

CO Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Wednesday, April 26, 2017

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Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Wednesday, April 26, 2017.

MCI did not receive any questions of interest.

MIT received a question of interest:

NDP MPP Gilles Bisson asked Min. Kathryn McGarry what the government was doing for Ontario forestry producers in the face of 20% tariffs and accused the government of being slow to react. Min. McGarry responded that Ontario has called on Ottawa to provide a loan guarantee program. She also pointed out that Ontario was providing funding for the construction and maintenance of forest access roads, as well as has just hired Jim Peterson to negotiate for Ontario over this issue.

MSA did not receive any questions of interest.

Topics varied, with opposition asking a number of health-related questions and questions related to education funding.

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)
Sent: April 26, 2017 12:19 PM
To: @CAB-ProvLegQP
Subject: Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Wednesday, April 26, 2017

Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Wednesday, April 26, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown to Premier Wynne Re: School Closures

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier of the listen to these quotes. To for my tax dollars, I want politicians who aren't frightened to disobey a provincial regime I believe is destructive to human beings. If trustees don't agree with the funding formula, I expect them to go out on a limb and push back, not implement it. Trustees acted like bureaucrats when what we desperately need are politicians who tell the province no. Mr. Speaker, those are the words of our current Liberal Premier about the school closures that now this government is implementing. So my question, Mr. Speaker, is why has there been a complete 180 in the tone of the Premier?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the leader of the opposition has laid out exactly why I ran for provincial office, Mr. Speaker, because They were the government in office that wouldn't take our meetings, that didn't listen to us, Mr. Speaker, that had cut funding across the province. Mr. Speaker, there were billions of dollars taken out of education in this province during the Harris years. That is why I ran for provincial office, Mr. Speaker. In fact, in fact there are many members here who ran for provincial office because of the devastation that was brought by that party when Harris was in office, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to be here. We've rebuilt our education system. 68% of Canadians were -- kids were graduating when we.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. I don't think the children and the families at the

rally outside queen's park today would believe those words from the Premier. Now Mr. Speaker -- another quote from the Premier is this. From our current Premier -- a key priority of the McGuinty government has been to keep good schools open. Immediately upon taking office, the government asked school boards to put a moratorium on school closures. This pause allows the government to develop a new tool for boards to empower local decision making on school closures. They wanted a moratorium then. Something's changed. Advocating for a moratorium on school closures. Right now when parents, when children are pleading for a moratorium, the government is deaf to those concerns. Mr. Speaker, why have they changed their mind on the moratorium?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, of course when we came into office, Mr. Speaker, there had been as I've said devastation across the education system in this province. It was absolutely necessary, Mr. Speaker, to put a moratorium in place while guidelines were put in place. Look, Mr. Speaker, I know how difficult it is and has been for decades, for school boards to make decisions about school closures or potential consolidations. It's a most difficult decision that school boards have to make. But, Mr. Speaker, that moratorium was lifted at least in part because school boards were saying we can't run our boards unless we have the authority to make decisions that are in the best interests of kids. And that means the best programs, the best staffing, Mr. Speaker, and that means that, as schools are built -- As new modern buildings are created, there have to be sometimes school closures and consolidations but in the final supplementary, Mr. Speaker, I'll talk about options.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. Now the Premier said there was devastation when she was running for office. Now I haven't sat here Mr. Speaker -- I think the government needs to hear this rather than heckle. According to the legislative library, this Liberal government has now closed 100 more schools than the previous Conservative government. That's egregious. They are setting records on school closures. The facts don't lie, Mr. Speaker. This Premier, this government, they said they were in it for education. This Premier was the education Minister -- Mr. Speaker, I guess the truth hurts and that's why the government benches are heckling. But the reality is this Premier said she was in politics for education. She has now closed 100 more schools than any previous government ever dreamed of.

>> Premier Wynne: So, Mr. Speaker, I think what we also need to talk about is the 810 million -- Mr. Speaker, but -- so there have been schools built in ridings across this province, Mr. Speaker, in rural, in northern, in suburban and urban communities. There has been a renovation of 780 schools, Mr. Speaker, on top of the 810 schools. So, Mr. Speaker, I go back to what I said in the second question. I understand that closing a school or consolidating two schools is a real challenge for school boards. I also know, Mr. Speaker, that we have great examples in this province where school boards -- Because Because

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Sousa) Re: 2017 Provincial Budget

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Tomorrow is a big day. The Liberals are allegedly tabling their first balanced budget in many years. But, Mr. Speaker, I share the concerns of the financial accountability officer and the auditor general that the government's numbers don't add up. We've heard descriptions in the media "Cooking the books," "It's a shell game," it's smoke and mirrors. Regardless of -- don't want to get into this accusation before or after the budget about anything that's happening between individuals and making an accusation so I'd like you to withdraw. Regardless of the term used, the evidence is that the independent officers are highlighting speaks to the fact the government's numbers do not add up. And when things don't add up for Liberal Ontario, there's usually only one result, and that's big tax increases or severe budget cuts. If the Premier could share with the legislature today which is it going to be? Given independent officers say the numbers don't add up, is it going to be a tax increase or deep cuts?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I know that the leader of the opposition will be in the legislature, will hear the budget speech tomorrow and I would think, Mr. Speaker, given his Conservative outlook on life he would be pleased that the books in the province are being brought to balance. He would see that as a positive thing. Mr. Speaker, I would say where

we perhaps diverge is from my perspective and from our perspective, a balanced budget means that we have the opportunity to build on the foundation that we have already put in place in this province. We've been building infrastructure. We've been building roads and schools and hospitals and bridges, Mr. Speaker, and transit. We've been investing in children's education and in the education of our postsecondary students, Mr. Speaker. We now, Mr. Speaker, with a balanced budget have a responsibility to make -- Make sure we tackle the needs people are confronting in this globally uncertain economy, Mr. Speaker. And that's exactly what we're going to do.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, if it actually has balanced budget, then I would be pleased. But when independent officers of parliament are saying the numbers don't add up, that rings alarm bells across the province. The Minister of finance has been claiming interesting will be a major booster shock for health care funding. But in January the financial accountability officer reported that the government would need to slash its health care budget by 2.8 billion over the next years if it was to meet their balanced budget targets. Once again my question to the Premier is who are we to believe the financial accountability officer or Jeff Sousa? Please enlighten the legislature.

>> Minister Charles Sousa: We have a recipe for success, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the numbers do speak for themselves. We're increasing our revenues. We're growing our economy. We're exceeding Canada, the US and the G-7, and we're balancing the books tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. We're balancing the books next year. We're balancing the books the year after that and we're investing in the people of Ontario.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The reality is no one believes this recipe the Minister of finance is putting forward. No one believes this recipe. Let me share the words of the financial accountability officer. I quote -- the outlook for the budget balance has deteriorated and concluded Ontario's budget would be expected to remain in deficit over the next five years. Will the Liberals come clean? You've got the financial accountability officer saying one thing. You've got the Minister of finance saying something entirely different. So to the Premier -- who do you expect Ontarians to believe? The independent legislative oversight or the Minister of finance?

>> Minister Sousa: So, Mr. Speaker, independent agencies around the world, here in Canada, the conference board of Canada has cited that Ontario's numbers are the most transparent with the greatest integrity of any other government in Canada. Every year, every year the opposition and naysayers say Ontario could never come to balance. Ontario cannot do say what they say it will do and we exceed -- Exceeded target year over year, Mr. Speaker. We've been deliberate, consistent and we're balancing the budget. More importantly the people who believe it are the people who have jobs this is year, Mr. Speaker. Over 700,000 more jobs since the depth of the recession. It's families who have more to care for their families, Mr. Speaker. It's about them and we're delivering for the people of Ontario.

MPP Singh to Minister Hoskins Re: Pharmacare

>> MPP Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Does this Premier believe in universal, public pharmacare for Ontarians?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question and the member opposite knows that, for the past few years our government has been relentless in advocating for a national pharmacare program here in Canada. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, we have been the leading political voice in the country advocating for a national program that would ensure that all Canadians have that access to medicines which is critically important. We know, Mr. Speaker, that at least one out of every ten families in this province and across the country are unable to secure the medicines that are prescribed to them because of financial difficulties. That's the basis of our advocacy. It's an issue of fairness and health equity. The social determinants of health. Less important as the other aspects of medicare, Mr. Speaker. That's why we have been working so hard with this advocacy, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Singh: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's thinking that it's ok to -- for Ontarians -- yans to sit by

and wait for Ottawa to do something while the people of this province have to empty their wallets to pay for lifesaving medication day after day.

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly this member is late to the party. We have been working across this country, Mr. Speaker, for the last three years in advocating for the exact access to medicines that the And, Mr. Speaker, despite being late to the party, despite recently having found the ability to articulate their advocacy for access to medicines, I applaud the third party for their advocacy. It's important that all of us who believe in issues of health equity and social determinants of health and the importance of access to prescribed medicine. It's important that we all work -- and I just wish that the party, the third party had have been there three years ago.

>> MPP Singh Mr. Speaker, all across Ontario people are getting prescriptions that they can't afford to fill. People are reaching for their credit cards so their kids can get a much needed asthma inhaler. They're splitting their pills in half or, worse, going without medication. The NDP's plan for universal pharmacare will save lives. Let's talk about being late to the party. Instead of doing anything, what has the Premier done? She sent her Minister to Ottawa to talk, and last year -- let's talk about advocacy. Last year -- Coverage of drug plans that, slashed coverage for seniors' drug care medication. That's their plan, to slash coverage. Why does the government -- why is this government so out of touch with what's going on in this province?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry but I remember things last year a little differently, because I remember that we added 170,000 more seniors in this province who at the time were paying \$100 deductible annually and were paying at least \$6 as a co-payment each time they refilled a prescription. We brought that 170,000 of the lowest income seniors into a position where that annual deductible was gone. It was abolished, Mr. Speaker.

[Applause] Went from \$6 a prescription down to \$2 a prescription. That had an incredible impact for some of the most vulnerable people in this province. We will continue to advocate for pharmacare as we have. I'm glad that the third party has decided to join our efforts towards this end.

MPP Fife to Minister Hoskins Re: Pharmacare

>> MPP Catherine Fife: Thank you. My question's to the Premier. Peter thurly lives in downtown Kitchener. In April of 2015 Peter had a s Eries of surg Eries that saved his life because public medicare works but now he's paying between 700 and \$1,000 out of pocket each month for medications he needs because there's no public pharmacare program in Ontario. Peter has had to stop working because he still is recovering. He no longer has drug coverage. Peter's wife has some drug coverage but it's not enough. They don't know how they will continue to pay for Peter's medications. People told me that every dollar his family spends on medication comes directly out of their food budget. Does the Premier think that in a province as wealthy as Ontario that this is ok?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we have an excellent program in this province called trillium, which is accessible to all Ontarians who find themselves in that very difficult challenging situation of affordability of their medicines. And so if those costs -- and it's an income-based program, Mr. Speaker. So if those costs are exorbitant, if they're unable to afford them, that there's a place where those families, those individuals can go. They can put in an application based on their expense -- expenditures and there will be support for them based on their ability to pay. So I have no doubt the member opposite is aware of this program. It's been in existence for many years in the province. I would encourage her to work with her constituents to see if there are measures that can be done through that program and others, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Fife: The Ontario new Democrats brought in the trillium program. You're not listening. This story. Speaker, Peter had a good job. Peter's wife has a good job. But getting sick forced them to make decisions that no Ontarian should have to make. We're used to hearing these stories coming from the United States, not from Canada. New Democrats want to fix this. Your government wants

to wait for Ottawa. Can the Premier explain to Peter and his wife why they should have to wait in this province?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, you know I appreciate the fact that the NDP Brought in trillium. They also were the government that eliminated, removed 10% of all the drugs that were on the formulary at the time. 250 drugs when they were government they took off the formulary that were no longer available to Ontarians. But, Mr. Speaker, it's important that Ontarians understand the efforts that we've made, and we have had great success in part because of the pan-canadian pharmaceutical alliance, where we are finding across the country a significant portion, as you can appreciate here in Ontario, \$700 million in annual savings because of the reduction in drug prices we've been able to achieve because of bulk purchasing and bulk bargaining or working out the price with the manufacturers. We've reinvested those savings into new medicines. Continue to add and we have more than 4,000 drugs on our formulary today.

>> MPP Fife: Speaker, talking to Ottawa isn't going to help the \$2.2 help the 2.2 million people in this province who have no coverage. The Liberal government in Ottawa isn't doing anything to help families like Peter's. The lib Lal government at queen's park isn't doing anything to help families like Peter's. Getting access to lifesaving medications isn't going to get easier, unless Ontario does something. The NDP Is ready to act on pharmacare. Speaker, why doesn't the Premier of this province believe in universal public pharmacare?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I am elated at the change of heart from the member from Kitchener- Waterloo because we used to remember it was only during the last election campaign in 2014 where the NDP Committed to finding \$600 million in savings and when the member opposite was asked where those savings would come from, she said that they would likely -- That their new accountability Minister, their Minister of cuts would like to find efficiencies in the health care and postsecondary education -- She went on to say, quote -- I would go first to health. I am elated she's had a change of heart, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Walker to Minister Hunter Re: School Closures

>> MPP Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the education Minister. The Liberal party tour across rural communities to seek solutions to her government's mass school closures. Ontarians can smell a junket when they see one. This is about damage control and the Liberals looking out for their best interests, not Ontarians. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I ask, since the Minister did not consult the community before changing the rules and removing the community impact component from the school closures review process, why should they trust you now?

>> Minister Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I want it thank the member opposite for this question be, because you know, first of all, I know that there are parents who are here at the legislature today to talk about their school communities and I want to welcome come them, Mr. Speaker, because it's very important that we do listen to parents, Mr. Speaker, and to schools and to students, and to hear what they have to say, Mr. Speaker. I also want to be clear that, you know, I understand how vital schools are to local communities, Mr. Speaker. They're the heart of our communities. And, you know, every student, every parent, every educator cares about our students and their success. Mr. Speaker, that's what we're focused on and that's why we have engaged in consultation. Because we want to ensure Mr. Speaker --These engagements are important, Mr. Speaker, because we want to ensure that, you know, that we hear about the ideas and the information that parents and school communities want to tell us about their local schools, Mr. Speaker. We want to continue to ensure that we provide the best education possible for all students in Ontario.

>> MPP Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the education Minister. You should be ashamed tearing the hearts out of our rural communities bought -- because's what you're doing. You blew the public's trust once before when you failed to consult them on new accommodation rules resulting in possibly 600 schools being closed across Ontario. Considering the serious depth of trust and

credibility with your Minister and your government, I want to know, Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of trust and collaboration, why hasn't the Minister included members from this side of the House on the provincewide consultation sphere?

>> Minister Hunter: Speaker, you know, the member opposite is suggesting something that's simply not the case. Just last week I was in Markdale and you were there. So, you know, there's -- there's no -- there's nothing that -- to preclude you from coming. These engagements, Mr. Speaker, are really designed so that we can ensure we're providing the best education possible, Mr. Speaker. I've also made it very clear to our school boards, to municipalities that we're looking for creative and innovative solutions, Mr. Speaker. We want boards to work together. There are really great examples of that. If you look at Terrence Bay, Mr. Speaker, the English and the French Catholic school boards are working together to share an elementary school. This is allowing access to libraries, to gyms, to play spaces, Mr. Speaker, to technology labs, ensuring that students have -- The best range every programs possible and that's what these engagements are about. How do we provide the best education for students in Ontario?

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rates

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Premier. Last year the Minister of energy denied that there was a crisis with soaring hydro bills. Then the government ignored the NDP's demands for moratorium on disconnections of hydro through the winter. Only when a crisis had pushed her government into a political corner did the Premier act. Well, a new crisis is upon us. Starting May 1st, Ontario families will start losing their hydro on May 1st?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and, you know, talk about what Hydro One is doing, Mr. Speaker. Hydro One, which has millions of customers in this province, are extending their winter moratorium until the end of May, Mr. Speaker. That is great news, Mr. Speaker. It just shows that Hydro One is working closely with their customers who have fallen behind on their bills, Mr. Speaker. The extra time will allow customers to take advantage of some of the early savings from Ontario's fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, in which all families, small businesses and farms in this province will get a 25%, up to, Mr. Speaker, on average a 25% reduction. And for those families, Mr. Speaker, that in rural or in their northern parts of our province, Mr. Speaker. That rate will be between 40 and 50%. They will see significant savings, Mr. Speaker, unlike nothing in their plan, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Tabuns: I guess the rest don't really count. They really aren't a factor anymore. Speaker, again to the Premier. If a family heats with natural gas, they have access to up to \$1,000 in emergency relief to help pay their hydro and gas bill if they can't meet their payments. But many rural families don't have access to natural gas, and they must heat with hydro. Not only is hydro more expensive. The government only offers these struggling families \$600 in emergency relief, not \$1,000. Why does the Premier think it's fair that rural Ontario families paying some of the highest hydro rates in Canada don't have access to relief the way everyone else does?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, when it comes to the west, the east, the north and the south, this government is acting, Mr. Speaker. I don't know where that member is coming from with the west. But also, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to rural, when it comes to remote and when it comes to northern, Mr. Speaker, I just said in the last supplementary and I know he hasn't been listening to the last month and a half in terms of what our plan is doing and I know he probably didn't pay attention during the technical briefing but let me remind him, that's 40 to 50% off through rural and remote families, Mr. Speaker. And on top of that, and on -- on top of that, Mr. Speaker, if these families qualify for the Ontario electricity support program, they can get an additional 50% off of their bills as well, Mr. Speaker. So we're making sure that those in the rural and remote parts of our province are seeing significant relief on their energy bills, Mr. Speaker. We have a plan. It's your working, Mr. Speaker, by example with the O.E.B.. Too bad they don't have a plan that fathoms to work

MPP Martins to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of energy about a concern that my constituents have raised under Davenport. Last week the Ontario energy board made an announcement regarding new electricity rates to be effective on May 1st. As the independent regulator of Ontario's energy sector, the O.E.B. Quasi-judicial board governs the sector. It sets electricity rates twice a year so Ontarians know what to expect with their bills. As members of this House know well, our government has recognized Ontarians want relief on electricity costs and we have acted. Our plan is to lower electricity bills by an average of 25% by this summer. I understand that the O.E.B. -- My question is for the Minister of energy about a concern that my constituents have raised under Davenport. Last week the Ontario energy board made an announcement regarding new electricity rates to be effective on May 1st. As the independent regulator of Ontario's energy sector, the O.E.B. Quasi-judicial board governs the sector. It sets electricity rates twice a year so Ontarians know what to expect with their bills. As members of this House know well, our government has recognized Ontarians want relief on electricity costs and we have acted. Our plan is to lower electricity bills by an average of 25% by this summer. I understand that the O.E.B. --

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also want to thank the member for that important question. I was pleased, Mr. Speaker, with the o.e.b.'s decision to begin lowering rates on May 1st, Mr. Speaker, and anticipation of our government's fair hydro plan. This is the next of several steps which Ontarians will see as we work towards bills being reduced by 25% beginning this summer, Mr. Speaker, with rates held to inflation for the next four years. The o.e.b.'s decision means bills will be reduced by 17% beginning May 1st. That's even earlier than expected, Mr. Speaker. The rest of our plan is intended to come into effect by this summer in order to achieve the rest of the promised savings, Mr. Speaker. The O.E.B. Would require to reduce rates again this summer when final legislation is passed to ensure Ontarians -- See the full benefit of our plan, Mr. Speaker, as soon as possible.

>> MPP Martins: Thank you to the Minister for that response and for his hard work on this file, on a file that is so important to my constituents. Our government heard from Ontarians who were struggling with the cost of electricity and that's why we introduced the fair hydro plan. It's also why this winter we gave the O.E.B. The power to ban power disconnections during the winter months. Several utilities actually already have this type of policy including Hydro One. In fact they had implemented a ban on winter disconnections and introduced add winter relief power to restore power to disconnected customers as part of a broader effort to be a more customer-focused company. I understand that yesterday Hydro One made an announcement where they extended their winter moratorium to provide even more support to customers. Would the Minister share with this House the details of that announcement and how it is providing further relief -- To Ontario rate payers.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Speaker, again thank you to the member for the question. Yesterday, as the member mentioned, Hydro One announced they are extending their winter moratorium until the end of May. So Hydro One will be working closely with customers who have fallen behind on their bills, Mr. Speaker, and this extra time will allow customers to take advantage of some of the early savings from our fair hydro plan while they work with the company to make sure that they get back on the right track, Mr. Speaker. I was also pleased to see Hydro One take this step which provides just more evidence of their new customer focus at this company. And as part of yesterday's announcement, Mr. Speaker, Hydro One is also eliminating requirements for security deposits from residential customers as well as reducing deposit requirements for businesses, Mr. Speaker. This removes a substantial burden for many customers. And will put money back in the hands of Ontarians. These actions from Hydro One work together with our government's fair hydro plan, fair relief for everyone in this province.

MPP MacLeod to Minister Hoskins Re: Opioid Crisis

>> MPP Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of health. Yesterday I once again approached the Minister to join me in Ottawa with parents and teens who are right now struggling with potent and potentially fatal opioids. In my city we are at a crisis level. Earlier today I spoke by email with our city's chief medical officer of health, Isra Levy, who agrees that this is a crisis. Last week there were 15 recorded overdoses in a 72-hour time frame. Since last Tuesday there have been a total of 28 recorded overdoses all told, 13 over the weekend. These drugs are like nothing we have ever seen on our streets. The first pill can be fatal. The person taking it may only have taken the pill once. I've written and spoken to the Minister and this government many times and we need his attention on this crisis. Will the Minister join me in Ottawa and meet the faces of this crisis?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And as always I appreciate the advocacy of the member opposite on this important issue. It is -- I describe it as a crisis. It's a national crisis. It's got obviously very serious provincial consequences including in Ottawa. And I was very distraught when I learned of the increase in overdoses as a result likely of an increased presence of fentanyl on the streets in Ottawa. I think the member knows that this is a multifaceted approach that we have to take to this. We are working very closely with the mayor of Ottawa, with the local municipalities. We will shortly be having a meeting of all municipal leaders that I will chair, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has asserted that that meeting will take place, and it will allow us I think to work even more closely with local jurisdictions. It is important that Ontarians -- Are able to understand we, in that multifaceted approach that's required, we unveiled the most comprehensive opioid strategy that this country currently has.

>> MPP MacLeod: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Minister. Each week when I go home I meet with Steve Cody who lost his son to an overdose and SHAWN Leery whose daughter is struggling with addiction. Both of them are prominent businessmen who have co-founded with the parents. They have become grassroots advocates and they spend their spare moments meeting with hundreds of Ottawa parents and their children who have taken these counterfeit pills laced with fentanyl, some of whom have lost their own children. We have reached a crisis level, and with respect what is being done is either not working or it is too slow reaching the people who need the help the most. Will the Minister commit today to ensuring students in our middle and high schools are part of an awareness campaign about the dangers of these new drugs? Will the Minister join me in Ottawa and will he commit to spending resources to alert the parents and their kids to this potentially life threatening drug that are now on the streets of Ottawa -- The time is now to act, Minister.

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I think it's important that the legislature and Ontarians not be left with the impression that this government isn't acting with the highest level of seriousness, including in Ottawa, Mr. Speaker, where we've committed this year 1.5 million to the Dave Smith youth treatment centre to support the construction of a new 30-bed residential treatment facility for youth. And I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that the members, the Liberal members of provincial parliament from Ottawa, particularly the member from Ottawa south, have been working very closely -- With me and this Premier addressing this issue, Mr. Speaker. In Ottawa there are more than -- it's important to mention there are more than 80 pharmacies in Ottawa alone that are providing naloxone, which is a lifesaving treatment, for those who experience an overdose. 80 pharmacies that are being accessed, getting naloxone and -- Free of charge through their pharmacists, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Gelinas to Minister Hunter Re: Rural Education Funding

>> MPP France Gelinas: The Premier, school funding formula discriminates against small northern and rural schools. What does that mean for our kids? In Nickel Belt 4 years old children will be on the bus for 3 hours each day if they want to stay in French immersion. In the winter, kids leave home in the dark and come home from school in the dark. They are tired. Some of them hate school because of it. Their parents will struggle to convince them to stay in school. I know of little kids, Speaker, who are being bullied right now because they have to me and cannot hold it for one and a

half hours in a bus. Premier, do you believe that it is acceptable for northern and rural children to grow up without a community school?

>> Minister Mitzie Hunter: Mr. Speaker, our priority is to ensure that every student in Ontario receives the best education possible, Mr. Speaker. And we recognize the distinct challenges that are facing rural and northern school boards, Mr. Speaker, and that is why we are giving more resources to rural and northern boards than ever before. Mr. Speaker, the school boards are projected overall to receive \$23.8 billion in the 2017/18 school year through the grants for students' needs and this is an increase of \$849 million from last year. Every board across this province will receive an increase in funding. Rural boards are projected to receive \$3.8 billion in the 2017/18 G.S.N., and that's an increase of \$1.3 million or a 3.7 -- Increase, Mr. Speaker, from last year. So we want to ensure that our rural boards have the resources that they need. And that is exactly what we're doing.

>> MPP Gelinas: Thank you, Speaker. Our children suffer because of this Liberal government's school funding formula, and so do our communities. After the school in knotting closed the first thing to go was the ice cream shop. Then the chip stand. Then the one and only store. And now even the one and only gas station is gone. Moved to Levac so that her 6-year-old son could attend French immersion at Levac public school. She's now worried Levac will be the next ghost town if this Liberal government continues with the spree of school closures. Yet when the Premier, when her Minister hears the fears of families in Levac, they ignore them and just keep right on at it with the unfair funding formula. This government still has 300 schools on the chopping block. What do they have to say to the worried families in Levac?

>> Minister Hunter: You know, Mr. Speaker, I want -- it's important that everyone recognizes that the funding formula recognizes the unique needs of our rural and northern boards. And that's why there is \$1,200 per student more to rural and northern schools than to urban schools, Mr. Speaker. I want to make that very clear. And, you know, I have visited schools in northern Ontario, Mr. Speaker. I visited schools in Sioux Lookout. I want to talk about some of the innovative things our school boards are doing on behalf of our students. When you look at the Patricia District School Board, Mr. Speaker, they're opening a new secondary school in partnership with Confederation College, with Menoia Health Centre mental health because of the unique needs in that community, Mr. Speaker, they are working together to design this unique hub to meet the needs of the students who are in that community, Mr. Speaker, so that they have -- They have the support they need, Mr. Speaker. We are supporting the board in that decision as they move forward.

MPP Vernile to Minister Glen Murray Re: Green Investments

>> MPP Daiene Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of the environment and climate change. The green investments that are outlined in our climate change action plan are now starting to roll out, and we are seeing the tangible benefits of these investments. In my old riding of Kitchener Centre, home energy audits are saving many homeowners a lot of money. Just over a year ago, Speaker, Mary Jane Patterson, she heads Green Solutions, a nonprofit group that promotes energy efficiency in K.W. She came to see me to lobby in favour of home energy audits and retrofits. And a few days later we delivered on that in our budget. Speaker, in my community, home energy evaluations have doubled. This clearly shows that homeowners and businesses are actively engaged under our climate action plan. Speaker, Ontarians know that these investments are lowering their carbon footprint and it's lowering their energy costs. Could Minister please explain to the House the long-term value of these investments?

>> Minister Glen Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that you probably won't come to -- as a surprise to many people here that the part of Ontario we know as K.W. Awesome is out ahead of much of the province on this. The reprogram is truly one of the most innovative on education and demonstrating technology. The program and expansion based on that experience and the member's advocacy is going to lead to 1.6 million tonnes of G.H.G. Reductions, one of the largest, Mr. Speaker. And the audit that the Premier -- this was actually the Premier's idea to get these audits out so people could learn and understand the technologies, the savings and the development. We're doing

37,000 of them that will in the end not only reduce G.H.G.S but significantly bring down people's heating and energy bills, Mr. Speaker. So no pun intended for the Premier, this is a win-win-win scenario, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Vernile: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the Minister for his answer and for his leadership on this important initiative. And he has a lot of fans and supporters in Kitchener- Waterloo. It is very encouraging to hear that Ontarians are seeing the benefits of green investments and that they're taking an active role in fighting climate change. Not only is this helping us to achieve our emission reduction targets but it's also helping us to create jobs. Now to date we have produced over 40,000 jobs tied to green energy. And here's another interesting stat, Speaker. According to reports released by environmental defence, blue green Canada and the clean economy alliance, green investments can produce up to 32,900 green jobs in the province. And their research also found an additional 24,000 jobs could be created – From the green cost savings. Speaker, could the Minister please explain why making these investments are important to create jobs?

>> Minister Murray: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure just to talk about economic dimensions. You're quite right. Actually a parallel study done by pembina institute showed that the first -- just the first tranche every investments of \$2.5 billion creates 33,000 high-skilled jobs in Ontario By the time. By the time, Mr. Speaker, we have retrofitted all of the buildings in Ontario, which this program will do over the next couple of decades, it will probably be the single biggest job creation program in Ontario. Mr. Speaker, while we have the wind on our side, we are very worried about a Brownout from the other side, Mr. Speaker. A complete Brownout of all of the funding programs when -- because the member opposite would tear up the cap-and-trade system. These jobs -- Saving was never appear, Mr. Speaker. We know Ontarians want to win. They don't want a Brownout, Mr. Speaker. Thanks --

MPP N. Miller to Minister Hoskins Re: Northern and Rural Healthcare

>> MPP Norm Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. People in northwestern Ontario have a life expectancy 2.9 years shorter than the rest of the province. Speaker, report from health quality Ontario has confirmed the reality facing northern Ontarians. They're more likely to have cardiovascular disease, have limited access to healthy foods, be obese and they are more likely to commit suicide. Northerners navigate a health care system with reduced access to testing and to doctors. The ministry's own rural and northern health care report identified these issues in 2011. Speaker, when is the Minister going to address the regional disparities in our health care system?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue and I appreciated the report that came out from health quality Ontario that pointed to the work that needs to be done to address the -- as they themselves indicated, a lot of this has to do with the social determinants of health but to address the fact that individuals in the north do have challenges in the north because of reside interesting because of the nature of the situation that are different than in the south. But, Mr. Speaker, we are making enormous investments in the north as we are throughout the province. Since coming into office we've increased the funding in northern hospitals by 55%. We just announced recently in Thunder Bay a new cardiac centre which will provide both vascular surgery as well as cardiac surgery. I want to thank both members from Thunder Bay, both MPP S who worked hard to be able to make that a reality and I'm happy to speak more in the supplementary.

>> MPP N. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the Minister, Speaker, research in the Canadian medical association journal about cardiovascular events shows that the three healthiest lhins are in the G.T.A. On the other hand, three of the four least healthy lhins are the northeast, northwest and north systemco Muskoka. It is deplorable that today where you live in Ontario is a determinant of your health and your life expectancy. Speaker, I'm going to the northwestern Ontario municipal association conference later this week. What does the Minister have to say to the people in the northwest lhins?

>> Minister Hoskins: That we continue to invest in the north, Mr. Speaker. The first nurse practitioner-led clinic was in the north in Sudbury. We have 42 family health teams in the north as well. I know, if the member opposite read the c.m.h.a. report, I think it was likely the one that referenced the health quality Ontario report which was the report we commissioned through an agency of government to actually provide us with that additional valuable information. And they pointed to areas where we could continue to improve and where investments should be made. We've made over \$157 million of investments in additional surg Eries and bringing down wait times in the northern region as well. Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of work to do across the province. I'm very fixed at the north as well because of the unique challenges faced there and what we can do more to improve the health situation of our northern residents, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Bisson to Minister McGarry Re: Softwood Lumber Trade

>> MPP Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, we've all heard the latest attack on Ontario's forest industry. The trump administration is slapping a 20% tariff on softwood lumber, claiming the Ontario industry is subsidized. Premier, we all know that's not the case. In fact in 2015, decision by the trade tribunals found that Ontario does not, I repeat does not subsidize its forest industry. So what the US Couldn't get done through the front he back door and would appear his strategy is meant to tie up our forest producers and the likely costly fight, which I'm confident we will win in the end. However this time many producers may not be able to withstand this latest frivolous attack by Mr. Trump. So, Premier, what are you prepared to do in order to help our producers survive as we fight back this frivolous attempt to

>> Minister Kathryn McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker. I thank the member for the question that's certainly on everybody's mind today about our -- our softwood sector. Certainly I want to reassure everybody in the House that oario is standing shoulder to shoulder with our forestry industry in order to protect their workers at this time of economic uncertainty. Certainly we cannot let the unpredictability of our southern neighbour affect the jobs and well-being of Ontario. So I want to reassure everybody that Ontario has been looking to things that we can do in the meantime. We've been aware that this has been coming for some time. We also know that the 20% tariff on our lumber are unfair. And we are going to be stepping forward with a number of things. We have been working very closely with our federal --So I want to reassure everybody that Ontario has been looking to things that we can do in the meantime. We've been aware that this has been coming for some time. We also know that the 20% tariff on our lumber are unfair. And we are going to be stepping forward with a number of things. We have been working very closely with our federal --We have called on our federal government to provide a loan guarantee program to help in the meantime.

>> MPP Bisson: Well, according -- listen. You've come pretty late to the game. We've known that this has been coming for some time. You just now start to react. We' already heard from B.C. We've already heard from Québec and your responses is to say, well, we're going to depend on Ottawa to be able to fix this problem for us. This industry is Ontario is unique. Well, according -- listen. You've come pretty late to the game. We've known that this has been coming for some time. You just now start to react. We' already heard from B.C. We've already heard from Québec and your responses is to say, well, we're going to depend on Ottawa to be able to fix this problem for us. This industry is Ontario is unique.

>> Minister McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker. Again I want to say that this is a federal issue and it's up to our federal partnership to negotiate this. In saying that, we have come forward on new initiatives. For instance we're providing \$10 million in new funding to the forestry industry to reimburse costs for road construction and maintenance on public access -- ses roads. We have announced just today that we have \$74 million from this government to assist with the forest access road program. That helps to have public access and that connecting some of our northern remote communities. We hired a chief negotiator, the former federal trade Minister Jim Peterson, who is on board to help to negotiate the sale. We've been meeting with our industry partners. They have asked for these things. We are going to be continuing to work with our federal partnerships to ask

for that federal loan guarantee. Thank you.

MPP Dong to Minister McMahon Re: Arts Sector Funding

>> MPP Han Dong: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of tourism, culture and sport. Speaker, our government is the proud supporter of Ontario's culture sector. Because of the great work being done by our artists, musicians, writers, teachers, curator, culture is one of Ontario's fastest growing sectors. In my riding of Trinity Spadina and across Ontario, our government's support for culture continues to bring people together Ontario's identity and great job and grow our economy. I'm pleased to ask our Minister about an announcement she recently made at Ryerson. This year's spring and summer recipients of Ontario's culture attraction fund which is a fund designed to increase culture and tourism, supports events that foster economic growth and contribute to job creation. Speaker, through you to the Minister, can she tell the member of this House -- More about the cap fund and how it will impact arts organizations across our province?

>> Minister Eleanor McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from Trinity-Spadina for his question and for his steadfast support of the vi Brant arts and culture organization in his riding. As the member mentioned I was at Ryerson image centre last month to announce support for festivals such as scotiabank which will kick off on Friday. There I announced this spring and summer season, 45 arts and culture organizations will receive over \$2.8 million in support through the Ontario cultural attractions fund. These include and they're across our province, francofed in Ottawa taste of Greece in London, the eight days stars and thunder international fireworks and music festival in Timmins. This year's recipients include events that will commemorate Ontario's 150th anniversary and, Speaker, our support helps communities and organizations to -- Attract business through tourism and economic development. I look forward to adding more in the supplementary.

>> MPP Dong: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank Minister for her response. Many festivals and events like the hot docs film festival in my riding, which begins tomorrow night -- -- Is the world's largest documentary film festival. They are having a positive impact on tourism and culture scene in Ontario. Our government continues to work closely with our partners to build a stronger culture sector. Last year the Minister of tourism, culture and sport introduced Ontario's first culture strategy, the four goals of the cull trur strategy are promoting culture engagement, inclusion, strengthening culture in communities and viewing the creative economy and promoting the value of art throughout the government. The culture strategy envisions an Ontario where every person has an opportunity to creative expression and culture participation and where the diversity of our stories and community is reflected, valued and celebrated Speaker, through you to the Minister. Can she tell this House the economic impact and how our support for culture impacts Ontario?

>> Minister McMahon Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the member for his question. You know, cycle, we're very proud of the hot docs festival. It's something as a government we're enormously proud of. They have a global reach and a global impact and we're absolutely really thrilled to see them since they're doing amazing work. We understand as a government that arts and artists play an important role not just in bringing joy to our lives, Speaker ,ch, but they contribute very much to our economy as well and it's why we're proud of our education system because, when I hear from organizations from around the world, why they're investing in Ontario, they speak loudly and clearly about the quality of our graduates in our education and our school system, Speaker. But culture is not really just about joy, which is also important. It's about jobs, Speaker. To the tune of \$25 billion to our economy and over 208,000 jobs. Speaker, critically important to vitality of not just our arts and culture sector but to our economy and we enormously love our arts and our artists for the world and global recognition that they're getting. Thank you.

MPP Martow to Minister Coteau Re: Foster Care Reform

>> MPP Gila Martow: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And my question is to the Minister of child and youth services. A report came out yesterday that details horrific outcomes for youth who exit the foster care system. Typically their lives involve low academic achievement, unemployment, underemployment and poverty, homelessness and housing insecurity, criminal justice system involvement, early parenthood, poor physical and mental health and of course loneliness. If the child welfare system was a parent, it may well have its kids taken away. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister tell us what he is doing to ensure that Ontario's most vulnerable youth have the same future as that which we plan for our own children?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member for the question. As member knows, over last several months, we've been working on a new act here in the province of Ontario to better protect children, youth and families here in our province. In fact, Mr. Speaker, recently a report came out called one vision one voice, which looks at black youth here in the province of Ontario, specifically in Toronto where there's a huge overrepresentation of black youth in our child protection system. And, Mr. Speaker, she goes even beyond that. Within that report there was a call to Collect good data. The anti-racism directorate is working to look at how race -- when we talk about black and indigenous youth who are overly represented. In fact, Mr. Speaker, in Toronto it's over 50% if you combine the indigenous and black together. So we're working with advocates within the child care system to look for ways to better position young people for success here in Toronto.

>> MPP Martow: Thank you. The Minister is legally the parent of approximately 1,000 youth who age out of the system every year in Ontario. Their life outcomes are horrific and compromise the talented people who could be thriving in our society. Mr. Speaker, we must have higher expectations for the child welfare system that parents these youth in their most formative years. A lot of attention to accountability but there's a big miss. What's missing are checks and balances to determine if our system is an effective parent. Presently no one is systemically studying the outcomes for youth aging out of Ontario. So, Speaker, the Minister does not measure youth outcomes after care in any way, how does he know anything he has been implementing is actually working?

>> MPP Coteau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I don't want to politicize this issue, but when we talk about a big miss here in the legislature, not one -- once has anyone from that side of the House asked me about the overrepresentation of indigenous or black children in the child welfare system. So I think that's the business here in the province of Ontario and especially in this legislature. Mr. Speaker, we set up the anti-racism directorate. We're looking at reform of the act within child welfare. We are looking for ways to better position young people for success, and in fact, Mr. Speaker, those young people, you know, we refer to them sometimes as at-risk youth. They're not employed in education or some type of training. There's 17,000 of them. We have a strategy here in the province of Ontario to look for ways to provide more opportunities and the very fact that this is a government, for the first time -- 13-year-olds and how to bring them into protection. I think this government should be very proud of the work that it's doing.