Fwd: MINISTER SOUSA'S REMARKS AND AVAIL ON 2017 BUDGET

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Begin forwarded message:

> **From:** "Cairns, Alan (TBS)" <Alan.Cairns@ontario.ca>
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> **To:** "Cairns, Alan (TBS)" <Alan.Cairns@ontario.ca>
> **Subject: MINISTER SOUSA'S REMARKS AND AVAIL ON 2017 BUDGET**

FYI -

From: Lepage, Guy (CAB)
Sent: April-27-17 5:17 PM
To: @CAB-QPscrums; @CAB-Budget Fin Team
Cc: @CAB-Issues
Subject: MINISTER SOUSA'S REMARKS AND AVAIL ON 2017 BUDGET

MINISTER SOUSA'S REMARKS AND AVAIL ON 2017 BUDGET

April 27, 2017

Location:

MacDonald Block, Ontario Room.

Speaker:

Minister Sousa

Media Attendance:

Print – 13 plus

TV – 10 plus

Radio – 4 plus

Media Outlets:

Jones – CP; Smith Cross – CP; Benzie – Star; Ferguson – Star; Rushowy – Star; Cohn – Star; Csanady– Post; Justin (unidentified) – Globe; Jeffords – Sun; Zochodne – QP; Nanji– QP Briefing; Cruickshank – iPolitics; Smith – QP Today; Crawley - CBC Radio/TV; Lamoureux - Radio Canada TV; Brule - Radio Canada/CJBC; Newstalk 1010; 680 News; Carter – Global; Global; Bliss - CTV Ontario; Rath - CHCH Television; Tumelty - City TV; Mulligan – City; Wu – Fairchild TV; Fortin-Gauthier – TFO; Morissette – TFO; Lagogianes – CP24; Wong – CP24; Platt – Citizen; Many other unidentified reporters

Statement by Minister Sousa:

Thank you all for suffering in lockup. You all seem pretty cheery – I can tell by the laughter. There you go. The 2017 Ontario budget is a balanced budget. It's the result of the hard work of the people of Ontario. It's the result of the Liberal plan to make strategic investments, managing our expenses, growing the economy. Our plan is working. We're making the largest infrastructure investment in the province's history - $190 billion over thirteen years. The budget – this budget is fiscally responsible. We're not raising personal taxes or corporate taxes. Our debt to GDP is improving. And, this budget is socially progressive. We're increasing health care funding and building new hospitals. We're increasing education funding and building new schools. We're helping families access more children – more child care, and lowering everyday costs. We're expanding universal pharmacare; and providing free prescription medicine to our children and youth – the first of its kind in Canada. Balancing the books has never been an end in itself. Balancing, however, allows us to make these important new investments, investments that will have real meaningful impacts on people's lives. We have much to be proud of: a strong competitive leading economy; a society built on tolerance, respect, diversity and inclusion. But while we look to the past with pride, today is also a day to look forward to the future with confidence. This balanced budget writes a new chapter for the people of Ontario. And with that, I'm happy to take your questions.

Media Questions:

Q. Smith Cross: Hi Minister, a lot of this spending isn't scheduled to flow right away or until after the 2018 election. Is your message to voters if they don't vote for the Liberals they won't get any of these nice things?

No, our message to the people of Ontario is that we together have balanced the budget, have taken the precautions to stimulate growth, and now we're taking the necessary steps going forward with things that matter to us, like more health care. I've travelled the province, and everywhere I went during my pre-budget consultation, was "invest more in health care, build more hospitals, provide us some more supports." We're doing that in this budget. Students want a good start in life, and they want to be able to have the most opportunities when they move forward into the next step in getting a job, and we're doing that by increasing supports in education and in post-secondary and in training, and in providing them with internships. And lastly, we want to be competitive long-term, this is not …these decisions that we're making today are not based on election cycles, they are based on long-term benefit for the people of Ontario and when you're looking at supporting our children with universal pharmacare with no deductibles, and no co–payments, for their benefit, we're speaking to them and for our future.

Q. Smith Cross: And a follow-up question, how much of this medium and longer-term funding is at risk from increased protectionism from the U.S.?

So, we recognize that 28 states rely on Ontario as either a first or second marketplace. We are a prominent supporter of trade and of free trade with not just the United States but around the world. We're investing an additional $50 million in investments for our global office activities and we recognize that importance and we'll continue to do so. In the end, our global strategy as well as ensuring that we have a balanced budget gives us protection and flexibility to do more and that's what we are doing.

Q. Benzie: I'm just wondering why the signature program in the budget is the new pharmacare for 24 and under? Why didn't you have it as a universal program for all ages?

So we recognize that expanding universal health care, this is OHIP+. It's about ensuring that we provide for more of our citizens and more of our people and what better place to start than those most vulnerable at a young age, for those 24 and under. We're expanding it to all of the Ontario drug plan, 4,400 medicines, complex issues, cancer treatment, the things that make it really tough on young families who then can't afford those very payments. And it is essential, I think, for us to consider what has also been happening over the last number of years by the Minister of Health and this government trying to advocate for a national strategy on this issue. What we've done here today, starting in January of 2018, is enabling and ensuring that all provinces consider, alongside the federal government, to do something more nationally. And I'm just very proud of our cabinet and our Premier in looking at this in this progressive way.

Q. Benzie: So is this just, I mean presuming you don't get a national pharmacare program, is this just the first step so that if its 24 now and you guys get re-elected and can still manage to find more money that it might be a 30-year threshold or the threshold would rise until it's universal?

So the step that we're taking obviously makes it essential for us to look at – or we're encouraging the federal government to look at it in a national scope to accommodate all levels, but of course we now do pharmacare for seniors as well over 65, and now all of our young children will now have that benefit. And it is something that will provide great benefit for many in the future as well. Especially families, you know too many workplace institutions don't offer benefits to the extent that we do. Too many young people are starting on contract and don't have these kinds of benefits. Now they will. And I know first-hand from – my family it means a lot and we're fortunate in order to be able to afford and have plans to subsidize but going forward many won' – today we're changing that.

Q. Justin, Globe: One thing I noticed in here is you're expecting the land transfer tax to keep going up pretty rapidly. Most of the taxes are expected to keep increasing over the next year, so you're obviously you're expecting the economy to do well. Are you also expecting the housing market to keep growing and those house prices to keep going up?

So our revenue numbers and projections are based on economists and their projections and their views. Certainly they'd look at historic activity that we've done and we've surpassed year over year those expectations. While they made projections and predictions, we use them, average them, and actually taper them down even more. We also build prudence into our systems and into our plan to accommodate for any shock that may occur. But again, coming to balance gives us some of that flexibility and we've tapered our projections more so than what's been done by independent economists. And –

Q. Unidentified: – the big headlining part of this budget – one of them I guess – is the increase in health spending. So you're looking at an extra billion and a half dollars in health spending. It's about a three-per-cent increase. That's – that's just a tad slower than GDP – sorry, inflation and population growth. Is that enough to make up for a couple of years of austerity?

That's eleven and a half billion dollars more in health care funding. That is – and of that is about a seven-billion-dollar booster shot that I have been talking about for the last couple of weeks. That is a tremendous infusion of supports for more hospitals, more front-line care, more home care, more support for caregivers. It's a huge impact on our health care funding. We've actually increased operating funding as well for hospitals, and bottom line is we're building new hospitals, especially in those growing communities. It'll be a substantive injection of support for health care.

Q. Bliss: Minister, you're $311 billion in debt. You're paying $12 billion a year in interest. So why are you spending like there's no tomorrow?

So debt is being managed – and it's first step to managing debt is coming to balance. And we're balancing our books. We're balancing this year. We're balancing next year and the year after that. Debt is also a function of our gross domestic product. Ontario is one of the largest economies in the world, and certainly as a subnational jurisdiction we're huge at $800 billion. Our debt to GDP is improving as we proceed forward. And our interest on debt, as you've alluded to, is actually much lower today than it's been in years. During the Harris days it was at 15-16 per cent. Today it's around 8.4, 8.9 per cent. And we've locked in those rates over long periods of time to minimize volatility and risk. So what debt means though – because now every amount borrowed, 100 per cent of that, goes to building new hospitals, building new schools, building more transit. And the question then becomes what's the priority? Do you cut those aspects, or do you continue to support and stimulate our growth? And continue to provide for future generations with a more competitive and functioning economy. We've chosen to do that while still managing debt and lowering and improving our debt-to-equity – our debt-to-GDP.

Q. Bliss: And on another question, one of the highlights in the budget is that you're going to now publicly fund the abortion pill. Are you trying to bait the far right in the conservative party with that?

You know, we're trying to provide women with choice and with a safe choice. And that's it.

Q. Crawley: Hi minister, you talked about this tremendous infusion for the health care system. But how exactly is this gonna solve the huge overcrowding problems that we have within the health care system in particular beause there's nothing in here for long-term care beds, which is one of the causes of the backups in the, actually in the hospital system?

So were increasing and encourage support of 30,000 more long-term beds. It's quite a few vacancies (inaudible) still. We're investing $583 million more in operating supports for hospitals to, to manage through some of these issues. And, again, we're investing substantive amount of dollars in operating, and in capital funding. We're also expanding supports for health care. Just, just in new capital for health care over the next nine to ten years – it's $9 billion, on top of the $11.5 billion that we're providing.

Q: Crawley: Sounds like an awful lot of figures, but not an actual answer to the question.

Well, $11.5 billion more in operating to support our hospitals and to support care on the front lines. Nine billion dollars more to support capital in construction of new hospitals. 30,000 more beds are being encouraged through the system. We're providing help and home care for seniors so they can have care when they need it, when they need it, where they need it. Oftentimes, they prefer it at home to – we're providing more supports for that too.

Q: Crawley: So, so that wasn't really a proper follow-up. So here's, here's my other question. One of the things I noticed is that you guys used to always like to spout statistics about how things have changed since 2003, you know, to drawing comparisons to the, to the Mike Harris era. What I noticed throughout this budget – you've got a lot of comparisons to things you've done since 2013. Why are you using that as your comparison stick now?

Cause I've – and our government – this has been my fifth budget that I've had the privilege of delivering. I guess six, cause I get – had to do, had the privilege of doing one twice. But since 2013, with my first budget – and this is our, our fifth - and, and I – I, I manage and we as a, as a team – this – in our caucus with Premier Wynne, we've been at this since 2013 to come to balance we said we would work with Ontarians to do so. We've been dedicated and disciplined – managing our expenses, growing the economy. And we're balancing the books. And that is what we're measuring.

Q: Carter: Minister, thank you. Minister, congratulations on balance the book, but why not decide to go after the debt? It has almost doubled since the last recession. If times are good, why aren't we paying that down, just in case times are bad again and were gonna have to go into further in (inaudible)?

So, as we balance the books, we're taking fiscally responsible measures to get, have flexibility. This last year, we've exceeded our target substantively – we we're aiming for $4.3; we're down to $1.5. Going forward, we put, built prudence into our system as well. And we've made some choices – definitely. We've chosen to support pharmacare for children. We've chosen to support more supports for hospitals for our seniors and those in need. We're supporting our young people greater hospital – greater education and more schools. And we are supporting many through some of our social programs. But, the majority of the debt – all of it, in fact – when it comes to borrowing, goes to capital. And that capital is dedicated to transit and roads, bridges, and some of these infrastructure measures. Question then becomes, which ones do you cut? We feel it's important to invest in these initiatives.

Q: Carter: If I may, one more. You talk about a balanced budget, but yet your Fair Hydro Plan creates $2.5 billion worth of debt each and every year – with an additional potential $2.5 billion in interest debt. That's not on the government books. Can you explain to people of the province why that isn't?

So, we removed $2.5 billion off of ratepayers to the taxpayers to provide some of the social programs to, to force delivery charges and distribution methods – especially in the north, where they we're excessively high. And they're now benefiting, or will benefit from 60, 40 per cent reductions. And, as you know, we've invested heavily in, a, in tremendous amount of assets. We've invested over $50 billion in new assets, new power, green power – all across the province. And we have great integrity. All of that is now being born by today's ratepayer – but they're gonna have huge benefit for tomorrow as well. So, we've refinanced that component, or we will refinance it. And there'll be $2.5 billion every year thereafter. So, $25 billion in 10 years will be extended to get repaid by the ratepayer.

Q: Carter: And I won't, I won't belabour the point. But the 17 per cent that you are promising in cuts, that cost is not in your budget.

So a 25 per cent improvement from last year that we're now going to be giving, on average, to every

Ontarian –

Q. Carter: (inaudible)

- so we're going to provide that 25 per cent going forward for the benefit of ratepayers and every Ontarian and that will be refinanced over a period of 10 years, as we said, to provide, because that benefit, that asset still exists, still provides value. Clean. We have like 96 per cent of electricity in this province has no emissions and its continued to provide greater quality of life, greater integrity and greater competitiveness for the province. Those are important investments and I am proud of those investments to enable us now to be ahead of other states and other provinces who are going to have to make them. Make no mistake, there is, there is need by other areas to make those investments, we're now getting a step up on them and we are going to be able to provide for that refinancing, at lower rates today, for the benefit of the future.

Q. Csanady: Hi Minister, you're plan has the province perfectly in balance for this fiscal year and the next two but, the Financial Accountability Officer, as well as external economists, have warned that you can't possibly maintain the current levels of spending growth, even maintain balance, without new revenue streams, so what happens after that two-year period?

Well, every year we've been told that we wouldn't be able to achieve our targets. Every single year. And every year, every single year, we exceed our targets and we surpass expectations. And we build prudence into our projections to enable us to have some of that flexibility. We're doing so as we proceed forward. But the key here is we have deliberately invested in our economy. While others were promoting and suggesting we do across the board cuts to try to avoid a deficit, or at least minimize that deficit, that would have put our economy and our recovery in harm's way. More importantly, it would have been putting people, families, and children in harm's way. We invested in them. By investing in them we're creating and bolstering our economy. We got over 700,000 net new jobs and over 100,000 annual new jobs as a result of the investments we made.

Q. Csanady: But you don't give yourself a lot of wiggle room for the next two years, what happens if there is a big shift, do we just immediately go back into deficit?

As I said, every time there are challenges in our economy it's the responsibility of the finance minister and our team and the premier to make those decisions. And every year we have responded to those challenges and overcome them and we'll continue to do so. We have managed our spending, we've taken the necessary steps to control spending in the early year portions of our mandate and we're managing a budget and are balanced because of the growth we've been able to achieve in our economy, going forward, we always have that option available to us. But again as I say, we've built prudence into the system as we proceed forward.

Q. Mulligan: Minister, forgive me for being sceptical, but you balanced the books, half a billion plus so far for pharmacare, no new taxes, it sounds too good to be true and when it does, it usually is. So is this just a shell game of numbers to make it look far rosier than it actually is?

So it's really not that complicated. It's revenue less expenses gives you the number, in our case we're balancing consecutively over three years, we're bolstering our revenues from some of the investments we made to grow our economy, we're controlling our expenses and then appropriating some of those expenses into things that matter to the people of Ontario, those are built into our plan and we've done it to the extent that we continue to balance. We've been very deliberate by doing so.

Q. Mulligan: So when it comes to the health care spending, I know it's a 3.3 per cent increase, is it going to be enough to stop the images that my news station did repeatedly this winter of people who are in hospital waiting in hallways, lying in closets, hoping for a bed in a proper room, is this going to be enough to stop that, because that's not going to be a good image just before an election.

Again, this is about the people of Ontario and that's our priority and what we have found, certainly during the last flu season, it was tough, there were a lot of demands on our system and the capacity was an issue. We're increasing capacity, providing more supports for operating in the hospitals, as well as the community centres, as well as the community hubs I should say, as well as in transforming the way we deliver services on the front line to people, we are actually building 5 additional hospitals, many of them right now will provide for some of those stresses in the system.

Q. Nanji: Hi Minister, I'm wondering if you're hoping a balanced budget will be enough to woo voters back to the Liberal camp?

We've always said we would balance this year. We always said we would take the necessary precautions to work for the interests of the people of Ontario; our priority is working for them. And they have worked too. Make no mistake; this balanced budget exists because hardworking Ontarians have stepped up to do what's necessary. The majority of the jobs that we have are primarily the private sector, primarily high paying and full time. So work we're doing here for health care and in education and in infrastructure, the work we've done to try to provide for their support has always been done in a balanced approach without putting them at risk. That's our priority and frankly we're trying to work for them and the Premier has been a champion in progressive measures, but as well as in fiscal measures. No others have I seen, and to the questions before, we have been able to come to balance while not sacrificing the things that matter, in fact we're investing more in those matters.

Q. Nanji: So, because you used 2013 as a marker, I'm wondering if this is a resume of sorts and your last budget.

This is a reflection on the province of Ontario, definitely. It's a reflection on the people of Ontario who have stepped up and have delivered. And it's a reflection on our government listening to their priorities and delivering on those priorities. As I said, they want more investments in health care, and we've continually being doing so and we're providing even more now; and they want more investment in education and schools to enable their young people and their students, even those in career changes also want some support. We've included that in this budget. And we're not letting up when it comes to infrastructure spending and supports to make us modern and competitive. Another part of this budget is embracing the new economy. We are leading in many respects on AI, on artificial intelligence, on quantum, on other matters, on a diversified economy, and that diversified economy is enabling Ontario to weather those economic shocks. And if it wasn't for that, we would have some of the difficulty that they experience on some other parts of Canada.

Q. Nanji: But, is this the last time that you'll be the person that has your name tacked on to all these cool measures?

I'm here, I'm working and I'm fighting for the province of Ontario and for the people of Ontario, as is the Premier of Ontario.

Q. McGrath: Minister, the 2014, '15 and '16 budgets all included major new transit plans or major new money. The 2017 budget includes relatively small new sum and no new transit plan. Is the government getting out of the transit business for a while?

We're increasing supports for transit. We have made deliberate –some, you know, I think we've increased our funding overall.

Q. McGrath: The $1 billion dollars is from federal money.

Yeah and we're putting additional supports, $84 billion over the next 10 years just in transit.

Q. McGrath: But there's no – no commitment to a firm new project here unlike there has been in previous years. So what do you say to a city like London, who are still in the planning process but they're planning on provincial money coming down the pipe, that there's no room here for them yet.

There will be room because we're putting, and this is province-wide and certainly we've already dedicated some funding for some of the urban centres that have gotten to that point. But we've made it clear to London and others that they'll be getting support as well, we're just getting through the process.

Q. Kelly, Globe and Mail: On the new OHIP-Plus Program, I'm wondering why, considering the fact that there are all kinds of other priorities in health, and that there are lots of children, teens, and 20 somethings who currently enjoy coverage under private health-care plans through their parents, etc. Why you decided to do this as a blanket program for everyone rather than either means testing or excluding people who have other ways to pay for this? Can you afford this?

Well, we can afford it and that's why – and I've put it in our budget and I've – and we're managing fiscally to afford to do so. Keep in mind that even with those that may have plans, and many do not, they still have co-pay deductibles and that's still an expensive option for them, especially if the child has chronic illnesses and requires daily medication. But going forward, we felt that you don't put a price on our kids and we want everybody to have the same, you know, the same benefit. It's a universal program. We're expanding universal health care by including our children.

Q. CHCH: We're taking about weekday GO service between Hamilton and Niagara. Will this be all-day service or will it be similar to what Hamilton is already experiencing with the Hunter street and Jane street stations, were it's just a couple of trains in the morning and then in the afternoon and that's it?

Well, as the – I did a 25-year long-term report recently, talking about the demographic changes here in our communities, here in Southern Ontario, as well as what's happening in the North. And as the demands are forever more prevalent, we must keep up. And in this budget we're investing more to maintain and keep up and it'll apply to transit and those demands and those communities. You know, we want to foster interconnection and greater opportunity for the people that live in Ontario. That is a competitive advantage. We also want goods to get to market quickly. We want to relieve some of that congestion in our roads and in our rail system. We also want people and families to get to and from work more safely and more quickly. All of that is part of our deliberations and the work we're doing will include obviously that interconnection – and throughout the corridor.

Q. CHCH: I think the frustration too in Hamilton is just the limited amount of GO trains even to Toronto and part of that was there's a delay in negotiations between the owners of the rail – railways (inaudible). How are the negotiations going?

Those discussions are – are going well. We do have issues to overcome and we do have expansion on those rail lines still to deal with. We have freight that has to be offloaded. We're making those adjustments and we'll get to where we need to be. In the end, we all work for the people of Ontario, and they're our bosses. So – and they're also, and also are the bosses of the rail lines.

Q. Simon, Advisors Edge: Thank you. So in the budget you talk about creating a best-interest duty for financial advisors and other financial service professionals. How serious are you about doing this and are you willing to move ahead (inaudible) other regulators who are also looking at this at the same time?

So we have been – and I have commissioned the report to look at modernizing our financial services as well as financial planners. We had those two reports that have come out. The issue of standard best-interest duty is something that is actually around the world. Many of them apply and we recognize that there's some – some apprehension by some with regards to what will that mean to hidden fees and so forth by financial planners and advisors. We're working with them. We're taking the necessary steps to protect consumers in the end. It's all about consumer protection and investor protection. And I'm very proud of the steps that we have already taken. With FSCO, we're coming forward with a new financial service regulator authority. We're moving some of the responsibilities to the Ontario Securities Commission, which will be temporary because we're also moving to a national regulator, a cooperative securities regulator which myself and Mike Dion established back in 2013 and we now have a number of provinces and territories involved with this. We're looking forward to move that yardstick even more to include some standardization as well as understanding of – of what a financial advisor is, right? Their actual professional designations.

Q. Simon: Thank you. And though there's a whole suite of financial service regulation that you're working on under FSRA and so forth. Do you hope to get all of these done soon? How soon? Like before the next election, can you say?

Yeah, those things are underway right now and we're providing the necessary regulatory and legislative authorities to move forward and it's something that in – for example, a cooperative securities regulator may require more time because we're trying to encourage the timetables of other governments that are going through elections even now. But it is my desire to see it go through quickly before the next election.

Q. Platt: Hi Minister. I'm just wondering first of all why the cost of the pharmacare program is not written into the budget or the press materials? Are you still unsure over what that's going to cost?

It's going to cost around $465 million and that's the estimate that we put into – that's (inaudible) the estimate I put into my fiscal plan.

Q. Platt: Okay, it's not – why is it not written into the budget though? It just seems weird.

It's – it's in our budget and it's in our plan. It may not have been in – in the document pages. Listen, that document is like 296 pages long. We're trying to cut it down from the previous ones so you guys would have more time to – to ask questions. But listen, you can't put everything into the document. And in this case it's built into the plan.

Q. Platt: I just – can I – I just also wanted to – could you confirm when you allow cities to put in a hotel tax, that – they would also be able to capture Airbnb rentals in that tax?

So that will be up to the respective municipalities to institute and to apply. As you know, the city of Toronto is requesting it and they'll be proceeding and will provide some of those privileges as well as many others now that they have. But again, that'll be up to the cities and municipalities to determine.

Q. Laura, CBC: Minister, there have been a number of concerns recently about the wait times in the emergency rooms with the Auditor General finding last year that the average wait time for getting a bed in the ER is about 37 hours. So I'm wondering why there's no specific funding in the budget to address that?

So there is $1.3 billion over the next three years to address reducing wait times. We're going to be reducing - $245 million alone over three years to see a specialist for example. There's $85 million over three years to – to provide for new and community care services. That will reduce wait times. We get $890 million over three years for key surgeries: hips, knees, and so forth. And $74 million over three years for faster mental health supports. All of that will help reduce wait times, relieve some of the stresses on emergency rooms. As you know, there's also auxiliary supports in community hubs, care hubs that are being established to ease the pressure on emergency rooms. And they're monitored. Ontario monitors wait times – sorry Allison – and it is – it is rated as one of the – you know, I mean, we rate ourselves against other jurisdictions and (inaudible) we're doing well. We want to do better though.

Q. Boyle: Hi Minister, one of the main reasons for the hospital overcrowding is the high ALC rates in terms of (inaudible) care. Does the budget do anything to address that?

The question is ALC beds and are we addressing it in the budget, recognizing that that is a stress in our system. And as I said, we're putting eleven and a half billion dollars over the next three years, part of that is to address capacity within those hospitals. We're increasing operating funding immediately to support some of those very issues. The other part of ALC is to try to provide additional long-term beds, and we have 30,000 that we're trying to encourage redevelop in this budget, and we're also looking at more home care opportunities, services, so that people can choose to stay at home because that's where, preferably where they wish to be.

Q. Emily (inaudible), hello. Minister, the Toronto Community Housing is expected to close a thousand units by the end of 2018 because of a massive repair backlog, and without increased financial support those numbers are expected to climb. As part of the province's commitment to keeping people in affordable housing, can you say why new and sustained funding hasn't been committed to repairing that specific issue?

So we are working – as you know, the federal government's come out with $11 billion over ten years across Canada. We have instituted two billion over three years since 2016 to support social and affordable housing; $500 million right now on top of that for retrofits and supports, and another $100 million that we're providing in surplus lands to provide for more social housing similar to what we just did in – in what was in the Pan-Am village, that kind of initiative, providing some more room, some more supply. We're (inaudible) closely to continue to do so.

Q. Cindy, Global: Hi Minister, good afternoon. This question is about OHIP Plus, and I'm wondering why should a millionaire's child have their drugs covered by taxpayers?

We look at a child and we look at universal health care in this province and in this country and universal health care applies to everybody equally and we're expanding that, and by expanding universal health care it applies to everybody. And if somebody, regardless of their income, is in need of support they'll receive that support.

Q. Cindy: But is it fair for a billionaire's child to have their drugs covered by taxpayers at a time when you're desperately trying to save money and balance the books for years to come?

You want an income test and we're not doing that when it comes to our children and with pharmacare, all of them are going to receive the supports they need when they need it and if its complex cases and those most in need they'll receive it and they're not going to have to mortgage their houses to do it, and certainly those that might be more affluent they'll have access to health care like they do today like everybody else does. It's one of the things I think us as Canadians and Ontarians value most. And it should apply to our children.

Q. Thomas Saras: Thank you. First of all allow me to express my feelings. This is a beautiful act and in my long life of serving the people it's one of the very few times that I feel very good for the people of Ontario. Minister, I found that besides everything else, you are giving only 2per cent to the people with disabilities again this year. Which means they receive $750 a month allowance and you give them 2 per cent which means $15 and they have to live with $765, is that okay with the policy of the government? I mean this is the people we're supposed to support most and then we are coming down and we give them only 2 per cent.

We are providing an additional $100M for dementia care and, as you know, for caregivers we're increasing a tax credit for their benefit as well. And we know that many are the ones that care for their loved ones, and be it a child or be it a parent, we know how important that is, that's why we're supplying $200M more for that as well. We're increasing some of our food allowances and supports for those in long-term care facilities, in fact, we're doing away with four ward beds to provide more privacy and frankly more respect for them as well. So there's always more to be done, we're doing as much as we can right now. $11.5 billion in total for health care, some of it will apply for the benefit of our seniors and our disabled, we have supports for mental health, we have greater supports for disability programs in those community centres as well, and respite care, all of it which applies and matters to people, and we're doing our best so that those caregivers don't feel isolated or also having to pay for more.

Q. Thomas Saras: My next question is about housing. When I came to this country, some decades back, the price of house was from $8,000 to $25,000, the government was giving to the first buyers $2,000, for the first time buyers. Today the houses are $1 million and you're giving, according to whatever you say here, you are giving $8,000. The young generation, how they can they buy a house, a million dollars, and the government is going to support them with only $8,000?

So our First Time Homebuyers Rebate, I guess I have to to correct you, I don't want to, but it's not $8,000, it's actually $4,000. But, I appreciate your concern. We all want young families to get into the market, to find homes that are affordable, to build up some equity. And we've, taking, taken a number of steps in our housing plan to try to support that. And – the thing is, this is also a reflection of Ontario's strength. I mean, our economy is strong; we're growing; we're attracting people from all over the world to come here to establish roots, to invest and build, and create jobs. That demand has been huge. And it's been creating a, a lot of pressure on increasing housing prices. The stock, the supply is one other thing that we've been trying to do to move into the system to help alleviate that. But, there's a number of things that we're doing to try to make it fair for our young people and our young families to benefit too.

Q: Jeff (Globe): Minister, to Toronto Community Housing. You mentioned $500 million set for retrofits, but that's over a period of years, across the province, for a variety of special programs. Why aren't you stepping up and stopping this absurdity in Toronto, which is that they're closing public housing units, as they have this huge waiting list. You know very well the number they want from you – I think it's $800 million over a period of years. Equal participation from the feds. Why don't you step up and fix it? It's a problem that Queen's Park created 20 years ago – why don't you step up and, and solve it for the people in this province – many of whom are the most vulnerable.

And we wanna support Toronto. We have continuously supported Toronto, and all municipalities across the province. We have stepped up with more supports for affordable housing over the years and we've already said that we'll match the degree of capital funding for a, a, for the work that's being done by the federal government. But at the same time, we're stepping up with over $2 billion dollars in three years for affordable housing, which more than matches what's being done by the feds. But we'll always do so. We have surplus properties that we've already designated for that very purpose. That's $100 million more right there.

Q: Jeff: So your saying, TCH is fixed? You're, you're, you're gonna put the $800 million in that you, you're being asked to put in by the mayor. I'm sure he's brought it up with you 100 times. That's happening? I don't see it in the budget.

We're actually doing quite a bit for Toronto. Ah, in, in a number of fronts where they can provide for greater revenues and greater support systems. But, when it comes to affordable housing, we are working with the, the cities. We're working those growing demands, those growing cities that are here in Toronto and as well as in the Peel region and the surrounding area. We're, we're taking steps to support affordable housing.

Q. Jones: Thanks minister.

Great, thank you everybody. Don't be gentle on the rest of them please.

N.B.: Comments captured are not verbatim quotes

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