

CO Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Wednesday, February 21, 2018

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Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Wednesday, February 21, 2018.

MCI did not receive any questions of interest.

MSA: NDP MPP Fife asked a question to Min. Hoskins about the ongoing effort for spousal reunification of a couple, Patricia and Don Deighton. When MPP Fife asked about this same couple in December 2017, one of the couple lived in a retirement home and the other in a long-term care facility. Min. Hoskins' response included reference to legislation that created a separate category for spousal reunification.

Official opposition questions were on small business, auto-regulations/fees and long-term care beds. NDP Questions today included: hospital overcrowding, Carillion winter-road clearing and the closure of Cardiac Fitness Institute

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

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From: Selvasadan, Assumpta (CAB)
Sent: Wednesday, February 21, 2018 12:00 PM
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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Wednesday, February 21, 2018

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Fedeli to Premier (Del Duca) Re: Small Business Costs

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you. Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. The finance committee got to hear from a lot of job creators and businesses, and their message was clear. Ontario can and must do better to create jobs and support businesses. In fact, the Ontario chamber of commerce said that, quote, 62% of our members indicate they are not confident about the economic outlook of the province. Why, Speaker? They cited, quote, business costs. The costs of doing business continues to rise under this Liberal government. So I ask this. With 62% of the chamber members are worried, why doesn't the government answer this call for action?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me thank the member from Windsor-Tecumseh for letting us know about Mr. Mccurdy and pass on our condolences. Mr. Speaker, I have a great respect for the Ontario chamber of commerce and we have worked very closely with them over the years, Mr. Speaker. And in fact, in that very report that the leader of the opposition is quoting from, Mr. Speaker, they also report that the business prosperity is at a 20-year high. So, Mr. Speaker, there are some very, very good things happening in Ontario. Over the past year cities and provinces -- cities and towns across the province have added thousands of new jobs, Mr. Speaker. A total of 800,000 new jobs since the recession, Mr. Speaker. Our unemployment is at a 17-year low, Mr. Speaker, and just to give some examples. 27,000 new jobs, Mr. Speaker. Barrie added 12,000. Kingston added 4,400.

>> Vic Fedeli: Back to the Premier, Speaker. It's not just the chamber that has no confidence. The Canadian federation of independent business shared their concerns as well. They said a business barometer index that shows a growing economy with optimistic small business would be at a 70 or higher. Sadly this index in Ontario is at 57.5. Speaker, that's not healthy. The Canadian federation of independent business describes the mood in the small business community right now, quote, as one of frustration, even despair. Speaker, frustration and despair. How can our entrepreneurs grow their businesses and create much-needed jobs when the Premier has created a climate of frustration and despair?

>>Minister Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. In this House yesterday the leader of the opposition talked about cherry picking, Speaker. I have to think from my perspective listening to the presentation he's put forward this morning, he is in fact guilty of what he's accusing others of doing, Speaker. As the Premier has said repeatedly over the last number of years, since the very depth of the recession, Ontario's trade -- created more than 800,000 jobs, Speaker. Let's take into account of those 800,000 nearly 91% of those jobs were full time, Speaker. 70% of those jobs that have been created are in above-average wage industries, Speaker. 73% of those jobs approximately are in the private sector, Speaker. This government has a very clear plan and, Speaker, a very clear record of success. 17-year low for unemployment, Speaker. 33 months below the national average in terms of unemployment. We're investing -- Speaker, we're investing in infrastructure. We're investing in both employees and employers, Speaker, because our government is on the side of all Ontarians. Thanks very much.

>>Vic Fedeli: Back to the Premier. Well, it's not just the chamber much it's not just the Canadian federation of independent business. Just listen to what the retail council had to say, quote -- faced with these challenging circumstances and an uncertain economy, the government must focus on improving the conditions for economic development. They concluded, quote -- now is the time to establish a positive environment that facilitates job creation. But the Liberals seem opposed to that idea. They don't want to create jobs. They don't support hard working families. Every single thing they bring forward, Speaker, is actually harming job creators. So, Mr. Speaker, why is this government content with losing jobs and seeing businesses closing?

>>Minister Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I didn't have a chance to say in my first answer for example here are the other initiatives that we've undertaken as a government to help support the economy and job creation. We've eliminated the capital tax, Speaker, which corporations paid whether or not they had a profit. That's providing \$2.3 billion of tax relieve each year. We reduced the small business corporate income tax rate, Speaker, from 4.5% down to 3.5%. And we know, we know that here in this province our corporate income tax rate is competitive and on average below that of Canada's and G-7 countries. All of this, Speaker, all of this and the investments in our people and the investments in our critical infrastructure are fundamentally the reason that Ontario's economy continues to lead Canada's, that we have the unemployment rate that is low, Speaker, lower than it's been at any point in the last 17 years and list goes on of all the very positive indicators of how strong our economy is, Speaker. But fundamentally, what the leader of the Conservative party does not want to admit is that he does not believe in investing in the people of this province, Speaker. While that party is focused on fighting inward, our government is focused on fighting for the people of this province.

MPP Fedeli (Clark) to Premier (Sousa) (Del Duca) Re: Auto Regulations and Fees

>> Vic Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. The trillium auto dealers association represents over 1,000 new car dealers across Ontario. They employ 77,000 people. They generate \$37 billion in economic activity. But they're concerned about the high costs of doing business in Ontario. Here's what they had to say about drive clean. Quote -- drive clean had its time and place. The point of drive clean is not there anymore. We think the time has come to scrap that. Speaker, that sounds like a good plan. So I asked, will the Liberals commit to scrapping the outdated drive clean program?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, and I know the Minister's going to want to comment on this in supplementary. But this question, combined with the previous question, Mr. Speaker, really is about a party that "A" is not interested in the environment, is not interested in fighting climate change, Mr. Speaker, and is not interested as the Minister of economic development and growth said is not interested in

investing in the people of this province because, Mr. Speaker, we are supportive of business. We have seen hundreds of thousands of jobs created in this province by the private sector, Mr. Speaker. But what the leader of the opposition doesn't want to do is admit that, with all the economic growth that's happening in this province, with all of the prosperity that's being created, there are still people who are being left behind. And some of those people are working in the businesses that he's talking about and we're raising the minimum wage, Mr. Speaker. We're putting supports in place for people. Free tuition, ohip plus, minimum wage. He doesn't want to acknowledge that's needed by people in this province. We're fighting for those people who –

>> Vic Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier. The member from Bruce- Grey- Owen Sound reminds us that wiarton Willie provided proof that winter isn't quite over. Winter tires are a must-have for safety on our roads. But not everyone can afford them. Trillium auto dealers said a winter tire tax credit, quote, will basically cut the costs in half of purchasing your standard size tires, and that makes them more affordable and that makes our roads safer. We know the budget is around the corner, Speaker. I ask will the Liberals support a winter tire tax credit through the upcoming budget?

>>Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, will the opposition support economic stimulus that this party's been putting forth for the last five years? Will the opposition --Mr. Speaker, we introduced winter tires as a means to help reduce auto insurance rates a long time ago. The members opposite are just catching up. The question does become this though. In their people's guarantee, which they have now broken three times, they have about a \$16 billion hole. Some say it's maybe 12. Some say it's 24 billion. All we know is they can't afford the things they say they're going to do. That providing more credit is a great opportunity for us to stimulate growth. But the question then becomes they're going to get rid of carbon tax or a ka and trade opportunity \$2 billion. Mr. Speaker, are they going to cut those supports for businesses that they so proudly stand for? We need to know.

>>MPP Steve Clark: Thanks, Speaker. Back to the Premier. The trillium auto dealers association is also calling on this government to support my bill 3, the cutting red tape for motor vehicle dealer's act 2016. It's a vital tool that cuts red tape for both dealers and consumers. Bill 3 would allow a car buyer to register the vehicle and provide the permit, licence plate and validation sticker all at the dealership. Frank Notte from the trillium auto dealers said, quote, if you're like me you despise waiting in line and wasting your time knowing whatever it is you want to accomplish can be done online and in minutes. It seems like common sense to me, the auto dealers and the members of this House, who unanimously supported my bill. Mr. Speaker, will the government cut red tape, stop wasting time and pass bill 3?

>>Minister Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I thank the member for his question. I also thank frank Notte and the team from the trillium area dealers association. I've had the chance to know this organization over the last number of years, and very appreciative of their work. A couple of things to keep in mind, Speaker. There has been no government in Ontario history that has been more supportive of Ontario's auto sector. All aspects, manufacturing, retail, all aspects. Mr. Speaker, the parts economy in Windsor and Brampton and right across the province of Ontario, Speaker. Our government has literally poured billions of dollars strategically into this industry when members of the Conservative party were opposed to us supporting this crucial industry, Speaker, that accounts for hundreds of thousands of jobs supporting hundreds of thousands of families in Ontario. Speaker, specifically on the issue of reducing red tape, again whether we're talking about all of the work that we've undertaken in this regard, whether we're talking about the 2017 burden reduction report showing that we've surpassed our target, the target to reduce unnecessary burdens by 50%, we surpassed that target two years ahead of schedule and there's a long list, Speaker, of initiatives that we've undertaken in this regard. The member asked specifically about his private member's bill. Our government will be happy to continue to work very closely with the association and with all --Who want us to work hard to make sure that we continue to support-

MPP Gelinias to Premier (Hoskins) Re: Hospital Overcrowding

>>MPP France Gelinias: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. On February 4th, my neighbour and good friend of mine, Leo, was admitted at health sciences north with a back injury. He spent 13 days being treated in a bathroom. I'm sending over a picture of the room so that the Premier can have a look as to how overcrowded the conditions are in our hospital. Will the Premier help people like

Leo, stop ignoring the hospital overcrowding crisis and make a real plan to undo the damage her government has done to our health care system?

>> Premier Wynne: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. And I know that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care will want to speak in the supplementary. Mr. Speaker, we are ignoring nothing about the health care system. The health care system in Ontario is incredibly important to every single Ontarian, because at some point in all of our lives we have to rely on the health care system. And of course, Mr. Speaker, it's unacceptable if there is a patient who is relegated to an inappropriate space. But, Mr. Speaker, that's why we've opened 1,200 new beds. That's why that number of beds is the equivalent of six community hospitals, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that there's more to be done with 500 million more dollars in our budget, Mr. Speaker, directly for hospitals. We recognize that working with hospitals and working with the communities, Mr. Speaker, because so many people want to be in the community. We want to make sure that there is care and appropriate care for them in the community, but we recognize that hospitals need more support. That's why we've opened up beds. And we will continue to work with hospitals across the province.

>>MPP Gelinas: Thank you, Speaker. Leo spent 13 days in a small, cramped bathroom. You can have a look at it right now, with a toilet directly behind his head. When I visited him, I couldn't believe where he was forced to receive his hospital care. Leo is in his early 70s, dealing with his back pain was stressful enough. For him to be forced into a room where I wasn't even sure if things were sanitary, that's a lot for him to have to deal with. Why is the Premier ignoring the severity of the overcrowding crisis?

>>Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, last fall we opened up the equivalent of six new community hospitals across this province. 1,200 new acute care beds. And that investment of approximately \$100 million, we've renewed that and more announcing for the coming year we are investing just under \$200 million to keep those beds open in most cases but also to work closely with the Ontario hospital association, to work closely with individual hospitals to meet their capacity challenges. We added 16 new beds to health sciences north. We increased their budget last year by \$6 million. I'm not saying that they're not facing capacity challenges partly because of the season that we're in and a very bad flu season that I think all the health care professionals acknowledge across this province but we're making the necessary investments. To make sure that we're providing the support to hospitals that they can continue, and they are,

>>MPP Gelinas: Thank you, Speaker. While Leo was receiving care in the bathroom, the other patients on the 4th floor were unable to use it. So that means that an entire unit of patients had no access to a shower, no access to a bathtub for the full 13 days that Leo was admitted in there. How can the Premier hear stories like Leo and still think that everything is fine in our hospitals?

>>Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we continue to work with health sciences north. In fact I was up there just several weeks ago for an announcement that I would say was made possible by the strongest advocate imaginable. Our member of caucus, the member from Sudbury, Mr. Speaker, that. Resulted in an announcement for an entirely new facility called neo kids, which is going to be a pediatric centre bringing together all of the resources that are necessary for taking care of children, of babies, of youth under one centre neokids. We announced together the member from Sudbury and myself a planogram for I think it was half a million dollars. We're committed to building that facility, and I want to commend the member from Sudbury for her strong advocacy on that issue, on the pet scan NER that Sudbury -- health sciences north. Is going to be having very, very shortly, Mr. Speaker, and on all of the health care advocacy that member continues to deliver.

MPP Gelinas to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Overcrowding

>>MPP France Gelinas: My question -- my second question is also for the Premier. New internal information showing that the Scarborough hospital reached the alarming unsafe occupancy rate of 147% in January this year. This is after the Premier said that temporary beds would mean that the hospital could deal with the flu surge. Clearly temporary beds have not solved the problem. When will this Liberal government put in place solutions that undoes the decades of damage done to our hospitals with successive Conservative and Liberal governments?

>>Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, she gave you the opening, Mr. Speaker. I've got to walk right into it. She's about decades of neglect. She neglected to mention the neglect from her party the NDP. They closed almost 10,000 hospital beds when they were in power, Mr. Speaker. I know the Conservatives beat that by about 400 beds that they closed their own 10,000. But the NDP Party, in the short period of time that they were in tenure, closed 9,600 hospital beds. 13% of the mental health beds. 24% I believe of the acute care beds across the province. They fired nurses. They cut the health care budget, and I can only imagine if they were ever in power, with the kind of commitments that they've made. In fact the member from Kitchener making the commitment to cut \$600 million from the health and education budget.

>>MPP Gelinias: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier. Chronic hospital overcrowding is hurting Ontario families. Olive, an elderly woman from Nickel Belt, was forced to spend weeks in a waiting room with no bathroom, no call button that she could press if she needed help. This is becoming the norm in way too many hospitals. When Ontario needs -- when Ontarians need hospital care. When will the Liberal government take this crisis seriously?

>>Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I should correct my record. I mentioned the member from Kitchener. I meant the member from Kitchener-Waterloo that was the individual that was committed to become, if elected, the Minister of cuts, cutting \$600 million from health care and education, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as a result of tremendous efforts by the community in Scarborough and in Durham, last year we had a report that came out that gave us a pathway to building our acute care services in that entire -- both regions. We gave a planning grant for both Scarborough and Durham so that they can plan for new hospitals. In fact the Premier just last week, I believe, was at a centenary of Scarborough announcing their brand-new emergency department, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Gelinias: Thank you, Speaker. The Liberals are offering temporary funding after years of freezes and budget cuts. Sure the Conservatives closed 2 hospitals last time they were in government, but Ontario families need us to invest now. They need us to invest in quality care that they deserve. When will this government stop offering band-aid solutions, temporary funding and come up with a real plan to undo the damage that they've done to our hospital system and our health care system as a whole.

>>Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we have a strong record of more than a decade of investments in health care. In fact we added \$500 million in the most recent budget, \$500 million in the budget prior to that, specifically to hospitals, Mr. Speaker, opened 1,200 acute care beds across this province last fall. Committed to even increase that investment in the coming fiscal year. Brand-new emergency department at centenary hospital, Mr. Speaker. Bridle town hub with ch is with Scarborough hospital as well. Moving services and facilities including dialysis closer to communities, closer to people in their neighbourhoods, and I want to thank the MPP For Scarborough- Agincourt for her unrelenting advocacy to make that project a reality. So many investments in Scarborough, it is becoming dizzying to the Scarborough members that are constantly advocating on behalf of that community.

MPP Scott (Yurek) to Premier (Jaczek) Re: Human Trafficking

>>MPP Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. I spent the past several years travelling across the province hearing from survivors of human sex trafficking, police officers and frontline service providers. It's the same story everywhere I go. People are asking me what's the funding this government promised? We have well-established organizations like Farm Town Canada, who are with us today, that have a proven track record helping survivors. So much so that the survivors have worked with local police, resulting in charges being laid against traffickers. But has the government helped them? No. This government should note that they need to help organizations like Farm Town Canada, not keeping them in the dark. Instead this government has hidden behind their bureaucratic fire wall and is failing victims of human sex trafficking. So my question to the Premier is why does Farm Town Canada have to travel all the way from Belmont, southwestern Ontario, to be heard by this government?

>> Premier Wynne: So, Mr. Speaker, I actually want to thank the member opposite and I want to thank the folks who are here today for the work that they have done of course to all of us human trafficking is unacceptable. It's a travesty that needs to be addressed, Mr. Speaker, which is exactly why we are making the investments that we're making. \$72 million to work towards preventing this crime, Mr. Speaker. In fact, there are 44 agency houses that are being funded, Mr. Speaker, to support survivors, to make sure that they

have the resources that they need and we are working with those agencies, Mr. Speaker. There was a process and I know that there were some agencies, Mr. Speaker, that were funded. There are others that were not, but that is the nature of the process, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to work with agencies, and I have no doubt that there is more that we are going to have to do and again I thank all of the folks who have been on the front line and who have brought to us and this legislature some of the solutions that we are now enacting, Mr. Speaker .

>>MPP Jeff Yurek: Back to the Premier. The crime of human sex trafficking continues to rise at an alarming rate in Ontario. This government has held many announcements boasting new investments and fight sex trafficking but the reality on the ground is much different. Many organizations have yet to see a penny of the promised funding and cannot access the resources they need. Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Elgin Middlesex London, not a single agency in Elgin county, not a single agency in Middlesex has received a dime to fight human sex trafficking. Their process is flawed. Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier, when, when will the organization, Elgin county and Middlesex county, receive some support from this government in funding to help fight human sex trafficking?

>>Minister Helena Jaczek: Premier said we do take this heinous crime extremely seriously. And this is why in fact our antihuman trafficking office, which is within my ministry, have been working so hard in fact to invite application from organizations across the province to apply for the funding that we have been announcing. And in particular, among the 44 organizations recently that did receive funding, nine of them are delivering services in southwestern Ontario, an area where the farm town is in fact located. Just as an aside, Mr. Speaker, farm town did not actually submit a proposal during our call for application. So some of the organizations receiving funding that will be of interest to the member opposite of course are the London women abuse centre. Providing crisis response, outreach and for exploited women and youth. Addiction services at Thames valley will provide supports and programs for women trafficked in the sex trade.

MPP Gates to Minister McGarry Re: Carillion Closure

>>MPP Wayne Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the Premier. Last month the Minister of transportation said that a new arrangement exists between krillion Canada to keep the roads plowed this winter following the collapse of its parent company, but she refuses to close this arrangement. Local media in the north earlier this month reported how the secrecy is putting safety of highways at risk. Karelian are quoted as saying our patrol yards doesn't have enough trucks to keep the highways safe. Majority are broken down and we can't get any repairs done. Since no one will work on them because they're afraid they're not going to get paid. Will the Premier provide for the public safety and karelian workers and disclose its new agreement with karelian now?

>>Minister Kathryn McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker. Thank you to the member opposite for the question. My ministry remains fully committed to ensure that our roads are safe for the travelling public during winter weather conditions. I want to be very clear that winter maintenance operations in all contract areas in Ontario have continued without any reduction in the required service levels. Ministry staff are working closely with karelian Canada so that Ontario's roads and highways continue to be maintained and cleared to our high standards. I can confirm that, under this arrangement between the ministry and karelian, we are paying some key suppliers directly for critical tools like road salt and equipment repair and leasing. We're only paying karelian for the services they provide, not paying any of karelian's corporate costs. Closely monitoring all funds paid to karelian which are kept in a separate bank account to verify all employees are being paid.

>>MPP Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Premier. This is no time for secrecy. Karelian workers do not know if they will be paid. The snowplows may not roll if a snowstorm hits. A routine winter day in Ontario can quickly turn into a major crisis on our highways. If winter road maintenance was still in public hands, we wouldn't be in this mess. The ultimate solution is to restore this work to public sector. But for now the Premier at least provide the minimum assurance to the Ontario public and karelian workers and publicly release its new agreement. The public has the right to know. Thank you.

>>Minister McGarry: Thank you for the supplementary. I want to reiterate again that we have an

arrangement in place with karelian that will make sure that our roads are safe right to the end of the winter season. But, Speaker, road safety shouldn't be a partisan issue. I'm afraid to see that both parties opposite have chosen the path of fear mongering. This despite \$ -- this is despite receiving my letter with the additional information about our arrangement with krill lan and my offer to discuss this issue directly with the members who wrote to the government on this topic. This type of fear mongering does not help the situation. All it does is needlessly scare the workers, the suppliers and the travelling public. We are committed to ensure that we have the roads safe and clear for our folks that are travelling the highway. Nothing's more important to me as Minister. Nothing's more important to me as a family. Our number one priority is to make sure that we keep our roads safe right to the end of the winter season.

MPP Baker to Minister McMahon Re: Trade with the US

>>MPP Yvan Baker: Thanks very much, Speaker. My question's for the president of the treasury board. Minister, as you know before I was the MPP For Etobicoke Centre I was management consultant with a company called the Boston consulting group where I advised global companies who operate globally and who sell their goods globally on how to resolve some of their most pressing challenges and so I know how important free and unrestricted trade is to our economy and to the economy of the United States. Now there is no doubt that our economic relationship with the US is mutually beneficial. And while that is the belief of many, we have seen the political landscape in the US Change on this front. We have seen a rise of protectionist policy that threatens to exclude Ontario businesses, restricting growth on both sides of the border. Now an example of that is New York state's buy American act which is scheduled to take effect April 1st. Minister, I believe we have a responsibility to protect Ontarians against policies like this. So what is our government doing. To protect Ontario's businesses and workers from discriminatory and protectionist American trade policy?

>>Minister Eleanor McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the member for his question. Ontarians. That's why we're introducing the act and following through on the commitment -- That our Premier continues to make to safeguard Ontario workers and businesses. Our proposed legislation if passed would allow our government to respond when necessary to any unfair actions taken by the United States. These regulations would be proportional and measured and designed to mirror restrictions made by opposing US Jurisdictionss. We believe in the value of free and fair trade across Canada/u.s. Border, Speaker. This is why we continue to defend Ontario businesses and jobs at every opportunity and I'm pleased to stand in my place today, Speaker, and say this is part of our plan to create fairness and opportunity in this province. I look forward to sharing further details about this important piece of legislation in the supplementary. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

>>MPP Baker: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you, Minister. I'm glad to hear we're taking action to protect businesses and Ontario workers. I was doing research to give members a sense of the scope of the trade. So between 2011 and 2016, New York state awarded more than 47,000 procurement contracts worth about \$193 billion and about 369 million of that has been awarded to Canadian firms. And this includes companies across Ontario, like dominion voting systems in Toronto, nightingale corp in mississauga, high criteria in Richmond hill, orbus partners in Ottawa and speck furniture in Etobicoke. So protectionist policies like the buy American act in New York clearly impact Ontario businesses. They clearly impact our economy. Minister, I believe we need to do everything we can to support trade and to prevent protectionist provisions, but also -- it is also very difficult to predict how. In the US Will evolve and what other steps can be taken by US Government. Are we prepared to respond should further action be taken in the United States?>.Minister McMahon: Speaker. It gives us the tools to respond to unfair policys when and if we need to. We're working hard on diplomatic resolutions and we have and will continue to do that. But while I'm pleased new York state has modified its buy American legislation to be less harmful to Ontario than earlier versions it's not enough. Participating in procurement projects creates jobs and increases value for packs tax pairs. We know when New York awards procurement like speck furniture in Etobicoke is because they represent the best value for money. The same can be said when we award New York based firms with our business. Ontario workers and business against discriminatory one-side procurement merci.

MPP Jones (Harris) to Minister McGarry Re: Highway Construction

>>MPP Sylvia Jones: Thank you. My question is for the Minister of transportation. After spending more than \$14 million and a decade of delay, the government has cancelled the environmental assessment of the G.T.A. West corridor. The proposed highway was supposed to address congestion in the G.T.A. West region and give businesses a commuters moving -- and get. Instead the Minister cancelled the E.A. Without telling Ontarians what her alternatives are. \$14 million later, ten years, we're back where we started. Will the Minister tell us what her plan is now that you've cancelled the G.T.A. West corridor?

>>Minister Kathryn McGarry: Thank you very much for the question to the member opposite. And although the E.A. Will not be completed at this time, the technical information, the data Collection, the analysis done during the pilot project for the project, will not be lost. The information will continue to be used for transportation and regional planning, including the proposed corridor study. So we've taken the original E.A. Assessment. We've narrowed it to about a third of the corridor so we can maintain a corridor for future planning for infrastructure needs, whether that be transit, whether that be energy projects. We need to identify that corridor. I know that this has been well looked for to get the answer. We now have provided certainty these are municipalities on our route moving forward, and we have certainly received a lot of praise from the environmental. That didn't feel this was the right time to be paving over prime farmland in the greenbelt. Thank you.

>>MPP Michael Harris: Back to the Minister of transportation. At \$14 million, planning a short-circuited E.I.G. T.a.west corridor, failure has been a waste of taxpayers' money. The Wynne Liberals have left communities without direction on E.A. Frozen lands and of course motorists stuck in gridlock. Gridlock that a ministry advisory panel says can be raised through congestion pricing. G.T.A. Motorists wanting to get home don't need government to tax their drive. Of course communities landlocked for over a decade, over a decade by government's inaction shouldn't need to wait any longer to move forward. So on top of her decision to cancel the corridor project, long congestion in the G.T.A. West, Ilt Minister at least commit today to release lands frozen out by this Liberal government's decade of delay?

>>.Minister McGarry: Thank you very much for the question. We also have made sure that the planning in that area is a broader scope that also includes the greater golden horseshoe. The path forward for the final corridor will be determined in part by more comprehensive planning and analysis work that's taking place through that area. We have identified about a third of the original area. The rest of the two thirds has been released back to the municipality to planning. But we also know that, coming from this party, with a plan to cut at least 12 billion cut, that they would not identify a dollar for infrastructure in their coming plan. In fact to fill that \$12 billion hole that they've got in their budget, it's the same P.C. Party that has voted budget after budget against with the countless investments that we have in transit, in transportation infrastructure. Windsor to Wawa to Waterloo region. This is a party, speaker, that has voted against that. I don't know what they would be cutting for the 12 billion cuts they have in their budget.

MPP Fife to Minister Hoskins Re: Spousal Reunification in Long-Term Care

>> MPP Catherine Fife: Thank you very much. My question's to the Minister of health. In December I wrote to you and I asked you to reunite Patricia and Don Davies, who have been married for 64 years but are faced with forcing to be away from each other because they cannot find accommodations. Don as you know lives in a retirement home while Patricia requires long-term care. Over two months since I wrote to you, Don and Patricia continue to be forced to live apart. My office and their family have worked with the Waterloo- Wellington LHIN to try and find a switch for Pat. But after two failed attempts, Don and Pat are still waiting to live together again. Can the Minister tell Don today how much longer he is going to have to wait to be reunited with his wife of 64 years?

>Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, and we had the opportunity to speak in a general sense about this issue and I, for privacy reasons I can't speak about the specifics of this individual case. But yesterday we had the opportunity -- I think we probably all appreciate the importance of this -- to talk about spousal reunification and that is such an important aspect of how we approach already care in this province. It needs to be. I can't imagine the anguish, the anxiety, the frustration, the tears of two individuals that have lived their whole lives together being unable to complete that in the last remaining years of their life. It's

important, and that's why we introduced legislation. And I can't recall – I hope -- I suspect I think the NDP Supported that legislation, which allowed us to actually create a separate category for spousal reunification. I mentioned yesterday this has just now come into play, this opportunity, where we require every single long-term care home in this province to set aside. Specific, at least one specific dedicated bed for spousal reunification. I'm happy to talk about this more in the supplementary.

>>MPP Fife: Mr. Speaker, the Minister said yesterday that he had introduced spousal reunification regulations. But let me tell him it has not solved the problem. That regulation was made on December 13th. It came into effect on January 1st, and now 52 days later Patricia and don Dayton are still being forced to live without each other. Every day that Patricia and don spend apart is another day where they deteriorate. Mr. Speaker, at the end of their lives, they are losing precious time with each other. And this government refuses to step up and fix the problem. Why is this Liberal government doing nothing to actually help Patricia and don spend the rest of their days together?

>>Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's always challenging to talk about on the one hand a specific case and then having to speak for reasons of privacy in generalities. And that to some extent limits my ability to speak about this individual case and I hope we can all appreciate the importance of maintaining the privacy of these two individuals. But, Mr. Speaker, these changes that we've put into place that indeed came into force January 1st, and we because of the operational aspects of it, we've been working with long-term care homes and now all long-term care homes have implemented this new policy, which is the result of tremendous I would say exceptional consultation across the long-term care sector, including most importantly with patients, caregivers, family members, loved ones, clients, residents of long-term care homes themselves. To develop a program which reserves a specific bed, at least one, in every home if there is not a person on the list for spousal reunification, we will make sure the next person gets that bed, Mr. Speaker,.

MPP Wong to Minister Hoskins Re: OHIP Plus

>>MPP Soo Wong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Our government recognized children can grow healthy and strong when they help to alleviate the financial burden that many Ontario families face. Our government has made the biggest expansion to medicare in Ontario in a generation through ohip plus. I know how important this program has been to my constituents in Scarborough- Agincourt as they no longer have to worry about how they pay for their children's prescriptions, including antibiotics to treat infections, asthma inhalers, seizures medications, oral contraceptives, antidepressants, drugs to treat arthritis, epilepsy and many more. Through you to the Minister of health. Can he please inform the House how ohip plus is helping people in Ontario since January the 1st?

>>Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member from Scarborough- Agincourt for this very important question. As both a father and a physician, I strongly believe that all children and youth in Ontario deserve to receive the best patient care and experience possible. And as families across this province need to be able to afford the medications that their children need to stay healthy and have that healthy start to life. I'm proud to say, Mr. Speaker, that since January the 1st, over 800,000 individual young people aged 24 and under have had their prescriptions filled at absolutely no cost to them whatsoever under ohip plus. Almost a million young people, Mr. Speaker. And more than 1.7 million prescriptions have been filled to date under ohip plus, including more than 17,000. Epipens, 29,000 asthma Chambers, and the numbers continue to grow. Ohip plus benefits more than 4 million children and youth in this province.

>>MPP Wong: Thank you to the Minister for providing this update and for continued effort to improve the health care for everyone in Ontario. Ohip plus is a historical step taken by our Premier and our government that has not improved the health -- not only improved the health and lives of young people but also helped to lift the financial burden of many Ontario families. And I'm proud, Mr. Speaker, that our government has helped to fight our most vulnerable population. Sheila, a constituent of mine in Scarborough- Agincourt and U.T.S. Student recently informed me of the numerous struggles with access to drugs. Ohip plus has provided her with financial ease and confidence to be proactive with her health care, end of quote. I note as a former nurse, this ohip plus program is a potential game changer in terms of

improving and protecting -- protecting the elt of all Ontarians. Account Minister please inform the House the impact of a historical program such as ohip plus on all Ontario people?

>>Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, the impact has been outstanding. I've had so many conversations with parents who are saving -- a mum in Ottawa for example has an insulin dependent teenager who is now saving as a result of ohip plus thousands of dollars each year. \$6,000 a year is her estimated savings because of ohip plus. In fact a conference board of Canada report recently estimated 1.2 million people in Ontario, aged 24 years and under, did not have any drug coverage before ohip plus. Those 1.2 million individuals and their families now have drug coverage absolutely free of charge for everybody 24 and under. And all they need to do is go to their local pharmacy, any pharmacy in this province with their health card and the prescription. No up-front fees. No annual deductible. No co-payment and they get that. Absolutely free of charge. Nearly a million children and youth already have availed themselves of that opportunity and 1.7 million prescriptions already --

MPP Walker to Minister Hoskins Re: Long-Term Care Spaces

>>MPP Bill Walker: My question's to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. 32,000 ailing seniors on the wait list for a long-term care bed and they are desperately waiting longer and longer to get the care they need. Victoria is one of them. A stroke patient in need of around-the-clock care. Yet as ailing as Victoria is, she is actually being forced out of her hospital bed and back on the wait list for a nursing bed. We recently read, Minister, neither you nor the Mississauga Halton lhin know the beds will be put in Milton to help seniors like Victoria get the critical care they need. Considering the shortage of hospital and nursing beds, will you guarantee that no senior, including Victoria, will receive an unsafe discharge from a hospital or be pushed out too soon too fast under your watch?

>>Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe it was just last week -- may have been this week -- but we have issued or call for proposals for 5,000 new long-term care beds across this province. I have no doubt that in Halton and I have to say the moment from Halton has been an outstanding advocate for her community both on long-term care but also the newly opened expansion to the Milton district hospital, where it's tripled in size and the number of beds has gone from 63 beds to 129 beds. But long-term care, and in fact the member from Ancaster Flamborough, etc. Also just half an hour ago presented me with a proposal for long-term care in Halton, Mr. Speaker. We're exited table -- committed to building these beds in Halton, mississauga, northwest, northeast Southwest part of the province. We're going to -- 30,000 in the next ten years

>>MPP Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Minister of health. It's interesting no money is in the budget for the first 14 years of your tenure and now there are beds and I hope they come faster than the ones you said you were going to redevelop. I believe Victoria should not have to wait five years for a nursing bed. No senior should. Because by that time sadly they could have died. That's what happened to Lynette Mitchell. Despite suffering from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, congestive heart failure recurrent pneumonia and poor kidney, she was charged from hospital. With her need for round the clock care there was no way Lynette was going to survive the wait. Sadly she died. Will you take any responsibility for the shameful fact that this is the best level of care you can give seniors at the end of their life?

>>Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I work hard to support those in our long-term care sector to make sure that they're delivering the best possible Carol and that the beds are available. And that's why we're making this unprecedented investment of 30,000 beds over the next ten years, which I remember the formerly known as the people's guarantee, Mr. Speaker, that they committed to long-term care beds as well. But since they have axed the carbon tax and, Mr. Speaker, I think the deficit now projected as a result of their commitments in their platform is somewhere between 12 billion and 16 billion, I think it's a little rich that the member opposite is asking me this question, because there is no way possible that with the hole that they've built in their platform, which you can drive a Mack truck through, with that deficit that they're projecting, Mr. Speaker, they have absolutely no way to fund long-term care, home care, hospitals and we're going to see child care -- we're going to see a replication of what they did in the 1990s when they closed 10,000 hospital beds, in they cut, cut, cut, Mr. Speaker. That's their platform.

MPP Sattler to Minister Hoskins Re: Cardiac Fitness Unit Closure London

>>MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Speaker, after the last Conservative government laid off 6,000 nurses and closed 28 hospitals, Liberal underfunding of health care has only made things worse. Just since the Premier was sworn in, London health sciences centre has been forced to cut \$141 million from its overall budget. The full-time jobs. In December the hospital announced its latest cut, the closure of the C.F.I., cardiac fitness institute, putting the health of up to 32 cardiac patients at risk. The hospital stated it does not receive any public funding for postcard yak therapy and counselling services. Speaker, will the Premier accept responsibility for her government's failure to properly fund hospitals as the reason for the closure of the C.F.I.?

>>Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I would hope the member opposite would allow clinicians, cardiac care Ontario, the best practises which are practised around this country, around the world to determine how cardiac rehabilitation should be provided, Mr. Speaker. They're virtually, across this province, the provision of care for postcard yak episode rehabilitation is six months, Mr. Speaker. That's what's being provided at St. Joseph's. In fact at the Mayo Clinic they recommend three months. The American heart association recommends three months. The exact organization that published the report that was referenced yesterday recommends three months of postcard yacare. We provide across this province, with the exception of London health sciences, we provide six months of postcard yacare. We will carefully, with the hospital, transition those patients so that they are getting the best -- Practised world standards in postcard yacare, as is being applied already in London, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. The closure of the cardiac fitness institute means that any new cardiac patients in London will be referred to the six-month provincially funded cardiac program at St. Joseph's health care, but long-term C.F.I. Patients will be out of luck. Speaker, there is no evidence to support a six-month cardiac rehab program and admits there is no data comparing outcomes between the long-term C.F.I. Program and the short-term program at St. Joe's. A recent study found cardiac patients who participated in a three-year rehab program were 60% more likely to be alive 14 years later than those who participated in a one-year program. If the Premier believes in evidence-based policy, will she intervene to fund the C.F.I. Until a comprehensive analysis of C.F.I. Outcomes has been conducted?

>>.Minister Hoskins: The publication that the member opposite cites, actually, is from the journal of the British cardiovascular society. And in Britain, Mr. Speaker, the best practice, the evidence-based approach to providing cardiac care, in fact the organization which is attached to and part of this same cardiovascular association in Britain, recommends three months. In fact that is a recent set of standards that they've promulgated. So, Mr. Speaker, I am --Every single other cardiac rehabilitation program in this province offers six months of care. That's what we're going to offer. Careful transition to the program at St. Joe's. And that's far in excess of what the Mayo Clinic, the American heart association. And others recommend

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: New Schools

>>MPP Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of education. Our government inherited the public education system that was severely underfunded, broken in disrepair. Today Ontario is now an international leader in education thanks in part to our historic investments in building new schools. Three weeks ago I had the pleasure of announcing almost \$45 million in funding for four new schools and one expansion in communities across Simcoe county. These are just a few of the projects that our government recently announced. Investments that will bring new and improved schools to students all across Ontario. Speaker, through you to the Minister, what is our government doing to build on historic improvements and investments to ensure students are learning in new schools and facilities that can better support. Achievements, equity and well being?

>>Minister Indira Naidoo Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank MPP Hoggarth for that important question and thank you for your great advocacy on behalf of students and parents in our region. Nelson Mandela once said education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world. And, Mr.

Speaker, we are doing just that. We are using education to build a stronger future for our kids and we are ensuring that our education system is getting the investments that we need. Mr. Speaker, we're building a solid path for our young people so they can succeed today and in the future. In fact here's what we're doing. We recently announced we are investing \$784 million to build, expand and renovate 79 schools across the province, including more than 2,700 licensed child care spaces for children aged 0 to 4. Think about that. Think about that, Mr. Speaker. When we are looking at billions of dollars being cut by other opposition members across the way, when we're looking at the NDP Voting against \$11 billion in –

>>.MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Minister ., Mr. Speaker, these investments are part of our plan to bring fairness and opportunity to the people in Ontario. Investing in our schools is one of the most important infrastructure investments that we can make for our nearly 2 million students in Ontario. Schools are places where students learn and grow, make new friends, are developed into citizens and they develop skills for the future. Our commitment to invest in building new and improved schools provides students with a learning environment that encourages achievements and well-being. We know that how and where students learn is very crucial to their success. Minister, can you please tell us more about how we are investing in student achievements by building new and improved schools?

>>Minsiter Naidoo-Harris: Thank you to the member for that important question. And, Mr. Speaker, we are committed to supporting school boards by providing modern 21st century learning environments for all students. In fact just recently we had the pleasure of announcing new funding for the construction of four new schools and one new addition to Simcoe county and Simcoe- Muskoka catholic District School Board, including new schools in Bradford, oro-medonte and wasaga beach. Mr. Speaker, having an improved and modern school facility helps to lay a strong foundation for a better learning exp Erience for our students. And, Mr. Speaker, I want to point out these investments have been continuing since 2003. In fact, we've invested nearly \$18.3 billion in school infrastructure, including nearly \$she -- including 860 new schools and more than 840 additions and renovations. Speaker, these investments are all part of our plan. To create fairness and opportunity in Ontario by raising the minimum wage and making access to affordable health care and child care

MPP Barrett to Minister McGarry Re: Road Maintenance

>>MPP Toby Barret: Minister of transportation. My office has been inundated with calls about hot potholes on provincial highway 6 south of caledonia. Your office has assured me the contractor is patching the holes but the asphalt is not sticking. Why have archaeological findings delayed this highway reconstruction for two years? It is a hazard to safety. I've been contacting your office for close to a year. Why now band-aid repairs have only started when we're at a crisis? Why the lack of action? And secondly, why the secrecy around your contingency plans?

>> Minister Kathryn McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker. And thank you to the member opposite for the question. Our government is committed to maintaining among the safest roads in north America, something that I'm very proud of. And we know that there are issues on our highways due to our climate in the wintertime and we do continue to repair things. I know also that highway 6 is a critical connection to this community and that the residents want to see progress. The archaeological assessment for highway 6 from hagersville to caledonia identifies six archaeological sites of varying importance. One is a 19th century euro Canadian site with an indigenous component. The assessment recovered 1,699 items as well as a possible House foundation for a structure built in the 1860s. So this site was identified as needing further assessment. If any impact from construction were planned outside the existing road platform. It's an important stage process. We will need to effect the work. However I do understand what matters now is that we do have a path forward.

>>MPP Barrett: These potholes on this 80-kilometre provincial highway are so bad that there are large lit-up warning signs at each end. I ask you to come down and drive on this atrocity. Minister, I'm told the contractor carolynia Canada has filed for creditor protection. This is clearly another example of botched government oversite and mismanagement. Minister, I ask you can you assure me this safety hazard will be fixed immediately? And can you assure all the drivers, who are exp Eriencing vehicle damage caused by these craters, can you assure them that they will be compensated?

>>Minister McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker. And I know that we will continue on our path forward on highway 6 improvements. M.T.O. Made modifications to the design of the project to limit the work in the area with these finds that I just mentioned to the existing road platform. Again it's our commitment to ensure that the travelling public has safe roads to travel on. We will be looking at resurfacing construction in late April, early may of this year. But I do want to say, Speaker, that with 12 billion cut in the platform in the P.C.S, that's an incredible amount that they would find to have to -- We know the P.C.S do not support infrastructure. It's not identified as apriority in their budget. We will continue to provide the infrastructure and I'm hoping they'll join us and vote for the budget.

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