recall, the opposition was quite shortsighted in their criticism of this project. I was very glad that our government didn't take their advice on this matter and made this investment happen, despite the political risk involved. Minister, can you advise this House as to why this investment and others like it are important to Ontario's effort in become ago world leader in innovation?

>> Min. Brad Duguid: The member's absolutely correct. The leader of the opposition once blatantly

called Mars a money pit -- Today we see, Mr. Speaker, just how ill-informed and misguided he was. Ontario's emerging as a global strength, as an innovation leader, and key to those efforts, Mr. Speaker, to transform Ontario to a new global economy is a strong and healthy Mars. Mars is a true success story that's helping to establish Ontario as a force to be reckoned with in the global innovation economy. Our decision to boldly press ahead to build the Mars tower, in the face of unrelenting political opposition, has proven today to be the right decision. I want to thank our Premier and my Colleagues for having the courage to step up in the face of political risk and opposition rhetoric. Building a strong economy and creating new jobs ahead of partisan politics. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Smith to Minister Duguid Re: Job Creation

>> MPP Todd Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question this morning is for the Premier. Speaker, on Friday last week, bacardi, bacardi announced that it was closing its brampton location due to the changing business environment and to ensure the company's future competitiveness. My question, Speaker, is this. How many more jobs have to leave Ontario before this Premier does something about the electricity crisis that she and her government have created in Ontario?

>> Min. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, any time a job is lost in this province, Mr. Speaker, we're concerned for the workers that are involved, and we will continue to reach out to those workers to ensure that we do everything we can to help them find alternative employment. But, Mr. Speaker, the member's got to deal with the facts. We've created almost 700,000 net new jobs here in this province. The unemployment rate is at the lowest level it's been in eight years. Mr. Speaker, we're outpacing the G-7 in growth. That means we're growing faster than the US, faster than Italy, faster than the U.K., faster than France, faster than Germany, faster than Japan. Mr. Speaker, we're leading this country in growth. We will continue to do that to ensure any of those workers impacted, Mr. Speaker, will have alternative employment for them to be able to pick up where they've left off.

>> MPP Smith: Speaker, we've lost 350,000 manufacturing jobs in the province of Ontario since this government took office. Electricity is a crisis situation here in Ontario, and this Minister, the Premier and his government don't seem to get it. They're the reason that the bite -- business climate is where it's at in Ontario. There is a smattering of applause over there because I don't think the Liberal caucus even believes the numbers that the Minister just put out there. This company, bacardi, had operated in brampton for almost 50 years, an international business. They said the business environment and competitiveness has challenges in Ontario, this after the government just gave them \$350,000 last year so they could keep the lights on. If the Premier doesn't want to blame her electricity costs, which we all know is the problem -- Which of her government's other policies does she believe is responsible for the uncompetitive business environment in Ontario?

>> Min. Duguid: Mr. Speaker, How dare the member opposite talk down our, Mr. Speaker, sector when we're up 5,700 net new jobs since last year alone. Mr. Speaker, we're proud that we've invested \$1.9 billion in support for Ontario manufacturers. That's leveraged \$18 billion in private sector support. It's helped to create or retain over 80,000 jobs. Where was the member opposite when we made those investments? Mr. Speaker, he was on the exact other side, opposing every cent that we invest under this sector. We're going to keep investing in our manufacturing sector. We're going to show to be the most competitive manufacturing sector in North America and we're going to keep growing jobs in that sector, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Del Duca Re: Public Transit Investments

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. My question to the Premier. Under the transit funding formula that was put in place by Bill Davis, the province paid 50% of the TTC's operating costs. The Davis funding formula helps make the TTC the envy of the world. The Progressive Conservative government cut that funding in 1998 and funding has stayed cut under the Liberal government.

Instead the government has offered indirect funding for the gas tax at a fraction of the previous funding. Will the Premier help make the TTC The envy of the world again? Will she restore the TTC Operating funding as proposed by the N.D.P?

>> Min. Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I thank the member from Toronto- Danforth for the question. I think that member will know that at the current time, our government is investing more in public transit in the city of Toronto in the 416 than in any other government in provincial history, Speaker. He cited in his question that not that many weeks ago the Premier announced that over the next four years we'll be doubling the amount of gas tax money cities like Toronto receive. Speaker, that means for the city of Toronto an estimated additional \$170 million rolled out by 2022 per year. That will bring their total to of course roughly \$340 million. Speaker, that's on top of the literally billions of dollars that we are currently investing. Again more than any other government in Ontario history and expansion of transit in the city of Toronto in the 905 communities around Toronto, Speaker. And in the 99 communities across Ontario that are eligible to receive gas tax funding. Thanks very much, Speaker.

>> MPP Tabuns: Well, Speaker, it's great for ribbon cutting but it's real tough when you're in an un-air-conditioned subway car in the middle of summer. Under the province's traditional 50-50 funding formula the TTC And wheel-trans would have received about \$345 million in direct provincial funding based on Toronto's most recently passed budget. With this level of provincial funding, the TTC Could improve service, boost ridership and give people another good reason to leave their car at home. Provincial funding for transit operations would allow for fare integration across the G.T.A. It would allow us to avoid the metrolinx proposal to charge people from Etobicoke and Scarborough for the distance that they travel. Will the Premier restore direct provincial funding for TTC Operations as the NDP Has proposed?

>> Min. Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. So as I mentioned in my first answer, as we are standing here today, this provincial government, under the leadership of Premier Wynne, is investing billions of dollars in the city of Toronto alone, Speaker. For example, \$3.7 billion in the 416 for G.O. Regional express route. \$416 million for the Toronto streetcars, Speaker. \$870 million for the Spadina subway extension. \$5.3 billion for the Eglinton cross town. Single largest construction project, transit construction project in Ontario history, Speaker. But interestingly, from my perspective as Minister of transportation, Speaker, is that when Andrea Horwath, the leader of the NDP, talked about providing support for the city of Toronto's transit, she was completely silent about the transit needs of every other community across the province of Ontario, Speaker. That's why our initiative doubles gas tax money for nearly 100 communities and every corner of this province. That's transit leadership. That's getting the job done right. Thanks very much, Speaker.

MPP Fraser to Minister Hunter Re: TVO

>> MPP John Fraser: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of education. Minister, tvo is truly one of our province's gems, one of -- we can all be truly proud of in this legislature and all Ontarians. So over the last several weeks, I've heard from many constituents about the importance of tvo to their families. Whether it's tvo kids, educational platforms, in depth current affairs shows or documentaries. Tvo plays an important part in their everyday lives. Most concerns over the last couple years of the potential loss of over-the-air transmission and the impact that that would have on those who did not have access to or who could not afford cable and internet. So, Minister, could you please let this legislature know about the additional support that was provided to tvo last Friday's announcement?

>> Min. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member from Ottawa South for his advocacy on behalf of his constituents. Mr. Speaker, we've heard Ontarians value tvo's dynamic educational programming. Someone talked about polkaroo. We all love polkaroo. That's why our government has stepped in, Mr. Speaker, and taken steps to make sure we can continue to enjoy this programming in these communities. This additional investment by our government of \$1 million will help tvo to continue to be accessible over the air in Ottawa, Belleville, Thunder Bay, Chatham,

clone, Kitchener, London and Windsor. This investment builds on the support the ministry of education already provides to two for their innovative educational products and learning tools for students across Ontario, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we support TVO and that's why we've committed to this –

>> MPP Fraser: Thank you very much, Speaker. I'd like to thank the Minister for that answer and I'd like to thank the Minister for listening to the concerns that I expressed on behalf of my constituents but not just myself. I not member from Ottawa Centre and many members of the legislature raised this. It really is a very important part of people's everyday lives. You know we've all been impacted and touched by two, those of us who had kids or are young enough to have been impacted by shows. I'm a little older so I remember my kids' shows. Although I really enjoy the agenda. I have a personal affinity for the poke-aroo. I could hear it in the legislature. As many of us do here. I'm really pleased to hear that over-the-air transmission will be continued. I think it's an important part, an important part of equal access. But I also know that two was also the educational extension of the ministry of education's effort to educate our children. So I'd like the Minister to please talk to us about -- For the technical extension of Ontario's education.

>> Min. Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you again to the member from Ottawa south. We continue to assist two in providing the innovative educational products, Mr. Speaker. I just heard from the member from Ottawa Centre that his two children watched two kids and that's really terrific. For 2016/17 the organization received more than \$48 million to better support the learning needs of all of our students. This includes supports for two's homework health, a free online mass tutoring by teachers for students in grades 7 to 10 ... a new ... indication math learning tool for kindergarten to grade 6 students based on Ontario's math curriculum and this is supporting our renewed math strategy. The provision of distance learning education through its independent learning centre the I.L. C. We will continue to support two so that it can deliver. Innovative programs to support 21st century learning for all students so that they can have the challenge and the skills needed to thrive in today's global economy.

MPP Clark to Minister Hunter Re: Rural Schools

>> MPP Steve Clark: Thank you, Speaker. My question is also to the Minister of education. Speaker, the Minister was in eastern Ontario last month visiting upper Canada District School Board schools targeted for closure. She told local media she was confident the board's accommodation review process would create better learning opportunities for students. I want to provide her with an update. Last week the final report recommended closing seven schools in Leeds- Grenville, 12 overall. That's one in four of the elementary schools the board has in my riding. It's a disaster for rural education in these communities. Speaker, does the Minister actually believe closing so many schools is creating better learning opportunities for students?

>> Min. Mitzi Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for this question, Mr. Speaker. During the wintertime, I've had an opportunity to travel across this province and, Mr. Speaker, I do that because it's what I love to do the most which is to visit schools and to talk to students and to talk to educators. I visited Glengarry, Ottawa, Cornwall, Sault Ste. Marie, Thunder Bay just to name a few. Mr. Speaker, I had a chance to see firsthand how investments in programming for students like specialist high skills major is allowing students to learn the skills that align with their unique learning styles and their interests. Mr. Speaker, every student in Ontario deserves to have access to the best education possible so that they can reach their full potential. And that is why we support the local boards as they are making decisions to strengthen their programming. For students, Mr. Speaker. And that includes having meaningful input from the communities.

>> MPP Clark: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Minister. Her answer was unbelievable. Ontario's Minister of education is sitting on the sidelines, talking platitudes, while the future of rural education is being totally dismantled. As I feared the ridiculous process that she's so confident in ignored alternatives brought forward by school communities in my riding. They're actually proposing

to close two schools in the two fastest growing communities in Leeds- Grenville. I called for a moratorium on school closures last fall to give us time to develop a provincial rural education strategy. You know it's hard to plan for the future of rural education when there's no tomorrow for these schools. Speaker, my question is simple. Will the Minister act before it's too late by stopping these closures and forming -- All-party committee to set up solutions for keeping rural schools open?

>> Min. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I want to stress to the member opposite every student in this province deserves to have access to the best education possible so that they can achieve their full potential. Mr. Speaker, our students in rural areas are integral part of that. We understand that boards are moving forward. There are no easy solutions, Mr. Speaker. Boards with the pupil accommodation review process are required to receive input from municipalities, from community members, from students, from parents and from their local organizations. And, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what they're doing. Mr. Speaker, we cannot have a one-size-fits-all solution to this issue. It has to be a local decision and that's why we support the pupil accommodation review process and we support local boards in making that decision. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we are providing the investments in our education system that are necessary to ensure that our students have the best -- Their education possible.

MPP Vanthof to Minister Sandals Re: BPS Executive Salaries

>> MPP John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Premier. Ontarians are concerned about proposed public sector C.E.O. Pay hikes that could see some executive salaries increase by 50%. These high priced executives who are already making six figures are going to so their salaries increase by hundreds of dollars each year. Most Ontarians haven't seen a real pay increase in years. A lot of Ontarians can't pay for example their hydro bills. It makes you wonder, what are this government's real priorities? If they would rather spend limited public dollars on high-priced executives than on supporting needed public services.

>> Min. Liz Sandals: Yes, thank you very much. Obviously when we think about our partners in the broader public sector, we want to make sure that we have two things hang. We want to make sure that our partners in the broader public sector can pay their executives adequately, that they can attract the best people, because we want the best people running our public services. But we also understand that they need to pay the broader public sector in a responsible manner and to get good value for money. I would point out that the group of people that we are talking about with broader public sector pay or in this group of broader public executives, have actually had their salaries frozen since 2012. And the issue that we have looked at. How do we come out of the freeze in a responsible way? And the way we do that is to make sure they are paying no more than. The 50 --

>> MPP Vanthof: Speaker, years of Liberal austerity budgets have underfunded our hospitals and school to the point of crisis. Funding for the frontline staff that makes a difference in people's lives has been cut possibly to make way for massive C.E.O. Pay hikes. This is money that could be used for hiring back the 16,000 nurses who have lost their jobs in the last two years as a result of damaging Liberals' -- When will this property stop letting the people of Ontario down and invest in programs and services that matter to Ontario families?

>> Min. Sandals: So for the B.P.S. Executives who have had their salary frozen, they have been asked to set out -- the organizations have been asked to set out a salary framework where they are compared to Canadian public sector comparatives. They are not legally allowed to pay more ... point of those comparators. If in fact they have reasonable comparators and reasonable salary increases we will approve that. If they have unreasonable comparators, that don't comply with the regulation, we'll send them back to the drawing board. That's happened. If they have unreasonable increases, we will send them back to the drawing board. We are only going to approve those salary increases, which are reasonable. And allow us to get good value for money and good people to run our public services.

MPP Vernile to Minister Chan Re: Ontario - U.S./NAFTA Trade

>> MPP Daiene Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of international trade. With recent world events taking shape, we're beginning to see a shift in the trade landscape especially here in north America. Ontario does have a long history with our partners in the United States and Mexico, strong and mutually beneficial trade relations that are measured through our deeply integrated economies. And this economic integration has largely come as a result of trade deals like nafta, which now links 450 million people, producing over 20 trillion US Dollars worth of goods and services every year. Nafta effectively eliminated almost all tariffs on goods and provided clear rules that govern trade in good services and investment throughout the continent. Speaker, given the fact that the new US Administration has vowed. To compete in NAFTA, could Minister please' look rate on what this is going to mean for businesses here in Ontario?

>> Min. Michael Chan: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the Honourable member from Kitchener Centre for asking the important question. Speaker, as Minister responsible for international trade, my job is to sell Ontario. While at the same time ensuring access to our existing key markets. Ontario supports free trade and understands the value of our nafta family. Speaker, we have a 24/7 pipeline of communication with the federal government to ensure Ontario's interests are at the forefront of any negotiation recently Prime Minister Trudeau met with US Administration for the very first time. All indications point to the notion that both countries value our similarities and that deepening our trade relation hip is mutually beneficial for now. Thank you, Speaker.

>> MPP Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. It's very encouraging to hear that our Minister of international trade and our government has been actively engaged with our nafta partners. The Premier should also be commended for taking actions to name a dedicated committee for Ontario US Economic trade relations and last month our Premier also issued letters to 27 governors of American ids -- states that rank Ontario as a top customer, spotlighting the positive impact that our trade creates for workers on both sides of the border. However face-to-face engagements are where meaningful connections are made, and that's why our Premier has committed to asserting her presence in key US States beginning in March. Speaker, cot Minister please give us more insight on the direction that Ontario needs to take from a trade perspective in order to continue competing globally?

>> Min. Chan: Thank you, Speaker. Nafta has always been the -- growth for our free countries. Since its implementation, the total G.D.P. For Canada, US And Mexico reached \$20.7 trillion US In 2015. Speaker, we will continue to work with our nafta partners to deepen our relationships, but we must also diversify. Diversification in trade is twofold. We must diversify our trade to include new emerging markets but pursue India and China, and in our established trading markets, we must diversify the sectors and regions for which we trade. Speaker, our government is committed to working with --To renew trade risks and to help Ontario protect and promote a strong economy. Thank you, Speaker.

MPP N. Miller (Thompson) to Minister Thibeault (Duguid) Re: Hydro Rates and Businesses

>> MPP Norm Miller: Mr. Speaker, I'd first like to point out the Minister of Energy said we voted against Bill 27. We actually supported Bill 27. My question is to the Premier. Speaker, Muskoka meet and 100 mile store's a small business in my riding. It's just the kind of business you'd like to see succeed in Ontario. They promote high-quality local food. I can attest to the quality of the delicious Ontario lamb they sell myself. Unfortunately the owner Dave Herdon is struggling to replenish the stock after being forced to launch a half-price sale of frozen meats on Facebook in order to pay his hydro bill and keep his business running. As a butcher, Dave knows that his freezers require substantial electricity to run. However when faced with a \$17 hydro bill and \$500 security deposit he had no option but to sell his quality products at a loss. Speaker, will the Premier explain how small rural businesses. Like Dave's to succeed and prosper while paying Ontario's outrageous hydro rates?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable member for the question.

The important thing for us as the government to recognize is, now, Mr. Speaker, we put forward a few programs to actually help small businesses and they're actually seeing help when they know about those programs, Mr. Speaker, so we're going to continue to promote those programs and make sure those businesses can actually find out that information and save those dollars, Mr. Speaker, because I do hope that the Honourable member let that company know about many of those programs, Mr. Speaker. But as the Premier has said quite a few times, Mr. Speaker, we've come forward with programs. We've had that 8% reduction that's just been in place since January 1st, Mr. Speaker. That 8% reduction applies to all retail price plan customers, Mr. Speaker, which includes farms, which includes small businesses and includes residents, Mr. Speaker. That 8% is coming off the bill but we know we need to do more, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to work hard at that and make sure we find other ways to help those businesses.

>> MPP Lisa M. Thompson: Snobelen farms is a local grain drying and exporter supporting good rural jobs. On the January hydro bill there was a delivery charge of \$9,006 before H.S.T., Speaker. While the electricity cost was \$3,312. Speaker, when snobelen farms wants the Premier to listen and understand, and this is very, very important. If she doesn't start standing up for Ontario businesses, the only thing drying up in this province will be more good-paying jobs. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier admit that her careless spending is perpetuating the ongoing gouging of Ontario businesses through her outrageous delivery charges? Thank you

>> Min. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, we're proud of the investments we've made with Ontario small businesses through the years. I wish the opposition would have been as supportive of small businesses when we made those investments. Our regional economic developments, Mr. Speaker, have seen us invest \$145 million. \$1.7 billion to private sector investment and created -- and supported 35,000 jobs in small businesses in eastern Ontario and southwestern Ontario, Mr. Speaker. Areas that have struggled today keep up with Ontario's burgeoning economy. We've also made Ontario one of the most competitive places for small businesses to operate. We've cut the tax and we've reduced corporate taxes from 5.5% to 4.5%. That saved businesses \$4.5 billion. Our corporate income tax is 13% lower than the average US That's saving significant amounts of money. We brought in the H.S.T., Mr. Speaker, saving \$4.7 billion. This is the most competitive jurisdiction in north America for small, medium and large businesses to operate. And we're going to keep growing, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Fife to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Economic Opportunities for Women

>> MPP Catherine Fife: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. My question of course is to the Premier. Premier, last month statscan data revealed women in this province are far more precariously employed than men. Women are less likely to be employed. Women between age 24 and 55 are employed at a rate 10% lower than men. Women are roughly twice as likely to be working in part-time jobs and more likely than men to have to work multiple jobs. To add insult to injury, Premier, full-time working women in Ontario earn \$167 less per week than their male counterparts across all industries. We know this because it comes from statscanada, their 2016 survey. What Ontarians don't know is why the Premier doesn't have a plan to address employment inequality. Premier, why don't you have a plan to address this serious issue?

>> Min. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you so much for this question, Mr. Speaker. And I want to really say that this is a very important issue for all of us. As we all know, women make up more than 50% of the work force in Ontario, and so they are key players when it comes to building our economy in Ontario and in this province. And because of that important role, they are contributing to a healthy economy and we're committed to ensuring there are economic opportunities for women and all Ontarians. In fact we're doing a number of different things. We support programs that help low-income women gain new skills and new opportunity, such as the women in skilled trades and information technology training program that's trained more than 2,600 women. We're also have a micro lending program for women in Ontario, which is designed to help low-income women. The employment training for abused and at risk women program helps women who are facing challenges in their lives, and we're doing so much more to promote gender equality. And address the gender

wage gap. Of course I'm more than happy to talk about how child care is assisting with that too.