

CO Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Tuesday, November 28, 2017

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Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Tuesday, November 28, 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 Ontario budget, mental health services and video remand in courthouses . NDP Questions today related to the healthcare, Grassy Narrows and the streptococcus outbreak in London-Middlesex.

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 28, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Fedeli to Minister Sousa Re: Ontario Budget

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the finance Minister. Ontario P.C. Leader Patrick Brown was in Scarborough this morning. He was talking to middle-class families. He was telling them about the people's guarantee. The guarantee that a P.C. Government will cut taxes for the middle class by 22.5% and reduce taxes for first income tax bracket by 10%, giving a break to those who need it most. Mr. Speaker, a P.C. Government will cut taxes and make life more affordable for middle-class families. Why won't this Liberal government?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, not one single Ontarian will receive a tax cut this member is advocating for or advertising. Even before the election has evened, they're making promises that they can't keep. I would argue step down now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Minister of finance. The people's guarantee offers a reasonable response to years of government mismanagement. Kevin Paige, the former parliamentary budget officer, had this to say, quote -- the fiscal estimates underlying the Ontario P.C. Platform have been deemed reasonable by nonpartisan institutes of fiscal studies in democracy. University of Ottawa. Speaker, Kevin mulligan, professor of economics at the Vancouver school of economics says, in my view, quote -- a government with firm attention to cost management can achieve savings in the range proposed in the P.C. Platform. Quote. Which one of these esteemed Canadian economists does the government disagree with today?

>> Minister Sousa: Thank goodness, Mr. Speaker, that Kevin Paige was there to keep an eye on these folks and use notes at the end of their glossy magazine to tell the truth. And the truth is there's \$12 billion in cuts under their plan, Mr. Speaker. The truth is -- That they're proposing is not true. It can't happen, Mr. Speaker. And -- insisted upon that, Kevin Paige, in order to provide his name. I would

ask the member opposite what is it that you're going to cut and how much is the carbon tax that's triple that of cap and trade is going to cost families on their gas bills, Mr. Speaker ?

>> MPP Fedeli: Back to the Minister. Speaker, I must say the Liberal spin sem bearing. John Michael Mcgrath pointed out the facts the Liberals are lying about a hidden -- Speaker, we will also increase the Ontario sales tax credit by \$100 per adult and \$100 per child in order to bring real relief to Ontario's low-income residents. That's money back in their pockets and that's money that will combat the unaffordable policies created by this Liberal government. The people who need it most will get it. Mr. Speaker, does the Minister not agree that lower and middle-income families finally deserve a break?

>> Minister Sousa: Let's be clear. Kevin Paige illustrated for the rest of the public to acknowledge that the 22.5% that they're proposing is false. It's completely untrue and cannot be achieved for the people of Ontario based on what they've said. Furthermore, the member opposite has just cited our fiscal plan and he's building his proposals and his assumptions on our fiscal plan, Mr. Speaker. Furthermore what they've done just does not add up. They're cutting revenues. They're cutting expenses, but they're increasing Karl bon tax substantively. They cannot be trusted. They're making guarantees that they cannot fulfil. Step down, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Fedeli to Minister Sousa Re: Ontario Budget

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the Minister of finance. The " Toronto star" editorial headline read that the people's guarantee, quote, deserves a serious look from voters. That's because it offers real solutions to make life affordable for middle class families. It deserves a look, Speaker, because the people's guarantee offers real, much needed and much deserved tax cuts, 22.5% for middle-class families. But instead of giving it a serious look, instead of acknowledging this is the path Ontario needs to bring real relief to families, Liberal members choose to repeat nonsense. They know it's nonsense and I hope they quickly realize, Speaker, how foolish they actually sound. Families deserve a lot better from you. Mr. Speaker, why won't the Liberals. Support tax cuts to middle class families?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Well, let's quote a few other things, Mr. Speaker. Using the numbers presented in that glossy magazine, reaffirmed by Kevin Paige as incoherent and frankly false because they're not going to be able to achieve 22% tax cuts. Furthermore "Globe and mail" states this. The problem with the people's guarantee is that it is a bit too clever, fiscally risky and economically incoherent, Mr. Speaker. They are not delivering a tax cut to the people of Ontario. In fact they're going to deliver a net tax increase with the carbon tax that they're providing that is twice as much as what we are incurring today, Mr. Speaker. And the tax cuts -- The question is what are you cutting? What amounts? What hospitals are you cutting? Are you going to cut pharmacare for people under 25? Are you going to cut tuition for those that are getting it free? Are you cutting health care and education -- Their plan is all about cuts and deficits, Mr. Speaker. This member has fought for balanced budget --

>> MPP Fedeli: Thank you. I can tell the Minister -- back to the Minister, what we'll be cutting are Liberal MPP S. Steve paikin, one of the most respected journalists, has this to say about Kevin Paige's review, quote -- one little sentence sets the Progressive Conservative platform apart. Quote, it's a thumbs-up from one of the most respected economic analysts in the country, and under the P.C. Plan, middle and lower-income families benefit the most. Only our party will put money back in their pockets. That's the money to combat the unaffordable policies created by this government. Money for people who need the help most. Mr. Speaker, why is this government attacking our numbers? Is it because they don't want to bring tax cuts. To middle-class families?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the same party that is not supporting Ontario families. The same party that is rolling back minimum wage. The same party that didn't support our plan to provide for more hospitals and nurses and education. The seam family that voted against university tuition, the

same family that voted against free tuition and free prescriptions for those under 25. The same family -- the same party that -- Kevin Paige, in his notes, made it clear their proposal, their plan doesn't add up, that they can't be trusted because what they're proposing is a tax that will not be achieved by any Ontarians. They're misleading the province. They should -- A finance critic should take every precaution. To be fiscally prudent and build contingencies to the plan. They have none in this plan. And their guarantee will illustrate the fact that they should step down.

>> MPP Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. Well, obviously the Minister is reading a different book, Speaker, because Kevin Paige calls our plan reasonable. That's something we could never call their plan, Speaker. Our people guarantee offers a 22.5% tax cut to middle-class families. Our plan offers an increase to the Ontario sales tax credit of \$100. Meanwhile the Liberal government demands higher taxes and higher fees. That's the way it always is, Speaker. They can't afford to pay their Liberal insiders any other way. But we think it's time to put the people first, not the insiders. Mr. Speaker, I ask one more time, why won't this government support tax cuts for middle-class families?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we have taken steps to support middle-class families. That party voted against every one of those very measures, Mr. Speaker. And instead they're pretending -- They're pretending to provide tax cuts when in fact they're not. In fact their plan is both a social and fiscal deficit to the province of Ontario. There's no proof. They're going into deficit. They're putting in assumptions for \$12 billion that they're not able to achieve. It's reckless, irresponsible --

MPP Horwath to Minister Hoskins Re: Healthcare Privatization

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question's for the acting Premier. Members of the Ontario health coalition are joining us today in the gall Eries and I want to thank them for being here. Year after year we've seen this Liberal government ant Conservatives before them cutting public hospitals and pushing health care services into private clinics. And now this Liberal government wants to open the doors even wider and roll out the red carpet for even more for-profit private clinics. Buried deep inside bill 160 the Premier's Harper style health omnibus bill is schedule 9, a plan to clear the way for new, private clinics and make it harder for ordinary families to get the health care that they need. Why is this government, like the Conservatives before them, intent on privatizing even more of our health care system?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. In fact I welcome the members of the Ontario health coalition that are here today. We've been over the past number of days working closely with the Ontario health coalition and other stakeholders for a common agenda and a common goal. One of the things that this act, if passed, will actually provide through schedule 9 is it will prevent any further private hospitals in this province. We currently have six private hospitals that were grandfathered into legislation from 1931, the previous government, Mr. Speaker, not our own. And what this legislation does is it actually -- it requires that those six entities transition out into a new regulatory and oversight regime. And no further private hospitals will be allowed in this province. Mr. Speaker, it is an important measure and I want to thank the Ontario health coalition for proposing additional language. We're going to introduce to make that crystal clear.

>> Andrea Horwath: The Ontario health coalition says, and I quote, this new act is essentially a new private hospital and clinic act. You know what? More privatization is absolutely the last thing we need in our health care system in the province of Ontario. Thanks to the Liberals ant Conservatives, there are over 1,000 for-profit private clinics in Ontario today taking scarce health care dollars out of our public system and handing that money right over to private corporate profits. The Premier's health care privatization bill allows private clinics to apply to open their doors at any time they wish, Speaker. And by repealing the private hospitals act, this omnibus bill actually removes the 44-year-old ban on future private hospitals in Ontario. Why is this government opening its arms to more private clinics when private clinics only make it harder for Ontario families to get the health care

they need?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, under this government and hopefully all future governments, there will be no more private hospitals in this province. There are six that exist that were grandfathered into legislation many, many decades ago, as the leader of the third party rightly points out. We are making it crystal clear that we are not going to allow any further private hospitals. We've got legislation that will require that. We're repealing an act that allows for private hospitals. We're requiring all the existing six to transition into say long-term care or others but with enhanced oversight and accountability and transparency that they currently don't have, Mr. Speaker. And we're working with the Ontario health coalition and other stakeholders to add additional language to make it crystal clear to all of us. That we not only share the same goal. We're going to attain that goal of no more private hospitals.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the first thing this government did after getting elected that last election is turn around and privatize Hydro One without a mandate. And now on their way out of office with no mandate, they're trying to privatize more of our public hospital services. Speaker, we will not let them get away with it. The national union of public and general employees says this bill will, quote, make it easier for private hospitals and clinics to expand and more difficult for the Minister to stop them. It allows anyone to apply to open a private clinic at any time, Speaker. It changes the name of private clinics to community health facilities, which would be laughable if it wasn't so offensive to not-for-profit community health care. And despite what the Minister says, the health privatization bill that they've introduced removes the 44-year-old ban on future private hospitals in Ontario. Why is this government doing exactly what we expect from the Conservatives and privatizing the health care people rely on?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again the leader of the third party has it completely wrong. So we are -- there are six private hospitals in this province. I was surprised to learn that when I became health Minister. It was grandfathered in by a government, not our own, many decades ago. So we're taking measures and the current regime through the private hospitals act which is almost 100 years old, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't provide for accountability and transparency and oversight that we would expect of all our health care facilities in this province. So we're adding that oversight and transparency and accountability. We're making it Chris Cal clear that this government will not tolerate or allow any additional or future private hospitals. It will be crystal clear. And again I want to thank the Ontario health coalition and other partners because. Perhaps the NDP Hasn't been listening, we've been working together to make that crystal clear that that will be the case.

MPP Horwath to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro One Privatization

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you very much, Speaker. While the Liberals are acting like Conservatives when it comes to opening the door to private hospitals, the Conservatives announced this weekend that their platform is going to be acting like the Liberals when it comes to hydro policy. Keep the \$40 billion hydro borrowing scheme that will see people's hydro bills skyrocket after the election. This plan is not good for anyone except bankers. Clearly Liberals and Conservatives see eye to eye when it comes to forcing families to pay for their pre-election Liberal schemes. Why won't this Liberal government once and for all admit that hydro should be a public good, controlled by the people of Ontario for the benefit of every single family and every single business in this province and reverse the sell-off of Hydro One?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleased to rise and once again talk about Hydro One and what it's been doing to actually help its customers, Mr. Speaker, and the work that we have done as a government to ensure that we have reduced rates for Hydro One customers between 40 and 50%, Mr. Speaker. And that's something that these families in northern and rural communities are seeing day in and day out off their bills, Mr. Speaker, and that's because of this government acting. The opposition voted against that, Mr. Speaker. They voted against helping families see a reduction of 40 to 50% on their bills. They voted against, Mr. Speaker, helping first

nations individuals living on reserve see their delivery charge removed, Mr. Speaker. They voted against the Ontario electricity support program and the enhancements to help low-income individuals, Mr. Speaker. We've ensured that we've helped families and businesses right across the province, Mr. Speaker. They have clean air to breathe, a better system to work at and now, Mr. Speaker, thanks to this government a more affordable system.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the privatized Hydro One has already applied for numerous rate increases. They've invested in foreign, coal-burning companies instead of Ontario families. And now they want the ability to force people who are struggling with their bills to install prepaid meters. Sure the company is looking out for its own profits, not Ontario families or Ontario businesses. In fact in Hydro One's proposal to install these prepay meters, they say people who are at high risk for nonpayment are going to be the targets. Clearly the plan is to make money from families who are struggling and use it to line the pockets of already wealthy shareholders. Can the acting Premier explain to Ontarians why the privatized Hydro One's priorities is boosting its profits and not helping families and businesses keep the lights on?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hydro One has come forward with the voluntary winter reconnection program, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that they can help families who were struggling. They then work with those families to make sure they can be reconnected and come up with a payment plan, Mr. Speaker. They're working hard on being a better company for families. When it comes to the prepaid meters, Mr. Speaker, since last week everyone is well aware that this is an opt-in program, if it is even allowed, Mr. Speaker, by the O.E.B.. The Ontario energy board is the entity that is quasi-judicial, will review the program, will review the application and then make a decision based off of its review. The O.E.B., in the past, has turned down rate applications, has turned down other types of applications like these, Mr. Speaker, because they have the best interests of ratepayers at heart. That is their mandate, Mr. Speaker. So we're going to continue to allow the O.E.B. To do what they need to do when it comes to ensuring they protect ratepayers, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House, this government will continue to act to row protect ratepayers.

>> Andrea Horwath: Continues to call this plan voluntary or opt in. Nowhere in the Hydro One proposal to install pre-pay meters can you find the word voluntary. What you will find is this exact quote, Speaker -- with a prepaid meter, electricity is paid up front. Once the prepaid amount is used up, power is cut off until the customer is able to load the meter with more credit, end quote. Right there in black and white. The privatized Hydro One says it plans to use prepay meters to get around the rule in Ontario banning wintertime hydro disconnections. Instead of working with people who are struggling, Hydro One will let their meters simply run out. Can the acting Premier explain again why she thinks the privatized Hydro One is in the best interest of Ontarians?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a lot of assumptions being made by the third party when it comes to two paragraphs and a 2,000-page document, Mr. Speaker. When the company has even -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The company is on the record saying this is not the intention of that two paragraphs, Mr. Speaker. The intention is to give people choice, Mr. Speaker, something that that party has never done when it comes to the electricity sector. Even their pie-in-the-sky plan, Mr. Speaker, doesn't offer choice and even excluded looking at helping low-income individuals, Mr. Speaker, but not us, Mr. Speaker. We made sure we brought forward the oesp program which actually helps low-income individuals. We brought forward a 25% reduction. For all families right across the province. And the Hydro One r1 and r2 reduction, Mr. Speaker, according to the fair hydro plan can see a 40 to 50% reduction, Mr. Speaker. That is actually helping people.

MPP MacLeod to Minister Matthews Re: Ontario Budget

>> MPP Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the acting Premier. Yesterday my leader Patrick Brown joined me in Nepean. He was there to stress our people's guarantee. I introduced him to a 12-year-old girl, Anna, and her family. Her family works hard as new Canadians but because of Liberal policies they pay more and they are consistently getting less. That's why the people's guarantee will

help them and why they endorsed it. It will help families like Anna's by reducing middle-class income taxes by 22.5%. It will help middle-class families by refunding up to 75% of their child care expenses, and it will help hockey players like Anna by restoring the fitness tax credit. After 14 years -- Of Liberal taxes, families like Anna's deserve a break. They deserve a break to get ahead. Mr. Speaker, why has the Liberal government. For 14 years forgotten families like Anna's?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Well, Speaker, we've been hearing a lot about this tax cut, 22.5% tax cut for middle income Ontarians. Well, Speaker, it's their number one promise. The only problem is, if you think -- if you promise people 22.5% cuts you think you're going to get a 22.5% cut. Speaker -- Speaker, not one single person in the province of Ontario will get a 22.5% income tax cut. Not one single person. You're telling the public one thing and you're actually doing something entirely different. It's time for your party to take a good long look at this. It's simply inaccurate. It is wrong. I'm not going to use the words people won't let me use. 22.5% --

>> MPP MacLeod: What's inaccurate and full of baloney is that answer that that Minister just provided to this government. You don't have to take our word for it. You can take Ken Paige's word for it and it's on the back of that document. You can also take Kevin Milligan's, professor of economics at the Vancouver school of economics. He had this to say -- I know they're nervous because I was at the Grey Cup Sunday with Patrick Brown. People were coming up telling us how much they love our platform. They love the people's guarantee. But let's go back to Kevin Milligan. He says the proposals have two main advantages. First, it delivers the largest benefit -- I guess this platform cuts real deep, Speaker. Let's try and get -- Kevin Milligan -- Just trying to ask the question. First it delivers the -- I wasn't trying to do that. First it delivers the largest benefit to lower and middle-income families who need help with child care expenses. Second it supports flexibility for those families who need part time care, shift work or regular care arrangements. Ontario P.C. Child care proposal offers improved flexible benefits for all Ontario families. Why won't you endorse our plan?

>> Minister Matthews: Speaker, I can assure you, the members opposite, the people of Ontario we will never endorse a plan that contains \$12 billion in cuts. And we will never endorse a plan that pretends to be something that it isn't. Let me repeat, not one single person in this province. Not one -- One single person will see a 22.5% decrease in their income taxes. Speaker, what the P.C.s are talking about and what they're actually proposing to do are two totally different things.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Zimmer Re: Grassy Narrows

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. To the acting Premier. The chief of the Grassy Narrows First Nation is in the legislature today asking that the province contribute to building and operating a health facility for the people of Grassy Narrows and Wabaseemong First Nation. The province has known for decades that Mercury is present on the paper mill site and that Mercury contamination was not decreasing in the English Wabigoon system. Mercury contamination continued on the site even though the Premier continued to say any cleanup would cause more risk to the population. As many as 90% of the people in these communities show signs of Mercury contamination and have been abandoned to their fate. Will the Premier today commit to making funds available for establishment and operation of a Mercury care health facility in this community now?

>> Minister David Zimmer: Thank you for that question. Speaker, we are deeply concerned about the challenges faced by Grassy Narrows and indeed White Dog Nation in that area. I can tell you that I have had, along with my federal counterparts, various Ministers and technical people, two meetings with my federal colleagues involving the chiefs. I can tell you, Speaker, that tomorrow we are having a meeting here in Toronto. I am meeting with my federal counterpart Minister Philpott and with the chiefs of Grassy Narrows and with the chief of White Dog. On the agenda tomorrow is this issue of what to do about Grassy Narrows. I have received the request for the treatment facility. This is a matter that will be discussed tomorrow between the province, the federal government and the first nations concerned. Thank you, Speaker.

>> MPP Tabuns: Speaker, again to the acting Premier. Pain is a constant reality for people with Mercury poisoning. Lack of control, tunnel vision and other symptoms make life very difficult. The Japanese long ago provided special health care for Mercury poisoned people in the city of Mina Maatta. Does the acting Premier feel so no sense of responsibility for dragging out this problem? What does the acting Premier have to say to the generations, the young people, the elders and the leaders of grassy narrows and wabaseamong people, left with painful debilitating legacy of Mercury poisoning of their river and land?

>> Minister Zimmer: As I said in my first answer, we are deeply concerned about this issue. That is why this meeting has been arranged tomorrow with the provincial government, the federal government, federal Cabinet Minister Philpott is coming down who is responsible for the operation side of the federal ministry. I know this subject matter that the member opposite has raised is on the agenda tomorrow. We will consider what we hear from both the federal government and the first nations and the province. But we are working towards a solution for this. In the meantime I should say that we have provided \$5.2 million for some remediation workup preliminary to tackling the actual problem. We've also set aside \$85 million. That's in a fund that is co-managed by the province. And first nation to address these issues. Thank you, Speaker .

MPP Qaadri to Minister McMahon Re: Film and TV Industry in Toronto

>> MPP Shafiq Qaadri: [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My is for Minister of tourism, culture and sport. [End of Translation] Across North America. Last year in fact was the third straight record breaking year for film production in Ontario. Our government of course understands how the strong the competition is across North America to attract film shoots both foreign and domestic and to provide an attractive location for local production. That's why we're budgeting \$481 million this year for tax credits related to this. Speaker, Ontario also has many other advantages great fit to make films and TV including innovative technology such as imax as well as world class tal element and infrastructure. My question is this. [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Could the Minister develop on the work that the government is doing?

>> Minister Eleanor McMahon: Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the Etobicoke North M.T. For his question. [End of Translation] Speaker, for their inaugural queen's park day and thank them for the work they do to build up our province's film and television industry. Speaker, on this side of the House we know our Ontario screen based industries showcase our province to the world and are true economic drivers. Investment in film and TV productions support over 35,000 jobs and contribute \$1.7 billion to our economy. A great recent example the production of "It" hired over 1,200 cast and crew in communities across Ontario and spent over \$28 million in just 60 days of filming at local businesses, hotels, caterers, restaurants, lumber and construction suppliers and that's just one of the reasons it makes me so proud to work with our film and TV industry to support these productions that are garnering attention from around the world and bringing jobs and investment right here to Ontario. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker. And thank you, Minister. Speaker, it's clear that Canadian and film and TV industry has never been in better shape. It's flourishing. It's important for people in northern Ontario as well to know that this government, under the leadership of Premier Wynne and Minister Mccmann, making investments to create jobs and help grow the economy. This government is exited to supporting and growing the film and television industry in northern Ontario swaex. Such as the critically acclaimed "Leonard Kenny" shot some Sudbury have been made possible by grant increases approved boy our government. Account Minister please explain how specific programs that our government champions are working to help television and film industry in the north and what this means for people in northern Ontario?

>> Minister McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, Speaker, our commitment to investing in civility in terms of our film and TV tax credits is just one of the reasons why northern Ontario is

soaring, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Minister of northern development and mines for his tremendous leadership in building up our sector in the north. I know that the sector's especially important to the economy in northern Ontario, which this year invested nearly \$23 million in film and TV production in northern Ontario alone. Since 2014, nohfc has invested \$76 million supporting 136 film and TV projects in northern Ontario. And of course as the member mentioned, letter Kenny is just one of the successful shows, Mr. Speaker. We're committed to creating jobs in the north, Mr. Speaker, and giving our young people a diversified economy where they can have the choice to remain at home, Mr. Speaker. That's part of our plan to build Ontario up. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Martow to Minister Coteau Re: Mental Health Services

>> MPP Sylvia Jones: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Ontario has a gap in its health care system. Too many people are slipping through the cracks and not receiving the mental health treatments they deserve. There is a mental health crisis in Ontario and that is why Patrick Brown and the Ontario P.C. Party committed \$1.9 billion over ten years -- This will be the largest mental health commitment in Canadian provincial history. Rob Jamieson, president of the Ontario police provincial association, reacted to our people's guarantee saying, quote -- great to see such a commitment to mental health. We need to invest more in those in crisis and those requiring supports." Will the Liberal government match the P.C. Party commitment to mental --

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm absolutely amazed at the change of heart, because there was only six or seven months ago that the P.C. Party, as a whole, voted against our investments in mental health, investments that created Canada's first ever program for cognitive behavioural therapy, that provides amazing outcomes for individuals with mood disorders like anxiety and depression. Mr. Speaker, they voted against us creating up to ten new wellness centres for youth across this province, Mr. Speaker. But it -- I'm trying to figure out still with their \$12 billion in cuts that are explicitly referenced on page 76 of their "People" magazine, Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering what cuts they're going to make to health care, what cuts they're going to make to education. How many nurses they're going to fire. Because we know when they were last in government they closed 10,000 hospital beds and fired thousands of nurses.

>> MPP Jones: We will never vote for a Liberal budget. The Minister 's trying to change history. Ten years ago, select committee on mental health and addictions. For far too long people are sitting on waiting lists without the mental health care they need and when they need t.our plan is going to make real difference for individuals dealing with mental health illness across Ontario. But don't take it from me. Kimberly Morin the C.E.O. Of children's mental health Ontario said and I quote -- so pleased to see topping up elementary and secondary school supports for services targeted at improving mental health and well-being including funding awareness campaigns as part of the people's guarantee. Will the Liberal government agree to match the P.C. Party's historic commitment to mental health in Ontario?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, they voted against our investments in behavioural supports in long-term care. They voted against our \$100 million dementia strategy to provide supports for families and individuals with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. We saw a five-point plan in the P.C.S before. We saw it in 1995 from Mike Harris. He didn't even have as draconian cuts as ex premised in their "People" magazine \$12 billion cuts and Harris said he wouldn't negative impact classroom education. An education crisis. He said that he would not close down hospitals. He closed down dozens of hospitals, fired thousands of nurses and closed 10,000 hospital beds. This is the future under a P.C. Government. We have to remember the past, particularly when explicitly they reference \$12 billion of cuts in their "People" magazine.

MPP Sattler to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Drinking Water in Schools

>> MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Speaker, years of neglect under the Liberals and Conservatives have resulted in a school repair backlog of over \$15 million, with serious consequences for the health and well-being of children. In the past two years, drinking water at more than 640 schools and child care centres has failed lead tests. Until this Liberal government, school maintenance budgets are barely enough to keep schools from deteriorating further and there is no funding to proactively fix the backlog. We know Patrick Brown and the P.C.S do not have a plan to fix Ontario schools. Their platform is silent on school maintenance and repairs. Speaker, other than flushing and testing, what is this Liberal government's plan to ensure the safety of drinking water in Ontario schools?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for this very important question. I know how important it is to keep our child safe as the Minister responsible for early years and child care, safety is one of my top priorities. When we send our kid off to school or child care centres, we want to know that they are safe and healthy and being looked after. We will continue to work with our partners to ensure all children in child care and in schools in this province are safe and have access to clean drinking water. Our standards, Mr. Speaker, are the strongest in Canada, and we have strict rules in place requiring immediate action should an issue arise. So parents can rest assured that their children are safe. While lead is generally not found in the municipal drinking water, Ontario still requires every single day care, school and child care centre in the province to test for it. We're the only province to do so. I want parents and kids to know that over 98% of those facilities meet or are better than health Canada standards.

>> MPP Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the acting Premier. Flushing and testing is not a solution. There is no safe amount of lead in drinking water, especially for children whose growing bodies absorb more lead than the average adult. As lead accumulates over time, it can affect children's brain and nervous system development. These recent lead tests showed concentrations at some schools that was more -- that was 100 to 300 times greater than the provincial standard. Western university engineering professor Claire Robinson says, for the lead issue, there's just really no quick fix and that all plumbing and fixtures containing lead should be replaced. Speaker, what is this Liberal government's plan to replace the plumbing and fixtures at the 640 schools and child care centres that tested above the provincial standards?

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I want to again thank the member opposite, because I think it's really important for parents out there to know that, right now, Ontario's standards are the strongest in Canada. So we are absolutely looking at making sure that we are ensuring the safety of our children and that they are in safe and healthy environments when they head off to school or child care. Parents can rest assured that their kids are safe. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we have a long-term plan. We have a long-term plan to address instances of lead in drinking water at schools and day cares, and this includes providing \$1.4 billion this year for school repairs and upgrades. Absolutely important upgrades and very necessary infrastructure upgrades. And this is about -- this is really, Mr. Speaker, the largest investment ever, provincial investment in school renewal so let's think about that. It's historic investment. As part of the plan, we've also strengthened Ontario's water standards, which are already the strictest in Canada. And we want to make sure children head off to school --

MPP Potts to Minister Lalonde Re: Correctional Service System

>> MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Minister of community safety and correctional services. Now, Speaker, I know that great strides are being taken in Ontario concerning correctional services and Howard Safer is one of the leading voices in correctional services. Was appointed Ontario's independent advisor on correctional reform. He has delivered two comprehensive reports that are helping inform Ontario's path forward. Speaker, our government has implemented substantial change through segregation reform, new hires to support our front lines, our facility health care systems and more. Mr. Safer and many community organizations such as the

John Howard society, have recognized our commitment and are supporting our plan. So, Speaker, would the Minister further detail our government's transformation of Ontario's correctional service system?

>> Minister Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for Beaches- East York for this very important question. As of today, we have a total of 7,109 inmates in our custody and care at our 26 correctional facilities. 7,109 inmates that our government in our -- and our dedicated correctional staff are committed to rehabilitating in a safe and human manner. Mr. Speaker, are there issues within our system? Yes. But our government is not shying away from that. But this is exactly why we are implementing the greatest change to corrections in eight generations. This is not about scoring political points and certainly not about rhetoric. This is about doing what's right, Mr. Speaker. Our government is taking action by hiring more staff, increasing mental health supports. Investing in correctional infrastructure and soon to come legislation to cement real and lasting change for decades to come.

>> MPP Potts: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the Minister for her very enlightened response. Speaker, I particularly look forward to seeing her tonight on political blind date with the member for Parkdale- High Park tonight at 9:00. I appreciate her dedication for reforming Ontario's correctional system dedication you see in that TV show, Mr. Speaker. Both the Minister and Attorney General have been implementing Progressive and modern changes to corrections, policing and the courts and I know that their goal and the objective of this government is to establish a truly 21st century justice system. And I know, Speaker, that my constituents in Beaches- East York are expecting that our courts, our prisons, our policing and sports services are equitably fair and inclusive. So, Speaker, would the Minister further detail our government's transformation of correctional services in Ontario?

>> Minister Lalonde: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you again to the member from Beaches- East York for the supplementary. Our government is building two new facilities in Ottawa and Thunder Bay that will serve as models of innovation and renewal for years to come where the needs of inmates and staff are put first. It has proven that warehousing of inmates simply doesn't work. But nobody seems to have told the leader of the opposition and/or the party opposite that. As a federal member of parliament, an eager Harper Conservative, his greatest justice legacy was supporting mandatory minimums, which only resulted in further warehousing of inmates. And we all know and he fail -- any failed Conservative policy isn't complete, Mr. Speaker, without a substantial misguided budget cut. The leader of the opposition voted for 10% cut in correction Canada's budget. While his government was blocking more -- locking more people up. Mr. Speaker, we are basing our plan on the best evidence. Thank you very much.

MPP Wilson to Minister McGarry Re: Tree Seed Plant Transition Proposal

>> MPP Jim Wilson: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of natural resources and forestry. Mr. Speaker, Mr. David Harvick the manager of Summerville seedlings in Everest, wrote to the Premier recently and said, quote, perhaps you're not aware that as we speak the managers in charge of the Ontario tree seed plant closure are only giving us the stakeholders one option, not all options as Minister McGarry has stated as recently as November 15. I would suggest that the Minister is grossly misinformed by her staff. Only option we are given is to get in line and hope to get some of the seed that is left on the shelf, end of quote. Mr. Harvick and the Ontario tree seed coalition are asking the government to accept the transition proposal they submitted to the Minister on October 13th. The proposal allows the ministry to walk away from the seed business but maintain their leadership role through the fiscal support of the province's propagation and forestry genetic experts. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister actually work with -- And accept the transition proposal?

>> Minister Kathryn McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker. And thank you to the member opposite for his question today. You know, I had an impromptu meeting recently with Rob Keane, who is the head of forest Ontario, as you know. Who had just actually had a meeting with my

ministry the day before. And his comments were that we were working very well with them to identify all options. So we are meeting with not only the stakeholders and the nurseries, but we are identifying new opportunities for our private sector. The private sector now provides 80% of the seed extraction and 100% the stock growing for the province. And I see this as an opportunity for private nurseries to expand operations as the ministry changes its focus to a science-based approach. So we continue to work with all of the stakeholders. To develop new policies such as the new seed zone policy and create a new genetic archive. Thank you.

>> MPP Wilson: Back to the Minister. Speaker, this Minister claims she's still consulting, but those who have taken part in those meetings report back that her staff is just going through the motions. They're ignoring reasonable alternatives from the industry to protect jobs and the environment by keeping the tree seed plant operating. Over two dozen environmental groups, municipalities and private sector nurseries are opposed to the Minister's plan. She mentioned forest Ontario. Also groups include Ducks Unlimited and the cities of Toronto and Ottawa. Ed Patcha, C.E.O. of Ferguson forest centre in my riding wrote this to me, quote -- this is really the last step in the Liberal government's abandonment of forestry in southern Ontario, leaving no controls on future forest genetics." Will the Minister shelve this ill conceived plant, or does she want her legacy to be the abandonment of forestry in southern Ontario?

>> Minister McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker, and for the supplementary. But the new genetic archive will be a potential new source for the type of scientific information needed to address climate change. For example our scientists will need to know exactly where the seeds have come from as they consider moongraining tree species in reaction to changes in climate. So we continue to work with all of our stakeholders, with our ministry, to continue all the important conversations, to ensure that moving forward we have a modern seed genetic archive and that we continue to grow the seeds. It's important for me to note, too, Speaker, that the party opposite has not supported in the past under their government in the mid '90s they privatized the system that put them in the situation to begin with. We continue to work on this side of the House. To ensure that we have savings for the taxpayers and important programs that we have moving forward.

MPP Armstrong to Minister Hoskins Re: Streptococcus Outbreak

>> MPP Teresa Armstrong: My question's to the acting Premier. People in London are worried today about an outbreak of a deadly virus in our city. In the past 18 months, invasive streptococcus has tragically taken the lives of nine people and sent 30 to the intensive care unit. Local health officials have reached out to the US Centres of disease control for help. They say the outbreak is, quote, very unusual. And that leads people who are in hospital today or have to sit in the emergency department today worried and scared that this virus is not yet under control. What is this government doing to stop the deadly outbreak and keep people safe?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're very concerned about the outbreak of streptococcus "A" in London Middlesex. Regrettably it's an issue. It's taken many lives. It's made many individuals sick, some extremely ill, and unfortunately it's an epidemic that has been going on for some time, more than a year, about 18 months but I have to commend the public health unit for London Middlesex are doing an exemplary job at doing everything they can to control and eventually eliminate the risks associated with strep "A" in that region, and of course we're working very closely, as is the public health unit, with public health Ontario so that they are providing all necessary resources. The best practices and activities required to get control over this epidemic that -- It is regrettable that this type of situation does occur from time to time in -- We're working closely on it.

>> MPP Armstrong: Speaker, when an outbreak happens, our hospitals need to have the space and the resources to meet the demand. That's true when we're talking about a bad flu season or a deadly virus like streptococcus that can lead to toxic shock and even a flesh eating disease. But under this government, London's hospitals have been pushed to operate far beyond their capacity.

Our hospitals are overcrowded every day, and even at the best of times people are being forced to wait in hallways and the E.R. For care they need. What is this government -- why has this government pushed our hospitals into an overcrowding and underfunding crisis that only makes it harder to respond to urgent outbreaks like the one that's happening in London today?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I was actually gratified to hear the first part of this question but I'm absolutely disgusted at the second part. That that member would somehow conflate AI can he serious public health -- a very serious public health situation that's taken lives -- Mr. Speaker, that has taken lives and devastated families, many of them the most vulnerable marginalized people in our society, and that she would link that to the situation in our hospitals, Mr. Speaker, is absolutely disgusting. The public health unit that -- well, you -- Mr. Speaker, there needs to be some things that are above partisan politics. I'm a public health doctor myself. I know precisely what's going on in London. I'm watching them closely. We're providing all necessary supports. And to use that tragic situation to talk about hospital overcrowding is despicable, Mr. Speaker. We will end this epidemic and we will provide the maximum supports to all --

MPP Rinaldi to Minister Leal Re: Agri-Food Industry and NAFTA

>> MPP Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for Minister of agriculture, food and rural affairs. Minister, nafta negotiations have left my constituents feeling concerned and uneasy. Free trade and economic co-operation with US And Mexico is important. Hundreds of thousands of good jobs rely on it. I'm sure you can agree, Minister, our farmers and food processors work hard each and every day and play a crucial role in the success of our \$37 billion farm and food sector. That is why it's important that their concerns and interests are not overlooked during the negotiation process. Can the Minister please update this House on what our government is doing to support the interests of our agri-food sector during the nafta negotiations?

>> Minister Jeff Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from northumberland-quinte west for a very important question this morning. Mr. Speaker, two-way agri-food trade between United States and Ontario is worth nearly \$28 billion, and the significance of this number cannot be ignored. Nafta rebates a foundation agreement between Canada and United States and Mexico that works well for all three countries. Over the past six months, I've been actively engaged with my US Counterparts and businesses to ensure that as nafta's modernized quote-unquote we do no harm. On this side of the House, we'll continue to promote the interests of Ontario's agri-food sector during negotiations. Not only have I been able to travel across several states to meet with many US Representatives but I'll continue my engagement with my agriculture advisory committee comprising of leaders in our sector to reinforce our government stands with Ontario's agri-food sector. I visited Mexico during the latest round of nafta negotiations, where I continue to stand up for the interests of each and every single individual across our agricultural community. I had the opportunity. To meet Canada's chief negotiator to -- position --

>> MPP Rinaldi: Thank you, Minister, for that response. It's great to hear that our government continues to promote Ontario agri-food interests along with meeting with your US Counterparts to strengthen our trading relationship. Minister, members of my constituency are concerned that our friends south of the border do not share our views with regards to our supply management system. The supply management system provides balance and protection for our farmers and producers and as yet -- has played an integral role in the agri-food sector. Minister, can you please provide the House with an update on how you are reaffirming Ontario's agriculture interest in the integrity of our supply management system?

>> Minister Leal: I want to thank the member from northumberland-quinte west for his supplementary. Our government has made it clear that any proposals that threaten the integrity supply management are absolutely nonstarters for the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, recent proposals made by the United States during nafta renegotiation -- lead to dismantling of Canada's supply management system, a system that represents 25% of agriculture production in the province

of Ontario. Let me be clear. Supply management works well for our province's producers, our processors and consumers as well as our economy. Mr. Speaker, I'm a little concerned, when I read page 56 of the glossy magazine. I would have thought there would have been some denunciation of what Maxime Bernier, who continues to traipse across Canada every day to talk about Ontario's supply management system. Against the cut of inaccurate facts that he continues to --

MPP Clark to Minister Naqvi Re: Video Remand in Courthouses

>> MPP Steve Clark: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Attorney General. Speaker, almost every court in eastern Ontario has video remands. But the Attorney General is keeping the Brockville courthouse stuck in the past. It takes two officers to escort prisoners from the jail to the court's detention centre. A third officer must then monitor prisoners. Brockville police have done over 800 of these. There's a safety issue and also a terrible waste of valuable resources. All for remand appearances that last about a minute. For five years the Attorney General has ignored pleas from the Brockville police to install video equipment in the court. Police chief Scott Fraser, the crown and defence lawyers in Brockville all agree it's time to stop this dangerous, costly and unnecessary prisoner transfer. Speaker, will the Attorney General get with the times and finally press the play button on video remands?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I think it's a very important question. We continue to evaluate all our courthouses across the province, make sure that they have the appropriate technology available to them. We've got -- we do remand in many parts of the province. I'm not obviously at this moment, Speaker, aware of any technical challenges or issues there may be through Brockville courthouse but I can tell the member opposite there is a very active evaluation that goes on. We always want to make sure, Speaker, that our courthouses are safe, that the people who work in the courthouses are also always safe and then there is timely access to justice when issues arise. So I again thank the member for asking that question and of course I will look into where we are and what issue or challenges we may be facing in providing for video remands at the Brockville courthouse