

CO Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Tuesday, October 3, 2017

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Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Tuesday, October 3, 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 farmers, government advertising and the timing of Ontario's culture days. NDP Questions today concerned, among other topics, Ontario's hospital capacity, hospital wait times and the Andrew Loku inquest.

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

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

Transcript of Provincial Question Period

41st Parliament, 2nd Session

Tuesday, October 3, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown to Minister Leal (Chiarelli) Re: Ontario Farmers

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of agriculture. The new chair of the Ontario processing and vegetable growers is pretty well known around this building. She is the old chief of staff to the former Minister of agriculture, a relative of a former Liberal MPP, and a well-connected Liberal lobbyist. The same old same old Liberal patronage. And it looks like Liberal entitlement at its finest. It does not send a good message to Ontario farmers. Mr. Speaker, was the chair appointed because of her Liberal connections? And, Mr. Speaker, was it the Premier's office that –

>> Minister Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, simple answer no.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, seeing the Liberals don't want to reconcile their patronage and Liberal entitlement, I'll try a different question on behalf of Ontario farmers. In over 14 -- Ontario farmers have seen broken promises after broken promises, and one of the best examples of that is the natural gas expansion. They've been waiting and waiting, and that promise keeps on coming and frankly the funding for it seems to be diminished year after year. So a very direct question to Minister of agriculture. Will we actually see this natural gas expansion as funded finally honoured this year?

>> Minister Leal: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of infrastructure who's been a real leader on this file. I'll withdraw that.

>> Minister Bob Chiarelli: We announced the \$100 million natural gas grant program, we became the first government in Ontario's history to make a significant investment in rural natural gas expansion. This program was a direct response to what we heard from Ontarians and residents, farmers and small businesses want to reduce their energy costs. Our government believes that the expansion of natural gas access, particularly in rural and remote communities, is an absolute priority. We are -- Underserved communities, including those in rural and northern Ontario. The expansion will help families, farmers and small businesses save up to \$1,500 in heating costs in each year, Mr. Speaker. Speaker, this \$100 million program -- Is leveraging millions more of investments from the gas utilities. In light of significant uptake for this program, we are working hard. To win the federal –

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of agriculture. Now the natural gas expansion's contingent on the federal government. They know how to make up any excuse to not honour their promises. Mr. Speaker, let me ask a more local question on behalf of farmers in Simcoe county. The sheep farmers of Simcoe county have been dealing with an increase in predatory animals particularly coyotes. They are a persistent threat. The Ontario wildlife and damage compensation program is supposed to be there to assist them. But there are serious concerns about the implementation of this program. Farmers are not getting the assistance they need and were promised by this government. Mr. Speaker, can I get a commitment? Get a commitment on walking away from their patronage or -- On this program, the Liberals will ensure the Ontario wildlife damage compensation program will actually -- The help they were promised?

>> Minister Leal: Indeed the compensation of that program that we have in the province of Ontario is very important to our farming community. We have trade staff that actually go out in the field to assess the damage that's been done by a predator. In fact, Mr. Speaker, not too long ago, I took the opportunity to -- Peterborough to see a sheep that was attacked by a fisher to see the damage that was done by that particular predator. I know in that particular case, the assessor comes from the municipality, in that case Asheville Norwood, goes in the field, assess the damage to make sure that the farm community is adequately compensated. From time to time we continue to monitor the situation to make sure that any farm animal. That's been damaged by a predator, you get compensated.

MPP Brown to Minister Sandals Re: Partisan Advertising

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the president of the treasury board. As the days go by, so does the government abuse of government funded advertising. And frankly, Mr. Speaker, they not only have -- they have more than doubled the government ad buy for this year. It's one thing to use Liberal party funds to campaign. He's another thing to use taxpayer dollars. Mr. Speaker, my question is very direct. To the president of the treasury board, will they cancel the 5.5 -- Mr. Speaker, clearly the auditor general has said these are partisan ads would not have been approved by her office. This latest \$5.5 million ad buy, will you do the right thing and cancel these partisan ads?

>> Minister Liz Sandals: Thank you very much, Speaker. I would to talk a little bit about the process for government advertising, because there actually is a bulk media buy, which is consolidated at my ministry. However, the process for approval is a ministry approach Cabinet office. Cabinet office makes a maximum allocation. Treasury board actually isn't party to that, but the figure that presumably the member is citing is the maximum allowable allocation. In order for the ads to ever go to air, they have to be approved according to the government advertising act, and I would -- I would point out to people that we continue to be the only jurisdiction in Canada that has a government advertising --

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister. \$5.5 million may seem like nothing to a government that wastes billions. But these millions, these millions could have been spent on much more worthy purposes, helping people with the hydro bills, helping children who need services for autism. There are so many better uses than using taxpayer dollars to fund government advertising. To fund partisan ads. And so let me ask a very direct question. Does the treasury board president believe it's appropriate to use taxpayer dollars for Liberal propaganda? Because that's exactly what they're doing. Are you on the side of taxpayers or are you going to continue to ignore the auditor general? Do the right thing. Cancel these partisan ads. Do the right thing. Make sure --

>> Minister Sandals: Well, I obviously -- -- Partisan ads -- I obviously don't agree that the advertising that we've supported over the years partisan ads. Think of some of the advertising we have done as a government. Think of the "Who will you help" campaign, about sexual violence, and if you go to that particular advertising campaign, the video was viewed internationally. The video was viewed by over 7 million people in the first ten days alone, eventually generated more than 85 million views worldwide. But what's really interesting about that ad is that it actually changed public opinion. What we set out to do with that was to change the attitude towards sexual violence. And in fact that ad achieved that. We don't think that's partisan. We think that's good social policy.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is again to the Minister. I'm talking about a \$5.5 million hydro ad buy. The auditor general, you say you're not partisan. The auditor general, the non-par at this San legislative oversight have said they are partisan. They would not have passed her office's approval but you took that approval away. So rather than try to distract the public with a different ad campaign, be very clear. We're talking about these partisan hydro ads. Let me give you had an example of something that would have been more of a worthy cause. The member for Nepean- Carleton challenged the Minister today that we could have used those fund on an opioid awareness. This is a real challenge. This is a real Chris sis -- crisis. So will you accept the challenge -- Mr. Speaker, will the Minister accept the challenge from the member from Nepean- Carleton, do the right thing rather than have these partisan Liberal propaganda ads on hydro. Will you use those funds for opioid awareness campaign?

>> Minister Sandals: Well, Speaker, we use government funding -- We do advertising for a variety of reasons, including expensive health things. Think about the campaigns about getting a flu shot. Think about the campaigns about helping kids community challenge in quitting smoking. So yes, we do advertising about health. But we do an advertising about variety of things. Think about the climate change ads that we did, because unlike the people opposite, we actually think that climate change is one of the most serious problems facing us today as citizens of not just Ontario but citizens of the world. And the -- That ad campaign, again, helped inform the public about the fact that climate change is real.

MPP Gelinas to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Capacity

>> MPP France Gelinas: [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the vice Premier. [End of Translation] My leader Andrea Horwath told this House that, over the weekend, 22 sick people in my hometown of Sudbury received their medical treatment in hospital hallways, TV rooms, patient lounge and a shower room. This isn't the first time that the Deputy Premier and her Liberal government has been alerted to the overcrowding crisis in Ontario hospitals. What is the Deputy Premier's plan to fix the crisis in Sudbury?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, our plan is to continue to invest in health care as we announced and are now implementing as a result of the spring budget. A \$1 billion investment in the health care budget this year, Mr. Speaker. We're investing \$7 billion new dollars in health care over the course of the next three years, and \$500 million specifically this year to hospitals on top of an equal amount last year. So we're investing in our hospitals ensuerg that they have the operating funds necessary to run their institutions properly and provide that high quality of care, but we're also investing specifically in those hospitals that are facing capacity challenges. We're working with those hospitals that are coming forward with proposals with regards to how we can further make available beds for them. To improve the process through which people who require admission are admitted into hospital.

>> MPP Gelinas: Thank you, Speaker. The Minister knows that the brampton civic hospital has been officially at over capacity every single month of 2017. He also knows that this crisis does not start in 2017. The hospital has been at over capacity for more than two long years. Since the Minister has known about this crisis for years now, what is his plan to fix the mess at brampton civic hospital?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite's figures are simply not true. Well, Mr. Speaker, so I have in front of me the hospital occupancy rate for every single hospital across this province, and I have the -- because they're delivered quarterly, Mr. Speaker, although we do track them on a daily basis, but the most recent quarter from April through July of 2017, brampton hospital is at 86% capacity. So, Mr. Speaker, it's important that we all, in this legislature, work with the facts. I'm happy to provide her with, as I have -- and in fact these are often generally publicly available very soon after I receive them myself. We're happy to actually work together -- For those hospitals that are facing specific capacity challenges, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Gelinas: Speaker, the budget short changed Ontario hospitals by \$300 million and the Minister knows that because the Ontario hospital association has written, has taken the step to write to the Minister to tell him just so. This amended immediate funding in order to avoid an even more acute crisis when the flu season, which is just around the corner, will hit us this winter. How much funding can hospitals expect from this government, and when can they expect it to deal with the overcrowding crisis?

>> Minister Hoskins: I know what's happening here, Mr. Speaker, because, despite the NDP Voting against our budget that included \$24 million specifically to address capacity in hospitals, and despite the NDP Seemingly being absolutely opposed to the humber river proposal, the finch site, to add more than 150 beds for transitnal patients that do not -- who no longer need to be in hospital. Now they're going to -- they're trying to set themselves up as somehow this is their idea and an investment that we made long ago and work that we're currently doing with their hospitals to address not only capacity but the potential for surge due to the flu season which is up coming. We've been working with this intimately with the O.H.A., with the hospital system. We'll continue to work and it has nothing to do with -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Gelinas to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Capacity

>> MPP France Gelinas: Merci, monsieur president. Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is again for the vice Premier. [End of Translation] In January this year, humber river hospital in Toronto was forced to admit 94 sick patients in unconventional beds. In February, it went up to 97 sick patients. In March, 61 sick patients, and in April 68 sick patients were admitted in unconventional beds. That's 326 people forced to receive medical treatment in a public hallway with no privacy and no dignity. And that's just one hospital, Speaker. When will the Minister at least tell us what is his plan to make sure that the sick patient admitted to humber river hospital will actually get a hospital room?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Our plan, Mr. Speaker, is the one that they opposed. Our plan is to create at least in excess -- at least we're considering a proposal from humber river hospital, and a significant number of other hospitals in the G.T.A. They've come forward with a proposal to address precisely what that party is asking us to do. So their proposal is in excess of 150 beds opening up for A.L.C. Patients in those hospitals, including humber river, that know they're not acute. They no longer need to be in that

hospital environment. So the plan from humber river hospital is to actually bring those people into an appropriate transitional setting where they can get expert rehabilitation care. I can't, for the life of me -- I mean this is such a direct question which runs contrary to their express opposition to this proposal. They're calling it warehousing. They're calling that site mothballs. They obviously don't like it. So the actual solution being proposed by humber river is that we're looking at -- they oppose, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Gelinas: Thank you, Speaker. Sickkids hospital reached a high capacity last winter of 107% of its acute care beds. Its mental health unit reached an astonishing 136% capacity, overcapacity at the exact same time. Again the Minister has known about this crisis for years. What is the Minister's plan to make sure that no sick child admitted to sickkids will ever feel the burden of this government neglect of our hospitals? When will he stop risking the health and lives of those little sick children just to balance the bottom line?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I'm so disappointed, once again, in the NDP Rhetoric. Does the fact that that member is suggesting that Ontarians cannot trust the hospital for sick children with the hundreds if not thousands of frontline health care workers, the volunteers, the administrators who are working day in and day out to provide world-class health care for the youngest members of our society. And to suggest that somehow I'm -- Mr. Speaker that this government and me as Minister that I'm putting those lives at risk is unbearable for me. In line with the rhetoric that they're increasingly using, which is creating fear mongering. The fact that they addressed their long-term care system as being in chaos, the fact that they're talking about -- Mothballing of individuals and facilities, the fact that they're opposing every effort that we're making to address the challenges that we face I find unconscionable.

>> MPP Gelinas: Those little sick children get very good care once they are admitted, Speaker, but this is what the issue is all about. The Premier -- the Minister's refusing to listen to the opposition. He has refused to listen to the Ontario hospital association. He says that he cares about the facts, but he's been presented with the facts, Speaker, time and time again in this House, and by the people of Ontario, only to continue to deny that there is a real crisis of overcapacity in our hospitals. What will it take for this Minister to take some real action, to take some decisive action and to help Ontario families throughout our province who need hospital care and end up admitted into the hallway?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I've lived and worked in many countries in the health care system and I know that we have one of the best health care systems in the entire world. And it's here in this province, Mr. Speaker. I know that that party has given up on our health care system. I know that that party. Is fear mongering -- We're not going to stand for that. We're going to expand the health care system. We're going to defend the doctors and the nurses and personal support workers and the thousands upon thousands that are working every day to provide that highest quality care. We have one of the best cancer care programs in the entire world, bar none. We have one of the best hospitals down the road in sickkids hospital. If you continue to disparage our hospital system like the way you are I'm going to continue to defend it. I believe in it. I love the health care system that we have in this province and we have to defend it, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Jones to Minister Hoskins Re: Carrot Rewards Health Promotion App

>> MPP Sylvia Jones: My question is to the Minister of health and long-term care. In July your government gave \$1.5 million to support the care rewards act. Your Minister described it as quite an innovative

mobile phone app that rewards for being active, eating healthy and quitting smoking with the goal of reducing the risk of chronic diseases. Now care rewards is encouraging users to check the credit score. Can the Minister explain what credit score versus to do with reducing chronic diseases?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, it seems to be the trend this morning, Mr. Speaker. I can't believe seems we've -- the opposition has reached new depths in twisting information and vilifying Canadian companies in the interests of scoring cheap political points, Mr. Speaker. I believe it's critical that we support Ontarians by encouraging people to make healthy and active lifestyle choices. That's why we've partnered with carrot rewards. It's an innovative health promotion mobile phone application rewarding users for being active, eating healthy and quitting smoking. We invested carrot rewards -- Mr. Speaker, carrot has absolutely no affiliation with equifax. If she and her staff had done their research, she would understand that. This, Mr. Speaker, is the P.C. Party of 2017 and, Mr. Speaker, 14 years in opposition has not been kind.

>> MPP Jones: The arrogance of this government -- \$1.5 million and you call me political points? Unbelievable! Carrot rewards -- Back to the Minister, Speaker. Carrot rewards contracted borrowell. Follow the dots. A company partnered with equifax to check users' credit scores. Borrowell admitted in September that the equifax breach could quote put you at risk of identity theft. The government gave sites \$1.5 million but did not do their due diligence to ensure the money was in fact used to encourage healthy living. Carrot rewards is still directing Ontarians today -- Through a service using equifax during what is reported to be the largest breach of social insurance numbers in North America. What steps has the Minister taken to ensure -- Personal information of carrot reward use

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, carrot no more has a relationship with equifax than cibc has a relationship with equifax. Let alone it's third party points removed. I think members of this House -- Thank you. So carrot rewards was actually launched in partnership with the Harper federal government in July of 2015 when Rona ambrose was Minister of health. Carrot worked with the federal government for an entire year before they signed the contract in January. When Patrick Brown was still a federal member. In fact the \$5 million -- Was provided by the Conservative federal government to carrot rewards. So, Mr. Speaker, this kind of genesis with the federal Conservative government, but of course the member opposite didn't look into any of that before trying to attack a good Canadian success story without merit. The Progressive Conservative party of bill Davis is long since gone. I can't see it.

MPP Armstrong to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Wait Times

>> MPP Teresa Armstrong: My question is to the acting Premier. Judy pause of London waited more than a year for her knee surgery, and now she's waiting even longer in pain for her hip surgery replacement. Her surgery date last month was cancelled due to lack of funding, and now Judy, like so many Londoners, will wait two long years for the surgery she desperately needs. London, strathroy and Stratford have some of the longest wait times in Ontario for hip and knee surg Eries, and that's just not me saying that. The head of the lhin says, quote -- our wait times are some of the worst in this province. When will this government stop squeezing our hospitals and start making sure that patients like Judy don't have to wait years for surgery that they need now?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, since we came into office our government has invested over -- almost \$2 billion. For more than 3 million additional procedures to help reduce wait times. In fact as a

result of that, the wait time alliance report card continues to give Ontario straight As in five key service areas including hip replacement surgery and knee replacement surgery. Straight As, Mr. Speaker. Now we know that there is variation across the province and that's one of the reasons why this past summer we made available publicly to both health care providers and patients and Ontarians information about wait times for a whole set of procedures publicly available so individuals can see for example which hospitals have longer wait times, which hospitals have shorter wait times and they can work with their health care provider. To make a decision that suits their particular and unique needs. We know that we need to continue to invest -- in supplementary I'll talk about investments this this budget.

>> MPP Armstrong: The crisis in health care in London is a direct result of years of hospital cuts by the Conservatives and the Liberals. Since 2013, London health sciences has fobed -- force today cut 141 million dollars and at least 488 full-time equivalent jobs have been cut. That is the Premier's legacy in London. Now we have the longest wait time in surgery. Our hospitals are overcrowded and pleading for dozens of new beds. And the acting Premier just sits there and makes excuses, instead of standing up in health care in her own city. When will this government stop cutting health care like the Conservatives and stop fixing the damages the Liberals have done to hospitals across southwestern Ontario?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, part of the budget we announced an additional 50 million to improve access and wait times for hospital services including specifically knee and hip surgery. The southwest lhin has included an additional half million dollars for more hip and knee replacement surg Eries. Mr. Speaker, it's important Ontarians understand the situation in the province that according to data from cihi, Ontario continues to beat the national targets for hip and knee surgery wait times, and also compared to other jurisdictions, it's 121 days across the oecd, 86 days in Canada, 75 days wait in the U.K., and only 70 days in Ontario. So the wait time similarly for knee replacements in Ontario are half the average of what it is in the oecd. We absolutely have more work to do. That's precisely why we made the wait time hip and knee investments in this year.

MPP Potts to Minister Sousa (Duguid) Re: Economic Investments in Ontario

>> MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of finance. In 2010, Speaker, this government promised to eliminate the deficit and balance the budget by 2017/18. And this was not very long after the '08/09 recession which had extremely negative impacts on countries around the world, and Ontario of course, Speaker, was not immune. However, rather than slash the programs and services upon which Ontario families rely in order to eliminate the deficit, I am very proud of the fact that our government chose to build Ontario up. The investments that we have made in transit, schools, hospitals, education have led people to choose Ontario as their home now more than ever. And I for one am happy to see that there are more supports for municipalities. Ontario cities and towns are now receiving four times the level of support they got in 2003, more than 4 billion in support. Speaker, can the Minister remind the House how, on this side of the House, we've been able to invest in the people of Ontario for 14 years without taking the slash and cutting as they would do on that side of the House ?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the member for the question. For the past 14 years, our government has taken a balanced approach to keep Ontario at the forefront of a global economyful we manage our expenses and transform how we deliver public services making them more efficient and more effective. This is a type of financial responsibility that the opposition doesn't understand, Mr. Speaker. By investing in Progressive policy, we're stimulating growth in our economy making historic infrastructure investments, putting 20 billion into hospitals, 16 billion into schools. Free tuition for our students and free pharmacare for our young people. Meanwhile our G.D.P. Is lean and lower than pre

recession levels. Under the previous P.C. Government Ontario taxpayers were paying 15 cents for every dollar earned, just to service the debt. Now in Ontario, we're paying only 8.4 cents and next year it will be even lower. We've eliminated the deficit. We balanced the budget and that means more money to invest in health care, education and other public services that –

>> MPP Potts: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Minister of finance. You listen, Speaker, to what the people -- the opposition are saying. They want people to believe we've made no advancements over the last 14 years. They would like people to believe we have no improvements in businesses and no investments in industries like the tech sector and stem sector. They would want you -- Thank you, Speaker. They would want us to believe that Ontarians have not been working hard to grow this economy into one of the strongest in Canada and all of North America, and it's hard to rectify that with what the Minister of finance has just spoken about. How under Liberal leader ship we have dug Ontario out of the recession, how because of this we are now able to make very Progressive investments in new policy that will attract foreign investment. So, Speaker, account Minister tell us about the great progress this side of the House has made over the last 14 years. To make Ontario the best place to create and grow jobs?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to stand up today to say that we've worked tirelessly with our business community and Ontario workers to build Ontario up, Mr. Speaker, and to turn our economy into one of the strongest in Canada and North America. Yes, we've weathered one of the worst recessions we've seen in recent memory. Since then we've added 760,000 net new jobs. Since then, Mr. Speaker, and for the last three years we've been leading the G-7 in growth. Since then, Mr. Speaker, we've brought our unemployment rate down to 5.7%. The lowest in 16 years. Since then, Mr. Speaker, we've invested \$3 billion in partnerships with businesses, leveraging \$27 billion in private sector investment. To putting 130,000 jobs, and just as importantly, Mr. Speaker, we're now poised to lead in the new global economy. Mr. Speaker, we've transformed our economy. We're heading in the right direction.

MPP MacLeod to Minister Hoskins Re: Opioid Crisis

>> MPP Lisa MacLeod: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the president of the treasury board. The opioid crisis has been gripping the province for about a year now. Cities like Toronto, Ottawa, London and Kitchener are not immune to the spread of deadly opioids that have claimed the lives of 865 Ontarians in 2016. The best way to prevent Ontarians, particularly the youth in our province, from taking potentially deadly drugs laced with fentanyl is through greater awareness and better education. Given the government's false media buy or its advertising budget which has grown in the last year from 25 million to 56 million, will the government commit to dedicating 10% of that to the public fight against opioids?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I genuinely appreciate the question. I think that we share the same assessments that we have a public health crisis, public health emergency with regards to opioids in this province and in this country. And we need to do everything we can, including education and awareness. It is an important tool. It's one of those touch points -- not the only one, but is an important touch point where we can alert people to the dangers and the risks inherent to both licit and illicit drug use. And particularly as the member opposite has said with regard to young persons. So this -- the education and awareness component of the opioid crisis is an aspect of our response we've been working on for quite some time. In fact we're working closely across ministries, higher education for example and others. To make sure, as we roll out this aspect of our efforts to fight the epidemic, that this is also having that intended impact.

>> MPP MacLeod: Back to the president of the treasury board. The government spent \$5.7 million on orpp ads after the program was scrapped during the program's scrapping. You're also slated to spend at least \$5.5 million on the fair hydro plan that the government -- the auditor called a pat on the back. I'm asking basically for \$5.6 million to be dedicated to opioid awareness in a public health and safety campaign that could save lives. Later today the family of Nick Cody will join me at queen's park. Nick died of a drug overdose after fighting addiction. His parents Steve and Natalie believe we need a campaign. One more tool in the tool kit in the opioid crisis but I believe it is a very important one. Will the government commit at least \$5 million into advertising and education campaign to tell Ontarians about these deadly drugs?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, again I share the member opposite's concern and the objective as well in terms of that one component education awareness. We need to be sure that we're reaching a young person in school, in Colleges and universities, that we have a campaign that reaches people that go to nightclubs and bars for example where they may come into contact with tainted drugs. The problem that we're facing is an increasing amount of fentanyl, that many if not most individuals that consume drugs are completely unaware of its existence and the risks inherent of that. We're funding safe injection sites, including in the member's city of Ottawa. We're funding test strips so you can test for the presence of fentanyl. We just released \$21 million out of nearly \$3 hundred million investment over a three-year period. To fight the crisis. 21 million to go specifically to harm reduction workers on the front lines so they have the tools that they need as well.

MPP Sattler to Minister Matthews (Hunter) Re: Public Education System

>> MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Speaker, Ontario families and education advocates were shocked to discover that this government is welcoming new education secretary Betsy Devos to Ontario. Devos is an outspoken proponent of vulture programs that divert public dollars to private schools and undermine a strong publicly funded education system. With a \$15 billion backlog in school maintenance and repair, with rising violence in Ontario schools, with chronic underfunding of special education, why is this government giving a platform to someone who believes that government should be spending less, not more, on public education?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Speaker, I am so proud of our education system in Ontario. We have actually transformed education over the last 14 years. Our graduation rate has gone from a shameful 68% to over 86%, Speaker. It is a remarkable turnaround. The more we can spread the word about what has happened in education in Ontario, the better. I actually think that secretary Devos has a lot to learn from the Ontario exp Erience. I welcome the opportunity to be able to educate her about how public education can work and can be strong and can benefit students, all students. I think there is a lot to learn and I'm glad that she has actually taken the opportunity to learn about our education miracle.

>> MPP Sattler: Again to the acting Premier. It's not just Devos's position on school choice and privatization that has people worried. She rolls back rules on gender neutral washrooms in schools and watered-down College policies on handling sexual assaults. Public education advocates strongly denounce her view. The president of the Ontario teachers' federation wants Devos to keep her backward ideas out of Ontario. Why won't this Liberal government listen to teachers and take a strong stand against privatization, against trans exclusion, against gender based violence and retract this invitation to allow Devos to tour Ontario schools?

>> Minister Mitzie Hunter: You know, Speaker, this is a disappointing question coming from the NDP, because when it comes to public education, Ontario has one of the best public education system in the entire world, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to focusing on student achievements and equity, Ontario has one of the best public education systems in the entire world, Mr. Speaker. If secretary Devos wants to learn about public education, there is no better place in the world to come than to Ontario -- To learn about public education and how we are serving the needs of Ontario's 2 million students. 95% of students in Ontario attend our public education system. Because we have an excellent system and we are proud to tell the secretary and anyone else who wants to listen.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Hunter Re: Public Education System

>> MPP Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of education. Over the last 14 years, our government has worked hard to improve the quality of our publicly funded education system. I also know that, as a teacher and a union leader, that we inherited this system that was severely underfunded and in disrepair. However our government has made historic investments, and we continue to build on our proven track record of supporting students success. I know that we have made many accomplishments during this time and that we have been recognized by the international community for our excellence in education. We always want to make sure that our young people are equipped with the supports they need to reach their full potential both inside and outside the classroom. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister. After 14 years of progress, has our government improved the quality of education -- how has our government improved the quality of education?

>> Minister Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member from Barrie for this question. I know how passionate she is about Ontario's public education system. And, Mr. Speaker, we are starting right where it belongs, with the investments in our classrooms. After 14 years, we have increased education funding in this province by 66% to more than \$23 billion. Each year. Our historic investments in education are paying off. Contributing to the high school graduation rate of, Mr. Speaker, a historic high, 86.5%. Up from 68% in 2004. Over 14 years, we've invested more than \$17 billion in school infrastructure, 820 new schools, and more than 800 -- Additions and renovations, which is part of our plan to create jobs and grow our economy. Let's talk about full-day kindergarten, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that response. I know just how enthusiastic parents were when sending their children off to school this fall, and it's clear just how much families value Ontario's publicly funded education system. Thanks to our supports and investments, our students consistently rank amongst the best in national and international student achievement outcomes. Over the last 14 years, our plan for our education system is clear. We are committed to supporting student achievement, equity and well-being for all students in Ontario. We've also heard that we are collaborating with education partners to prioritize student success and well-being. Minister, can you please tell us more about our plans to pave pathways to success for all students and to support all education workers. Within our publicly funded education system

>> Minister Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I want to say thank you again to the member from Barrie. And as she well knows, the excellence in our education system begins with our excellent teachers and education workers across this province, Mr. Speaker, who show up each and every single day on behalf of all of our students. I just want to say thank you to them. Mr. Speaker, we have invested in our system of education, because we know this is the best investment we can make in the skills and in the talent of our students,

Mr. Speaker. We've introduced new programs to prepare students for work and life after graduation. The Minister of agriculture is talking about our high skills program including our agriculture program and these specialty high skills programs, Mr. Speaker, are having extraordinary impact on our students. But we're not stopping there, Mr. Speaker. We've invested an additional \$190 million over three years to create 40,000 more work related integrated programs for students. The experience that they --

MPP Martow to Minister McMahon Re: Religious Holiday Accommodation

>> MPP Gila Martow: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the Minister of tourism, culture and sport. This past Friday, Saturday and Sunday Ontario celebrated Ontario's culture days for 2017. Beginning the last Friday of September, the annual culture days weekend features hands-on behind-the-scenes community engaged activities inviting the public to contribute to arts and culture across Canada. This year the Ontario culture days fell on the important Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur unfortunately and this means that many in Thornhill and the Jewish community across Ontario were unable to participate. You know and I'm not talking about just attending. I'm talking like actually participating in the events that foster engagement and support for the diverse arts and culture community in Ontario. And I'm just wondering if the Minister can explain why there isn't a plan in place to accommodate special days like Yom Kippur? Thank you.

>> Minister Eleanor McMahon: Thank you, Speaker. And I want to thank the member opposite for the question, and I know how important her faith is to her, Speaker. In recognition of that, I want to say how much I respect her question. I do want to point out, Speaker, that will culture days which we celebrate right across Ontario encompass about 200 cultures in Ontario and with the busy calendar season every year, sometimes it's difficult to choose a day that doesn't affect a particular faith and a particular religion. I will take this back to my officials, having had the question now from the Honourable member, and see what we can do to avoid such duplications in the future but I know that she appreciates that there are hundreds of cultures across Ontario, and that sometimes again it's difficult to schedule these kind of events and celebrations, given that there's one almost every weekend on days that don't impact a particular culture or faith. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Martow: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And again to the Minister. And I just want to read from a message from Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne on Yom Kippur where she said just last week Yom Kippur the day of atonement is the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. Now I can understand everybody here can appreciate that there are a lot of Jewish holidays, and it's a never-ending cycle every holidays in the Jewish community. But Yom Kippur is a little bit different. It is the holiest day. We don't need the Premier to tell the community that. But maybe -- But maybe the Premier's words need to ring into some of the ministry staff to understand that. We have artists -- we lost Leonard Cohen this year. Eugene Levy, the famous Canadian actor. Even Drake was Bar Mitzvahed, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to see a little bit of recognition that, for the high holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur that events like the culture days can accommodate those special days. Thank you.

>> Minister McMahon: I thank the member opposite for the question. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to wish the Jewish community in Ontario and beyond the very best wishes for the high holiday season which of course as the member opposite has just mentioned is just behind us now. Having Jewish members in my own family, Speaker, I'm very proud to, as we all are, of our Jewish community here in the Ontario. There are enormous accomplishments. In fact, Speaker, in the arts and culture sector there are many artists who are Jewish. I want to just respond by saying again we will look at the calendar, Speaker. I also know that the member opposite appreciate the diverse nature of our province. When it comes to

Kathleen Wynne and her supports for the arts and culture sector and her supports for the various faiths in this province, nobody can question that commitment, Mr. Speaker. Because she is absolutely committed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Tabuns to Minister Lalonde Re: Andrew Loku Inquest

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. My question to the acting Premier. In 2015, Toronto was rocked by the death of Andrew loku, a 45-year-old black man in mental health distress in an incident with police. Rightly a coroner's inquest was called, and earlier this year that inquest made 39 recommendations that would give the police the training and cools this need to did he de-escalate situations with racial populations and those who need to be heard and helped. So incidents such as the death of Andrew loku may never happen again. Today I'm joined by a group of concerned mental health professionals on the front lines of this issue, who are calling on this Liberal government to act on the coroner's inquest recommendations. My question -- When will the Premier implement the loku inquest recommendations?

>> Minister Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the member for his questions. First I want to express my sincere condolences to the friends and the family of Andrew loku. I know that police officers are increasingly interacting with vulnerable individuals, often with complex mental health issues, Mr. Speaker. And this is why we need to modernize the police service training. Police officers need the necessary tools to defuse crisis situations and protect both themselves and their communities. Through our strategy for safer Ontario, we will promote a collaborative partnership between police, the public and other sectors such as education, health care and social. This will improve interaction between police on our vulnerable Ontarians.

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the acting Premier. Notwithstanding those assurances, the reality is that it's been two years since the tragic death of Mr. Loku. The jury's in, and those recommendations have yet to be implemented. The time of talk and good intentions is over. The people of this province don't need another coroner's inquest gathering dust on someone's desk. When will this Liberal government act to implement the coroner's inquest recommendations into the death of Andrew loku?

>> Minister Lalonde: Thank you. You know our government is very committed to make sure that people with mental health issues get access to the service they need, Mr. Speaker, and through the strategy for safer Ontario, we will be improving the de-escalation training for all new recruits and existing officers across the province. Incorporating use of force and des claition into our upcoming legislation to ensure police can fully respond to individuals in crisis. We will establish the most appropriate model for police interaction with persons who are in crisis, Mr. Speaker. My ministry is also working very hard and diligently with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to provide people with mental health issues with the right care in the right place at the right time. And, Mr. Speaker, we will be bringing legislation this fall. Thank you very much.

>> MPP Shafiq Qaadri: Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister every infrastructure. [End of Translation] Would like to thank Minister Chiarelli and this Premier for joining me in my riding of Etobicoke North for the latest and greatest infrastructure development, the \$400 million expansion of Etobicoke general hospital. 14 years of dedicated Liberal leadership has resulted in the largest infrastructure renewal in Ontario's history. Under the leadership of this government, whether it's hospitals, schools, public transit projects across Ontario and of course these were precisely the projects ignored egregiously by both the P.C. And NDP Governments. At the heart of our 190 billion 13-year plan is a commitment to creating better lives for the people of Ontario. In Etobicoke north, whether it's communities, schools, hospitals, transforming infrastructure, there are developments all around ridings. But the opposition is close every step of the way. Speaker, could Minister please elaborate on Ontario's current infrastructure development?

>> Minister Bob Chiarelli: Thank you for the question. Speaker, our government invests an average of \$11 billion per year on infrastructure, on track for \$20 billion next year. Last year in power the Tories spent \$1.9 billion. The acute transit projects let society infrastructure rot. Our Liberal government has been building Ontario up for 14 years. We've invested \$280 million in broadband connecting tens of thousands to high-speed internet. We've carved out 100 major hospital and children's treatment centres, with 35 more under way. We were the first Ontario government to invest \$100 million in rural natural gas expansion. We tripled to 300 million the annual Ontario community infrastructure fund for smaller communities. 1,400 clean water and wastewater projects we are funding. There is no debate to be had. Of all the parties represented in this House, only us has delivered on infrastructure.

>> MPP Qaadri: Thank you, Minister, for the slurry of developments and your leadership. I know that the investments that we've made over the past 14 years in every corner of this province will benefit today's generation but will also lay the foundation for a fair and prosperous Ontario for our kids and grandkids. Speaker, whether ear' making infrastructure investments in health care, in education, in transportation, these are of course a top priority for the community that I represent in Etobicoke north. From rapid transit to go regional express rail, these new transit options as an example will allow people in my community of Etobicoke North to get to work or school and back and forth from home faster than ever before. Speaker, as an example we have a \$1.2 billion Finch L.R.T. Custom designed with 8 stops. Right in Etobicoke north. I'd like to ask, Speaker, would the Minister please provide more information on what our government continues to do to reverse the chronic underinvestment, the legacy of the government opposite?

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: Delighted to have a chance to answer the member of Etobicoke north's question. He is absolutely correct. Since 2003 we have gotten a lot done. So for example the Eglinton Crosstown L.R.T. T., which will open up in 2021, Speaker. When you think about that, it will be more than 20 years since the Conservative party killed and tilled the Eglinton subway, Speaker. We also know when the Conservatives were last in government, Speaker, they invested between 10 to 15 times less per year than we have in G.O. Transit and other rapid transit projects, Speaker. Of course an oldie but a goody, Speaker. We can never forget Mike Harris and the Conservatives sold highway 407, Speaker. Now let's take a look at what our Liberal government's done over the last 14 years. We've extended the go rail knit work by nearly 09 kilometres. Toronto Spadina subway is merely weeks away from opening, Speaker. We have already opened the first. Publicly owned highway 407 that will be going out to the 115/35 in no time, Speaker. Our record is clear and so is the Conservatives' record.

>> MPP Monte McNaughton: To the acting Premier. Canada's Premiers are gathered in Ottawa today with finance Minister bill Morneau to discuss the Liberal proposal to raise taxes on small businesses. We already know that Premiers from across Canada are standing up for their small businesses and family farms. But so far Ontario's refused to condemn the action of their federal cows incident. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier be on the side of our small businesses and family farms or Justin Trudeau's?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government as of one knows has proposed changes to close loopholes used by consulting firms and professionals. We need to understand the implication of these changes to small business, Mr. Speaker. To make sure that Ontario continues to grow and thrive. Regardless of the federal government's decisions, we will continue to take action to support growth of small business in Ontario. We have already lowered, Mr. Speaker, business corporate tax rates from 5.5% in 2009 to 4.5%. We've eliminated capital tax, Mr. Speaker, lowering the overall tax rate. Capital cost allowance and continue to work with our small business community to ensure that they are protected and that whatever the federal government does, we will continue to support small business and the business community. We have 5.6% of unemployment and foreign investment in Ontario than anywhere else in Canada. Efforts we've made to date. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .