

CO Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Tuesday, November 14, 2017

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Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Tuesday, November 14, 2017.

MCI did not receive any questions of interest.

MSA did not receive any questions of interest.

Official opposition questions were on a number of topics including the hydro rate reduction plan, long-term care facilities and the government's budget. NDP Questions today included school repairs, hospital funding and the college strike.

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

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

From: Stinson, Jeffrey (CAB)
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Transcript of Provincial Question Period

41st Parliament, 2nd Session

Tuesday, November 14, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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Table of Contents

MPP Smith to Premier Wynne (Thibeault)

Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

MPP Thompson (Clark) (Yurek) to Premier Wynne (Hoskins)

Re: Long-Term Care Facilities

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Hunter)

Re: School Repairs

MPP Horwath to Minister Hoskins

Re: Hospital Funding

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne

Re: Ontario Budget

MPP Sattler to Premier Wynne (Matthews)

Re: College Strike

MPP Kiwala to Minister Jaczek

Re: Poverty Reduction

MPP Brown to Minister Sandals

Re: Budget 2017

MPP Campbell to Minister Zimmer

Re: Grassy Narrows

MPP Qaadri to Minister Zimmer (Hunter)

Re: First Nations Recognition

MPP Coe to Minister Matthews

Re: College Strike

MPP Horwath to Minister Hoskins

Re: Hospital Funding

MPP Baker to Minister Leal (Duguid)

Re: Small Business Growth

MPP Smith to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Todd Smith: Good morning. My question's to the Premier. Speaker, this morning global news reported that utilities in Ontario charged customers \$12.4 million just to send out disconnection notices last year. Some customers were billed as much as \$55 for a single notice of pending disconnection. A stamp is 85 cents, Speaker. An email is even less than that. Hydro One even admitted that the cost of sending disconnection notice is only \$1.05. Speaker, why does the Premier think it's fair that thousands of Ontarians, who already can't pay their hydro bill, are also being charged for the privilege of being told that they're going to be disconnected?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of energy is going to want to speak to the specifics of this notification but, Mr. Speaker, let me just say that what we know is fair is that, across this province, people are seeing a reduction of on average 25% in their electricity bills, Mr. Speaker, and people living in more remote and rural communities, up to a 40 to 50% reduction, Mr. Speaker. We knew and we know that people were struggling --Look tristy prices, Mr. Speaker. That's what our fair hydro plan addresses, Mr. Speaker. It actually addresses the challenges that people were facing because, Mr. Speaker, we had made investments in our electricity system to make it reliable, Mr. Speaker. The system was not clean. It was not reliable. It is -- There was a cost associated with that but people have seen reductions in their bills, Mr. Speaker. That's what's fair.

>> MPP Smith: Speaker, for years, for three years, the Premier said that there was no crisis in electricity in Ontario. She didn't act until it became an election crisis for her and the Liberal government of Ontario. And we know that the fair hydro plan, which is really unfair, doesn't do anything to fix the problem in Ontario's electricity crisis. It just makes it worse. Speaker, the Ontario energy board doesn't require companies to track disconnection notices but most do, and we know that across Ontario roughly 1.5 million disconnection notices were sent out last year, 1.5 million, electricity that's so expensive that hundreds of thousands of Ontarians can't afford it and can't afford the disconnection notice they get for the power that they can't afford. Follow the logic here. Speaker, why is it that the government -- Is allowing outrageous profits to be made from customers who can't afford their hydro bills in the first place?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So if we're following the logic, let's look at the very first thing that we did, which is a 25% reduction for every family in this House hold which they voted

against, Mr. Speaker. Going on with that, Mr. Speaker, following the logic, all they would have to do is look to what the O.E.B. is doing, Mr. Speaker. The O.E.B. is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of its customer service rules and we look forward to seeing that result later this year, Mr. Speaker. On top of that, if we're following logic, Mr. Speaker, which is something that they don't have on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker. On November 15th, they are well aware, Mr. Speaker, that the O.E.B. Banned winter disconnections from November 15th until April 30th of 2018. The O.E.B. Has mandated that all customers who are currently disconnected be reconnected as soon as possible at no charge, Mr. Speaker. The O.E.B. --And their decision also requires the removal of load limiting devices and anything else Mr. Speaker That is affecting customers. That is something, Mr. Speaker, that we're supporting.

>> MPP Smith: Speaker, this is the Liberal legacy in Ontario. People are getting cut off of their electricity at record rates. Listen to this. Last year approximately 60,000 Ontarians had their power cut off. 60,000. We know now that across Ontario roughly 1.5 million Ontarians have been served with disconnection notices. That's one in every three homes is being hit with a disconnection notice. Welcome to Liberal Ontario. These are the numbers. You can't dispute them. And still utilities are charging up to \$55 for disconnection notices that only cost \$1.05 to actually produce. How the heck do you explain that, Mr. Speaker? Speaker, why the most catastrophic mistakes of this government always seem to fall on the people of Ontario, who can least afford them?

>> Minister Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, so welcome to Liberal Ontario where your rates have gone down 25%, Mr. Speaker. Welcome to Liberal Ontario, where you're seeing more infrastructure built right across this province than ever before, Mr. Speaker. Welcome to Liberal Ontario where you don't have coal as part of your electricity system. Welcome to Liberal Ontario where we're raising minimum wage and looking after our workers, Mr. Speaker. The list goes on. We are very proud of our record and making sure that we've invested in health care, that we've invested in infrastructure, that we've invested in education and in advanced education, Mr. Speaker, in training, in research. You know, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to welcoming people to Liberal Ontario, we do that with open arms. We're encouraging businesses. We're encouraging people. We're seeing more and more people come to Ontario. Our unemployment rate is at its lowest ever thanks to the Minister of economic development and growth. Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to take that member on any time to debate a Liberal Ontario and the benefits --

MPP Thompson (Clark) (Yurek) to Premier Wynne (Hoskins) Re: Long-Term Care Facilities

>> MPP Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Last week many Ontarians were shocked to learn of a new secret home care agency that her government will be creating. What we want to know is who she consulted with in creating this agency. Was anyone other than the organization writing hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of attack ads on behalf of the Liberals even consulted? This is a question of ethics, Speaker, not merit. We want to know about the relationship that the Premier and her Liberal government had with its former party president. Speaker, I have a straightforward yes or no question -- will the Premier do the right thing and release all of the correspondence that her office had with the sciu and all other -- Relevant stakeholders ahead of the home care changes announced in October?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I know that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is going to want to speak on the specifics, but, Mr. Speaker, you know, our priority, with a very complex issue in terms of making sure that the people who we love, the people who raised us, the people who have built this province, that they have the care that they need and that they want, Mr. Speaker. And that means that there needs to be a range of care. You know I hear the heckling from the other side. They've had a lot of

time. We have been investing in home care, Mr. Speaker. We have been working to make that transformation in the health care system that actually gives people who are needing care in their homes or in the community those options, Mr. Speaker. We continue to look for ideas. We continue to look for models, Mr. Speaker, that will provide better care for people who either -- Want to stay in their homes, want to stay in the community or want, Mr. Speaker, long-term care. That's our priority is making sure those people have the care that they need.

>> MPP Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Premier. In her 2015 report of community care access centres, the auditor general found serious issues. The government was spending 39% of their total budget on administration costs alone. They created a needlessly complex system that resulted in gaps in care and left patients suffering. And now we're hearing the government has quietly put forward a plan for new home care bureaucracy with zero consultation with industry stakeholders. Instead of spending precious dollars on home care and patients, this government has been set up to expand the bureaucracy to the benefit of their Liberal insider friend. Given the government's poor home care track record, this will clearly not benefit patients. Can the Premier explain why this announcement was buried at the bottom of a press release and rushed through with no consultation? And will the Minister commit to exposing any involvement sci-u has had?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite had have been paying attention, he would have known in early October that at Kensington, that is a tremendous provider of home care services. They have a hospice as well. They have a residential setting for individuals that require support. He would have known that in early October, I spoke in front of many media representatives, many cameras at the same time that we announced an increase in our funding to home care across this province. But I specifically and emphatically described this model, which is in fact -- that has been used successfully in California, in Massachusetts, in Michigan, Oregon and many other places around the world. The model that we're following to give choice to those who require home care,

>> MPP Steve Clark: Thanks, Speaker. Back to the Premier. For years this Liberal government has looked out for the interests of insiders and the well connected. First leaving everyday Ontarians paying more, working harder and getting less. This deal to create seiu-backed home care model certainly looks like history repeating itself. Described by some as having cozy ties with this government. Their G.R. Head is a former head, former president of the Liberal party. Doesn't pass the smell test. Speaker my question to the Premier is simple. Just how much influence has Michael Spitali have on the creation of this seiu-backed organization?

>> Minister Hoskins: So, Mr. Speaker, we're piloting -- We're piloting two new innovative self-directed care models. One model is we're going to provide funds directly to home care clients to purchase the services themselves but we need to acknowledge, there's a subset outside of that, roughly 6,000 people maximum across the province that don't want to remit taxes for their employees to revenue Canada, that don't want to negotiate or find a challenge to negotiate those contracts with employees. We're going to provide that subset with complex needs, more than 14 hours of home care needs a week with the opportunity to select and schedule their own personal support worker. We're going to do that and support them, as many jurisdictions in United States and around the world have done successfully.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Hunter) Re: School Repairs

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, pie question's for the Premier. Schools in Ontario need \$15.9 billion worth of repairs just to get them to decent standards for our children. That's a very big number with very big consequences. In the summer, that number means kids that are in the classrooms sweating in their seats because schools can't afford air conditioning on hot days. In the winter, which is upon us, it means a second grader for example trying to focus on her math test while fumbling with her winter gloves and parka because the heat is broken yet again at the school. We have to do better for our children in this province. Why did the Premier allow this \$15.9 billion school repair backlog to get so bad?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let's just look at the facts of what has happened over the last number of years, Mr. Speaker. First of all we inherited a system that was seriously degraded, Mr. Speaker. One of the reasons as I've said in this House and elsewhere, one of the reasons that I am in provincial politics is because of the policies of the previous government that allowed our publicly funded education system to degrade in the classroom, outside of the classroom, Mr. Speaker. And so that's why I'm here. That's why many of us are here. So we have invested \$17.5 billion in capital funding. We've built 820 new schools, Mr. Speaker, and we've invested in more than 800 retrofits and additions, Mr. Speaker. When you think of the reality that there are in the order of 5,000 publicly funded schools in this province, Mr. Speaker, that is a huge percentage of schools that have either been rebuilt or have been renovated. Since 2013, we've invested -- 9.3 billion in capital funding to support more than 120 new schools and more than 140 additions and renovations. So that rebuild and that renovation --

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the fact remains there's a \$15.9 billion backlog in repairs for schools in this province. The disrepair in Ontario schools started with the Conservative government. I don't disagree with that observation that was just made by the Premier, because that government cut school maintenance budgets and left a \$5.6 billion backlog when they were at the helm. It's continued, however, with the Liberal government. They have often provided just 1 will she 10 of what schools actually need to keep up with repairs. Why did the Premier break her promise to Ontarians and follow in Conservatives' footsteps when it comes to education funding that leaves too many children in this province trying to learn in buildings that are falling apart around their ears?

>> Minister Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. And I first of all, Mr. Speaker, there's no government in the history of this province that has invested more in education than this government on this side of the House. And, Mr. Speaker, you know, I know that there are advocates here who are concerned about the state of our schools, and we know that good school environments provide better learning environments for students. I want to thank fix our schools for all of their advocacy and advice they've given to us, Mr. Speaker. You know what, Mr. Speaker ? We are following through. After inheriting a system, as the Premier has pointed out, in complete disrepair, we have been making those investments in new schools, in additions, as well as in the repair of schools. This year alone our government will spend \$1.4 billion on school renewal, Mr. Speaker, which is in line with what the auditor general has advised in an ongoing base toys keep our schools. To keep our schools in a good state of repair. Mr. Speaker, we know there is more work to be done, and that's exactly what we're doing. We're making those investments and working with school boards to do so.

>> Andrea Horwath: The previous record on education is abysmal. Since 2011 Since 2011 the Liberals have closed more than 270 schools and put another 300 on the chopping block. The repair backlog has only gone up. I think it's pretty interesting to hear the Premier and the Minister talk about the previous government's complete disrepair of status in terms of it being 5.6 billion if they're so concerned about the complete disrepair that they left them, why is it almost three times more under the Liberal government after 14 years in office? Ed repair backlog has only gone up and now it's \$15.9 billion. Children are being sent to schools with leaky roofs, broken boilers. Thousands of students are being sent to learn in dilapidated portables. Schools are parks, playgrounds and public spaces. They're supposed to support and encourage our kids to learn. Why has the Premier let our schools fall into such dismal disrepair?

>> Minister Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, Mr. Speaker, we have a plan moving forward to

continue to invest in Ontario's schools. We are investing \$16 billion over the next decade to invest in the infrastructure in our schools, because we know that good school environments provide the optimal learning for students and that is our focus, Mr. Speaker. I don't know what the focus is of the leader of the third party, Mr. Speaker. The last time she put forward a plan, it promised an embarrassing \$60 million a year for school repairs. That is just 4% of the \$1.4 billion we have committed to invest in school repair and renewal. Mr. Speaker, we know that Ontario's schools are worthy of this investment and that's why we're making them. We're making these investments so that students can have the best learning environment possible. And we have committed that funding to school boards so that they can prioritize the facilities that need repair.

MPP Horwath to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Funding

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you very much, Speaker. My next question's also for the Premier. The emergency department at Brampton Civic Hospital was built to serve 90,000 visits. It experienced more than 138,000 visits last year alone. This year the hospital has already been forced to declare code gridlock eight times between January and April, and we know that last year at Brampton Civic, there were 4,352 patients laying on stretchers, getting their medical care in public hallways. The Premier's solution is to offer 37 beds. Well, I'm sure the people of Brampton will take the 37 hospital beds. Just simply not enough to begin undoing the damage caused by many years of Liberal budget cuts and freezes. Is this the best the Premier can offer to the people of Brampton?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the mayor of Brampton, the leadership of Brampton Civic Hospital William Osler, the three MPPs as well on this side of the House that have worked so hard on behalf of the residents of Brampton and surrounding region of Peel. Mr. Speaker, last week we announced, on top of the 17 million of new dollars that we added to the operating budget at William Osler this year, we announced last year 37 new beds for Brampton Civic Hospital itself, 22 beds for Etobicoke General which is part of the William Osler system, and importantly and especially, Mr. Speaker, we announced our commitment to fund in the tune every hundreds of millions of dollars phase 2 of the Peel Memorial Urgent Care Centre, which will involve more than 100 new beds and associated supports once that is fully completed in the future, Mr. Speaker. So that is an incredible response, I think, to a reality that's happening in Brampton because of a growing population. It is one of the highest growth populations in this country and we're responding to that.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker the Peel Memorial Centre has also been hard hit by the Premier's short changing every health care in Brampton. In 2016, the Premier and her Minister of Health were warned that the urgent care centre at Peel Memorial would need to serve 65,000 people per year. 50% more than what it was designed for. And it has to help 50% more people than it was designed for while being forced to close at 10:00 PM. Again due to a lack of support from this Premier and her Liberal government. The 37 beds that the Premier has offered are barely a drop in the bucket when it comes to the underfunding of this magnitude. Will the Premier take any meaningful action to help Brampton hospitals and make sure that Brampton's families have the health care that they can count on?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I think it's insulting -- insulting to the mayor, the leadership at William Osler to suggest the investment that we made in the tune of hundred of millions of dollars last week, that that somehow is meaningless. 37 new beds for Brampton Civic, 22 new beds for Etobicoke General, and Peel Memorial specifically what we did is we committed to funding and we're now well on our way to create phase 2 at Peel Memorial. By the way an urgent care wellness centre, which is so well received by the community and appreciated by the community we're building a tower adjacent to that phase 2,

which will contain well in excess of 100 new beds. Mr. Speaker, on top of \$41 million over the last two years, an increase in their operating budget to William Osler. \$41 million in the last two years. If that's meaningless, I don't know what planet that member is living on.

>> Andrea Horwath: I'm living in a planet where, in Ontario, people are getting their health care in hallways in hospitals. That's what planet I'm living on. Speaker, the NDP Has a motion today that would immediately relieve the pressure at brampton civic and Peel memorial, because brampton families shouldn't have to wait to get access to good quality health care, and their loved ones shouldn't be getting their hospital care in public hallways. The William Osler health system, which runs brampton civic and Peel memorial, have called for an immediate 30.2 million investment to cope with the overcrowding, open two mothballed operating rooms that were built but have never been used, Speaker, and deal with immediate funding shortfalls. This is a start. It won't fix the harm that comes from decades of underfunding but it's what the people of brampton need right now. Will the Premier commit to taking this stem and helping the the people of brampton get the health care that they need and they deserve?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, like the P.C.S with regards to the announcements I made in October they reference, it seems the leader of the third party missed our announcement last week where we announced 37 new beds. In fact beds that will be available this calendar year. And she missed the fact that in response to the growing demands in brampton, one of the fastest growing jurisdictions in this country, we're expanding Peel memorial, adding more than 100 beds there, plus all the associated supports for rehabilitation and complex continuing care. Mr. Speaker, we're making the investment 2,000 - the equivalent what was announced for Peel is the equivalent of a medium sized hospital, Mr. Speaker, and we announced a couple of weeks ago 2,000 hospital beds and spaces to be able to address the capacity challenges that certain parts of our province are having. Mr. Speaker, this is great news for the people of brampton. I think she needs to talk to the people of brampton because they will agree with us that it is solving the problem.

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne Re: Ontario Budget

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Today it appears the Minister of finance will double down on his claims that Ontario has a balanced budget. Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Let's start with the financial accountability officer in may of 2017, the F.A.O. Said spring outlook said we will continue to be in budget deficit for the next five years. Five years, Mr. Speaker. He stated further, beginning in 2018 and '19 the F.A.O. Is projecting a steady deterioration in the budget deficit. So, Mr. Speaker, we have the Minister of finance pretending we have a balanced budget. We have F.A.O. Chosen and agreed to by the government saying that it is not accurate, that we're in a significant deficit. So my question to the Premier is who's right. The Minister of finance and his political spin, or the non-partisan F.A.O.?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let's look at some objective realities, Mr. Speaker. The fact is Ontario is leading economic growth in the country, Mr. Speaker. Our unemployment rate is the lowest in 17 years, Mr. Speaker. We are seeing job creation, Mr. Speaker, just this year 125,000 net new jobs, 800,000 net new jobs since the recession, Mr. Speaker. The reality is Ontario is doing very well. But here's the other reality and the Minister of finance will be speaking to this as well. Not everyone in this province is sharing in that, Mr. Speaker. Not everyone is feeling that benefit evenly. And so, Mr. Speaker, what we are doing as a government is we are putting in place supports, making sewer that people have access in a fair way, Mr. Speaker, that they have access to opportunity across the province. Whether it's students who will benefit and are benefitting from free tuition, whether it's young

people starting in January. Who will get pre prescription medication or whether it's the millions of people who will benefit from an increased minimum wage. That's the fairness

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. I had pretty specific questions and that the Minister of finance says the budget is balanced, yet the F.A.O., the nonpartisan legislative oversight agreed to the government to make sure that facts are correct and the numbers are correct. That officer that the government agree today is saying the government's numbers are wrong and not just by a little bit. The financial accountability officer's economic and fiscal outlook predicts that Ontario's deficit will be \$2.6 billion. So, Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. Rather than talking about something, nothing related to the question, I want to know who is right with their numbers? Is it the F.A.O., which is the nonpartisan legislative oversight, or is it the Minister of finance and their fake Liberal spin?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's interesting -- I think it's interesting that the leader of the opposition would suggest that the economic well-being of the citizens of this province have nothing to do with the economy of the province. This notion, Mr. Speaker. The fact that there are millions of people in Ontario who can't look after themselves because they're earning \$11.60 an hour and they will see a minimum wage increase -- An increase to their wage as of January 1st, Mr. Speaker. I think that will make a material difference to the people who are -- Who are struggling to make ends meet. Mr. Speaker, the reality is that if this leader of the opposition doesn't think that creating fairness in this province, creating opportunity in this province when we're living in a province that is leading economic growth in the country. If he doesn't think that that's a priority, then he is completely off track in terms of what we believe as a government, Mr. Speaker

MPP Sattler to Premier Wynne (Matthews) Re: College Strike

>> MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Speaker, last week's announcement of a hardship fund for some of the 500,000 College students who have been financially disadvantaged by the strike, is cold comfort to students who are seeing their dreams slip away as this strike drags on, who are experiencing skyrocketing rates of anxiety and depression with few resources on campus to assist them, who are being forced to turn down job offers and are worried how they will be able to support themselves. Speaker, if the Minister can direct the Colleges to create a hardship fund, why doesn't she direct the Colleges to go back to the table and work out a negotiated settlement -- Bring stability not chaos for the College system?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I am completely sympathetic with the students who want to be back in the classroom. They need to be back in the classroom, Mr. Speaker, and I know that Colleges have a responsibility to put in place contingency plans, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that students don't lose this semester, Mr. Speaker. I know also that faculty want to be back in the classroom and my understanding is that faculty will begin voting on the employer's last offer through the olrb beginning today, Mr. Speaker. We want every student in our College system back in class as quickly as possible, Mr. Speaker. But I know that the member opposite understands the process. We need to let that unfold, Mr. Speaker, and we will work as hard as we can to make sure that young people get back into the classroom as quickly as possible.

>> MPP Sattler: Again to the Premier. Speaker, with no resolution in sight until at least the end of this week and that is by no means certain, the College strike has entered uncharted territory in the history of

College labour relations. The risk of losing a semester is very, very real for students. Students are worried that they will have to repay osap for education they did not receive. When St. Lawrence College student Morgan Campbell called the Premier's office to share her concern, she was told to call welfare. Speaker, is this really the best advice this Liberal government can offer to students when it is their failure to properly fund the system that created the conditions for this strike and their inaction that has allowed the strike to drag on past the breaking point?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. Since this strike began, my focus has been very clearly on the student. I have spoken with students. I have spoken to parents. I've spoken to grandparents, Speaker, all of whom are really concerned that their -- that their child or grandchild or they themselves are in danger of losing a semester. It is vitally important that this strike get resolved and get resolved quickly, Speaker. We do respect the Collective bargaining process. The Colleges are in -- bargaining with opseu, Speaker. We must respect that process, but at the same time we must keep our eye on students. They are facing real anxiety, as the member opposite has said. They are facing real challenges, financial and otherwise. And that's why -- We're asking that Colleges create a dedicated fund to support those students.

>> Thank you, speaker. My question is to the premier. Speaker, last week's announcement of a hardship fund for some of the 500,000 college students who have been financially disadvantaged by the strike, is cold comfort to students who are seeing their dreams slip away as this strike drags on, who are experiencing skyrocketing rates of anxiety and depression with few resources on campus to assist them, who are being forced to turn down job offers and are worried how they will be able to support themselves. Speaker, if the minister can direct the colleges to create a hardship fund, why doesn't she direct the colleges to go back to the table and work out a negotiated settlement -- [Applause] Bring stability not chaos for the college system? [Applause]

MPP Kiwala to Minister Jaczek Re: Poverty Reduction

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of community and social services. Mr. Speaker, our government continues to take a leadership role in exploring creative and innovative ways to reduce poverty and support people living on low income. We have shown our commitment to low-income individuals and families through expanding the Ontario electricity support program, introducing ohip plus, providing free prescription medication to children and youth up to 24 years old starting this January and through the largest increase to the minimum wage in the province's history, raising it to \$15 an hour by 2019. In my riding of Kingston and the islands, I know that these commitments are very important to my constituents. On November the 2nd, the income security reform working group released their report titled "Income security: A road map for change" with recommendation to the government on how to make further improvements to support some services for people living on low income. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister, can you please tell the members of this House .

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Speaker, and to the member for her question and her advocacy for low-income Ontarians. Last year our government established the income security reform working group, the first nations working group and an urban indigenous table on income security reform. We asked them to study Ontario's income security system and make recommendations on how to improve it. I want to sincerely thank the members of the three working groups for their valuable contributions over the last year in creating the road map. We will be using the road map as a guide to develop a multi-year plan. Our plan will be practical, realistic and recognize the province's fiscal responsibilities. Mr. Speaker, I know on this side of the House we all agree with the need to fundamentally reform the income security system, especially social assistance, because we want our programs to reflect the needs of the people who require them.

>> MPP Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for all of the important work that she does to support Ontario's most vulnerable individuals and families. I know that people from my riding, like Hugh Segal who helped author the recommendations for basic income, Tony Picard, as well as of course Elaine Power from Queen's, will all think that these initiatives will be very, very important for our communities. While Ontario's economy is strong, not everyone is experiencing the same opportunities. More people are facing job insecurity and the cost of living is certainly rising. We want to create a fair, modern, accountable and effective income security system that will ensure that individuals living on low income will have the tools and resources that they need to provide to improve their overall quality of life. It is also important that we hear from the public about how they feel and how we can -- reshape our current income security system. Can you please tell us how the public can get involved in providing their feedback on income security, a road map to change?

>> Minister Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although we continue to make improvements to the social assistance system, we know we have more work to do. Reforming the income security system including the transformation of social assistance will assist us in ensuring all individuals are treated with respect and dignity and are inspired to reach their full potential. We also want to ensure particular attention is focused on the needs and experience of indigenous people. Hearing from individuals who are directly impacted by our current social assistance programs is vital in terms of how we move forward with the recommended changes and that's why my ministry has posted the income security: A road map for change online for public feedback. What we hear over the next 60 days, along with the recommendations from the report, will go a long way in helping us to reform the system and to one that is fair, supportive and puts the needs of the person at the centre. Of supports we provide. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Brown to Minister Sandals Re: Budget 2017

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Premier. There's a lot of talk about the Liberals' mythical balanced budget, and it's not just the financial accountability officer who's saying the government's numbers are wrong. It's the auditor general. Last year she said the government significantly understated the deficit. Ant books, I quote, were not prepared following the Canadian public sector accounting standards. She added that the legislature and all Ontarians must be able to rely on the province's consolidated financial statements to fairly report the fiscal results for the year. This year they can't. So now you've got not only the financial accountability officer. You have the auditor general saying the government's numbers do not add up. And then rather than answer something that's not related to the question, I've got a very specific question to the Deputy Premier. The F.A.O. And auditor general are saying the government's numbers are wrong. In this financial update we're getting this week, can we be assured that the numbers are actually going to be agreed upon by legislative officer? Yes or no?

>> Minister Liz Sandals: Yes. Thank you very much, Speaker. And I can give you the one-word answer, yes. The budget is balanced. In fact we are on -- Budget -- yes, the budget is balanced. We are on track to balance the budget this year. And do you know what that means, Speaker is this that means that instead of slashing and burning services people rely on, we choose to invest in the people of Ontario to bring the province out of the recession. Progressive policies like full-day kindergarten, free tuition that will insure that the labour force of the future is well educated, well trained over the long term, not to mention the historical infrastructure investments -- Of 190 billion over 13 years and our private economists who agree with our projection.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Deputy Premier. My question was will the F.A.O. And auditor general agree with the numbers? It should be very worrisome to everyone in Ontario that you have

numbers that the government's presenting that the legislative oversight are saying are incorrect. This is unparalleled. You've got the F.A.O. And the auditor general saying not only are the numbers wrong that government's making up their own accounting rules. And if it's not good enough that you've got legislative oversight saying that you're wrong, the highly respected don Drummond, which this government has praised before, has said by no means are they completely out of the physical woods. So everyone is saying your numbers are wrong. They do a specific kindness of at least admitting they make up their own rules? Of saying their numbers do not add up and we are in a deficit?

>> Minister Sandals: Thank you very much, and I wouldn't presume to speak for our independent officers. They're independent. However, what I can do is tell you about some other third-party numbers. So for example 800,000 net new jobs since the recession. The majority are in the private sector and in above-wage industries. About 94.1% of those new jobs are full time. That's not my data. That's statscan. The unemployment rate is 5.9%, which is below the national average for 31 straight months in a row. Lowest it's been in years. Those are not my numbers. Those are statscan numbers. What about the G.D.P.? Private-sector forecasts for real G.D.P. Growth is 2.9%. In 2017. North America leading. Increased from 2.4% since we presented our balanced budget.

MPP Campbell to Minister Zimmer Re: Grassy Narrows

>> MPP Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier or the Deputy Premier. The NDP Has repeatedly confronted the Premier and this government with evidence that people in grassy narrows and wabaseemong first nations were still getting sick from Mercury poisoning including young people. She said the Mercury was contained. She even warned that a full cleanup might make things worse. Now we know that her government has known all along that there was still Mercury contaminating the river and that this government has been concealing this truth. When did the Premier find out that the ground under the mill was still contaminated with Mercury, and who gave the order to keep this truth from the people grassy narrows?

>> Minister David Zimmer: Thank you for that question. The domtar report, which has been in the news recently, Speaker, was received by the ministry in September 16. It is the position of this government that all information related to the Mercury situation on grassy narrows first nation and on the English wabigoon river should be transparently shared. The ministry is reviewing that report now to see what the consequences of that report are and what should be done. I should say, Speaker, that we have a plan in place to deal with the Mercury pollution on grassy narrow on the domtar site. We are working with grassy narrows first nation, with white dog first nation. We are working with the ministry officials. We have committed to clean up the Mercury site there.

>> MPP Campbell: Speaker, the fact of the matter is that this government has had that report in its possession for over a year. And this government has always known this information. This is not new information. The Minister did not let the people of grassy narrows know. How is that transparent? Instead, a few months after receiving the report, he told this House that, quote, there is no source unquote of Mercury contamination. The people of grassy narrows and wabaseemong first nations deserve to know why they have not been told the truth. Will the Premier tell us when she knew about the contamination and who gave the order to conceal this truth?

>> Minister Zimmer: Speaker, the ministry, the government received this report in September '16. We are

committed to resolving this issue. I can tell you, Speaker, that in the past year or so I have been to grassy narrows twice. I have met with the chief at grassy narrows. And the chiefs of white dog. I have had meetings with former Minister Murray on two occasions, with the leaders from the communities. We have had meetings with the federal -- the then federal Minister, Minister Bennett. We are committed to this. We have recently provided about \$5.2 million. To support pre-remediation work, and subsequent to that we've set aside \$85 million for remediation efforts. This government is serious about dealing with this issue.

MPP Qaadri to Minister Zimmer (Hunter) Re: First Nations Recognition

>> MPP Shafiq Qaadri: As you all know there is a long treaty between the British nations and -- this history dates back from 1701 to the present day. In fact Ontario is unique in Canada for the number and variety of treaties between first nations and the crown. There are actually about 46 treaties and counting. These include land purchases across the entire province. Last week, Speaker, as you will know Ontario celebrated treaty recognition week with events taking place all across our province that brought together indigenous and non-indigenous peoples together to learn about our shared history. Speaker, can the Minister elaborate on the significance of treaty recognition week and our government's work towards reconciliation in this area?

>> Minister David Zimmer: Thank you, Speaker. Treaties are the reason Canada and Ontario exist as we know them today, and all Ontarians, especially students, need to gain a better understanding of treaties. Ontario is the first province in Canada to legislate the observance of an annual treaties recognition week. And during the first recognition week last November, we connected many indigenous Speaker s with hundreds of students across Ontario through our living library initiative. This year we held more than 200 events, in 60 communities, with 50 indigenous Speaker s. And last week I was in white fish first nation to celebrate the treaty recognition week with grand chief madaby and chief shining turtle. We launched two very, very important children's books on the history of treaties and their significance. It's through the recognition week that ou our three-year treaty strategy the government is working to build a better understanding of the significance and importance of treaties.

>> MPP Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker. Through the treaty recognition week, as the Minister 's deadline, offering an opportunity to foster greater understanding and awareness of the importance of treaties across the province of Ontario. Raising awareness of treaties and of indigenous treaties and cultures more broadly is of great importance to this province, to this government and to this country particularly through educational opportunities for youth. I know our government believes all students, including indigenous and non-indigenous students, are enriched by learning about the histories, cultures, perspectives and contributions of first nation, métis and inuit peoples in Canada. I understand our government's taking steps to ensure Ontario's curriculum includes man mandatory learning about residential schools and indigenous people, historical and contemporary contributions. Would the Minister share with us what the government is doing about updating the curriculum in response to the truth and reconciliation commission's --

>> Minister Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last week I joined the Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation at Milliken mills high school in Markham to announce our government's three-year annual investment of \$5 million to support the implementation of the revised curriculum. Ontario has been working with indigenous partners to make revisions to the curriculum that will strengthen mandatory learning on the history of residential schools, the legacy of colonialism and the importance of treaties. We will also be investing in capacity building for teachers and supporting the development of resources that are linked to the revised curriculum. Promoting greater awareness of indigenous histories and cultures is one of the many steps on Ontario's journey of healing and reconciliation with indij nuls peoples. Axles such

as these revised curriculums reflect our government's commitment to working with indigenous partners and rebuilding relationships based on trust and respect for first nation métis and inuit. I want to thank the Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation for his work.

MPP Coe to Minister Matthews Re: College Strike

>> MPP Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Deputy Premier. A "Global news" story last week shed some light on the Premier's attitude towards -- Thank you, Speaker. A global news story last week shed some light on the Premier's attitude towards students and the ongoing community College strike. A St. Lawrence College student contacted the Premier's office because she had concerns about her second-semester osap loans. Speaker, the alleged response from staff in the Premier's office -- call welfare. Call welfare, Speaker. Speaker, this is absolutely shameful. Which staff member did the Premier instruct to tell students to call welfare when in financial distress?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. Well, I can tell you that no one, no Premier has ever done more for College and university students than our Premier Kathleen Wynne. No one has done more. Free tuition for almost 200,000 students, Speaker. Free tuition plus help with living expenses. Another one third of our students are getting additional help to defray the cost of tuition, Speaker. We have opened the window of opportunity, opened the door of opportunity for students in this province unlike it has ever been before. Speaker, we believe that when students work hard, when they get accepted to College or university, money should never stand in the way. And that's why we've brought forth the greatest transformation of student assistance ever in the history of Ontario -- In the history of Canada, Speaker. I can tell you that internationally people are looking at what we have done to open opportunities for students, Speaker .

>> MPP Coe: Back to the Deputy Premier. While these investments don't do anything for students, who have already sold personal belongings to pay their rent. Speaker, the Premier's shown a complete lack of leadership and failed to act in the best interests of students since the first day of the strike. While my Ontario Progressive Conservative Colleagues and I called on the Premier to take action and bring both sides back to the bargaining table, the Liberal government sat on its hands for weeks. Now the Premier's staff allegedly treats College students desperate for financial assistance with disdain and disrespect. Speaker, how can College students across Ontario trust that the Premier will act and effect their best interests ever again?

>> Minister Matthews: Students have been caught in the middle of this strike since the beginning. It is not fair what students are going through, Speaker. It is just not fair. That's why we've worked hard to bring the two sides together to negotiate, Speaker. I know the party opposite has no respect for the Collective bargaining process, Speaker. Zero. If you look at their campaign, their platform last time around, Speaker, a number of initiatives to weaken Collective bargaining, Speaker. On this side, we are very concerned, very concerned about students, and that's why we've instructed Colleges to create a fund with the net savings from the strike, Speaker, and we're consulting with students' groups, College student alliance and other student leaders on how best to distribute the money from the savings --The sooner those students are back in the classroom, the better off we all will be.

MPP Horwath to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Funding

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question is for the acting Premier, the Deputy Premier. Yesterday I was in London talking to Nicole doorthier. Nicole told me about her brother who struggles with his mental health and how when he needed help at the hospital, he was forced to wait in the E.R. For 16 hours before being admitted on to a stretcher in a public hallway for four days. In fact they gave him four hours in a room then yanked him out of a room and put him into a hallway for four days. Stories like this are everywhere in London, particularly when it comes to people trying to get help for mental health issues. That's because London health sciences has been at 130% capacity in its psychiatric beds every single day between May 1st and September 22nd this year. In fact, on August 22nd -- The hospital reached an extraordinary high of 165% capacity in its mental health beds. Why is the Premier ok with these shocking numbers and ok with disappointing Nicole and her brother?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And that's why I find it hard to understand, given that expressed concern, why that member opposite and her party would have voted against the legislation that will allow our paramedics, our E.M.S. Services to transport mental health patients to the most appropriate clinical location. We invested and opened up a remarkable with the cmha, a remarkable crisis centre in the community in London. But they voted against -- I suspect when it comes to final reading they're going to vote against it again, where it will provide our E.M.S. Workers the opportunity to actually transport and deliver mental health patients even with a history with that crisis centre to that crisis centre. For some reason she wants to continue to divert them to the hospital E.R., Mr. Speaker, we also are dramatically increasing our investment in mental health beds and I'm happy to talk about that in supplementary.

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, you know this Liberal government talks a good game about dealing with the mental health problems that we have in this province, but when we have a hospital that's at 165% capacity in its mental health beds, we have a serious problem that they've been ignoring for a very, very long time. The hospital overcrowding crisis didn't happen yesterday, Speaker. It didn't happen overnight. It's been years in the making, starting with the last Conservative government closing 28 hospitals, firing 6,000 nurses, closing 7,000 hospital beds and worsening with every single Liberal budget cut and hospital funding freeze that followed, and there were many. We must do right by Nicole, Speaker. Her brother and all those who have been let down by our health care system under this Premier. Under this Minister's watch. What is the Premier's plan to fix the overcrowding crisis at London's health sciences?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I implore the member to just leave the P.C.S. alone for a little bit. Despite the fact that they closed almost 10,000 hospitals, because her party the NDP When they were in government closed 9,600 hospital beds. What we're doing, Mr. Speaker, at London health sciences, we're opening 48 new beds, Mr. Speaker. 24 of those new beds are mental health beds, acute-care mental health beds in the hospital and 24 additional. By the way, Mr. Speaker, for the entire month of October, there are only two days when London health centre -- health sciences centre was above capacity. Mr. Speaker, we're making the investments, millions of dollars, 48 new beds but there's a long list of investments that we're making in London which includes mental health beds that I referenced 24 both Victorian university sites of London health sciences, 24 new acute beds. Six new acute beds in St. Joseph's health care. We also have 43 as yet unallocated beds that because we were so insistent that these beds that I referenced be up and running as soon as possible -- We have an additional 43 which may very well end up at London health sciences as well or other places where they're needed, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Baker to Minister Leal (Duguid) Re: Small Business Growth

>> MPP Yvan Baker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister responsible for small business. Before I ran for office, I ran my own small business, and my dad and my grandfather were both entrepreneurs and they were actually very successful at it so I know a little bit about the risks entrepreneurs take on to be successful. I also know how important they are to our economy. This week, Speaker, is global entrepreneurship week which helps people -- explore their potential as entrepreneurs and raise the profile in Ontario and across the world, frankly. In Canada global entrepreneurship week is being hosted by Futurepreneur Canada. For those of you who don't know Futurepreneur is an amazing organization and helped to launch almost 2,200 small businesses here in Ontario alone, Speaker. Now we have in Ontario one of the fastest growing entrepreneurial sectors in the country, frankly in the world. And so we have -- A lot to celebrate here in Ontario to recognize the contributions that entrepreneurs make. So, Minister, could you please tell us what our government is doing to support small businesses and entrepreneurs?

>> Minister Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member from Etobicoke Centre for this very important question. Of course the member was a very successful businessman in his own right and has been a real leader in the development of the Bloor West business improvement area. Just last month, small business week, I had the pleasure of welcoming Futurepreneur to Queen's Park to showcase some of the great work of young Ontario entrepreneurs they support. We also brought together women entrepreneurs from across the province to hear how we can better help women get a start in growing a business. We're working hard to ensure entrepreneurs across the province have the tools they need to succeed. Through the Ontario network of entrepreneurs our small business centres support the start-up of main street businesses in every corner of Ontario. Last month the launch of the small business access one window service to help entrepreneurs access resources. Small business. We'll continue to create the right conditions for entrepreneurs in Ontario to both innovate and grow.

>> MPP Baker: Thanks very much, Minister. Minister, I've spoken with you before on this topic and I know that you understand how vital our entrepreneurs are to our economy, whether they be in Etobicoke or whether they be in Peterborough. One of the things we have heard the Premier speak to this morning in question period is our economic performance and this would not be possible without the hard work of our entrepreneurs. In fact to ensure that our economy supports well, we need to support our entrepreneurs and supporting entrepreneurship is also critical for another reason, because as our economy evolves, Speaker, more and more career opportunities, job students -- opportunities will be related to entrepreneurship so we need to support our youth and our young adults in starting and growing businesses. Last week, Speaker, on this note I held a youth advisory group in my riding of Etobicoke Centre where I invited Scott Bowman from Futurepreneur to speak to young people in my riding how they can be successful entrepreneurs. Minister, can you tell us what you are doing to help youth start and grow businesses here in Ontario?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That state of entrepreneurialism is so important. The fact we planted those seeds many years back are really paying off for us today as we become one of the most innovative climates in the world. That's why, Mr. Speaker, many years ago we invested in Summer Company. 8,600 youth have started their own businesses through that program. In 2017 alone, 944 businesses were started through Summer Company. That program was successful. So we decided to start Starter Company, and that program expands the program to people 18 to 29 years of age throughout the year. Earlier this year we expanded that, Mr. Speaker, to Starter Company Plus, which has no age limits at all. In six months so far Starter Company Plus has been responsible for starting up 772 businesses. Started or expanded -- expanded and over 700 jobs created, Mr. Speaker. We're going to keep investing in those seeds of entrepreneurialism in Ontario.