

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Monday, March 26, 2018

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Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Tuesday, March 26, 2018.

MCI did not receive any questions of interest.

MSA did not receive any questions of interest.

Official opposition questions critiqued the Hydro Rate Reduction Plan, carbon tax, certain individuals listed in the Sunshine list, the Ajax Downs casino being moved to Pickering, and the process of approval for workers' claims to the WSIB. NDP Questions addressed dental services not covered by the government's Healthy Smiles program, assistance for employers who are unable to provide dental benefits to their workers, dental coverage for seniors and benefits for injured workers.

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

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

Transcript of Provincial Question Period

41st Parliament, 3rd Session

Monday, March 26, 2018

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Fedeli to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Once again, the auditor general is blasting the Liberals' accounting, this time for their unfair hydro scheme. The auditor said she thinks, quote -- the accounting is bogus, quote. She highlights the fact that the financial and accounting structure was designed to avoid reporting the unfair hydro scheme's costs. She claims it was, quote, allowing the government to falsely claim their budget numbers. These numbers can't be trusted. This government can't be trusted. Mr. Speaker, if the auditor general can't trust this government, then how can anyone in Ontario do it?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, Mr. Speaker, families in this province asked for real and immediate relief on their electricity bills and that's what we delivered, Mr. Speaker. Our plan has been approved by some of Canada's top accounting firms including E&Y, PwC, Deloitte and KPMG, Mr. Speaker. All of those organizations have looked at what we did, Mr. Speaker, and have reviewed it and have approved it, Mr. Speaker. And in fact the same accounting process is used by Toronto Hydro as well as it's used in Alberta, used in New England, in New York, Minnesota and Texas, Mr. Speaker. But we're very confident, Mr. Speaker, that what we have done to deliver real relief to families on their electricity bills, Mr. Speaker, is appropriate and people are seeing that relief right now, Mr. Speaker.

>> Vic Fedeli: Back to the Premier. Well, while she says one thing, the auditor general has the sole authority to audit the province's books. This government has fought her time and time again. They have attacked the auditor's credibility. They have attacked her expertise and they have attacked her character. This has gone too far. If the auditor general says we can't trust this government's numbers, it's clear Ontario can't trust this government's numbers. Mr. Speaker, will this government show an ounce of integrity, an ounce of accountability and own up to these questionable numbers?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleased to rise and respond to the question. Mr. Speaker, we made a policy choice to ensure that we continue to have a clean and reliable and an affordable electricity system for ratepayers of today, Mr. Speaker, and ratepayers of tomorrow. The fair hydro plan keeps the cost of borrowing within the rate base, not the tax base, Mr. Speaker, because that's the logical thing to do. Electricity financing should remain within the electricity system, Mr. Speaker, not the tax base. Officials from the treasury board, finance, O.P.G., the ieso, the Ontario financing authority along with external advisors that include Ernst & young, KPMG and deloitte worked on the accounting related to the fair hydro plan Mr. Speaker. They along with the office of the provincial controller ensured should that this plan was in accordance with public-sector accounting.

>> Vic Fedeli: Back to the Premier. It's been reported that the auditor general has uncovered very troubling behaviour at the ieso. It seems there is a culture of untrustworthiness and a lack of integrity. The auditor's concerns, quote, included incorrect accounting, deceptive and obstructive behaviour by the ieso's board and management, and poor financial controls, quote. It's so bad, the auditor general warned that if improper accounting wasn't fixed, she may issue an adverse opinion on Ontario's books. Now, Speaker, that would be a first in Canadian history for any government's financial statements. So, Mr. Speaker, will this government be the first in Canadian history to have their numbers.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When talking about the A.G. And our system operator, our system operator, the ieso, has assured the ministry of energy that they have made every effort to be forthright and fully responsive to the auditor general's request for information. So for example, Mr. Speaker, the ieso has accommodated the auditor's requests by making accommodations to extend the duration of the auditor general's staff on the ieso's premises to the initial two weeks requested to seven weeks. During this time, the ieso received and responded to over 200 information requests from the auditor general's staff. The ieso accommodated every meeting request, about 40 meetings took place between the ieso and the auditor's staff. The ieso accommodated the a.g.'s request to meet with their board in audit committee, and throughout their audit. The auditor general's staff had direct access to the ieso's staff, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Fedeli to Premier Wynne (Del Duca) Re: Carbon Tax

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the Premier. With the budget just days away, people want a better path forward for Ontario. Only Doug Ford and the Ontario P.C. Party --Only Doug Ford and the Ontario P.C. Party will bring jobs back to the province of Ontario. An important step to make Ontario open for business is to scrap the carbon tax cash grab, Speaker. The P.C. Party will stop sending families hard-earned money to California. The auditor general has confirmed that this government is doing exactly that. So, Mr. Speaker, will the Premier axe the tax? Will she --Scrap the carbon tax and bring jobs back to the province of Ontario?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know this question from a party and a member who has decided to turn its back, their backs on climate change, Mr. Speaker, not recognizing the single greatest threat to humanity. But, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about jobs. Let's talk about what's actually happening in Ontario, Mr. Speaker, because we're seeing economic growth that's -- in one of the leading jurisdictions in the country, Mr. Speaker. We're outstripping the growth of the G-7 countries. The United States, Mr. Speaker, and on jobs, there have been 810,000 new jobs, net new jobs created in this province since the recession, and over 400,000 jobs created since I became the Premier, Mr. Speaker. So the reality is --That there are jobs being created in Ontario, Mr. Speaker. Our unemployment rate has dropped to 5.5% and been below the national average for 34 months.

>> Vic Fedeli: Back to the Premier. Nobody believes this government's spin. When the Premier slipped up a few weeks ago, she admitted her carbon tax was used to line the government's pockets, not reduce emissions. She claims scrapping the carbon tax would impact the public service. Why would money that she claims to be solely dedicated to the environment affect the public service? Her carbon tax has nothing to do with reducing emissions. It's all about grabbing cash. Well, the party with the taxpayers' money is over. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier admit her carbon tax has nothing to do with the environment but has everything to do with taking more money out of the taxpayers' pockets?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are on track to meet our pollution reduction targets, Mr. Speaker, and I know that the Minister of the environment will want to speak to that in the final supplementary. But, Mr. Speaker, let me just -- in terms of the go-forward in this province, and the member opposite acknowledged that we're bringing the budget in in a couple of days. Mr. Speaker, we know that, across this province, we've balanced this budget this year, Mr. Speaker. We know -- we know, however, that having done that, having seen economic growth and those jobs that I said have been created, Mr. Speaker, those 400,000 jobs since I've been the Premier, the low unemployment rate, even with all of that, Mr. Speaker, not everyone is feeling that benefit. Not everyone is feeling that evenly, Mr. Speaker, which is why we are making a very conscious and deliberate decision to invest in people. Invest in their mental health, invest in their education, invest in their health care, Mr. Speaker. I understand that's not what the party opposites sit wants to do but we believe that is actually what people --

>> Vic Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier. Well, scrapping the carbon tax cash grab is just one step for job creation in the province of Ontario. We have lost more than 300,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs because of this government and their policy. When we talk to company owners large or small, one top issue is the cycling bureaucracy, red tape and reputation. We need to let business grow, Mr. Speaker, and bring jobs back to Ontario. We need companies to know that Ontario is open for business again. Mr. Speaker, will the Liberals scrap the red tape they have wrapped all around Ontario's businesses?

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I thank the member for the question. I've said on many occasions in this legislature that over the last decade, since the depth of the recession that engulfed Ontario and most of the world, we have created more than 800,000 jobs, Speaker, in this province. That's in part because our government made the decision to invest in our people, to invest in infrastructure and to make sure that we kept focus on the importance of supporting families in need at all times, Speaker. Specifically the member -- the leader asked a question regarding reducing red tape, Speaker. I should note that the 2017 burden reduction report specifically showed Ontario surpassing the target that had been set regarding burden reduction by 50% and, Speaker, two years ahead of schedule. This report also found an estimated savings of over \$150 million and 5.4 million hours to business but we removed 08,000 regulatory burdens, Speaker. There's more to this story. I would say to the member opposite it's important to focus on the facts and not dispel myths to the people of Ontario. Thanks very much.

MPP Mantha to Premier Wynne (Jaczek) Re: Dental Services

>> MPP Michael Mantha: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Hung Lee hewittnin is 12 years old. She and her older brother need to have a few teeth removed and make room for new ones that are coming in but their mom Pamela can't afford it. This is necessary dental care but right now, after 15 years

of Liberal government in Ontario, tan's family will just have to go without it. The Premier talks about government that care. Why can't her care for hewn-lee and her brother?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is going to want to speak to it. Like I said last week, Mr. Speaker, I think it's great the third party has now begun to talk about dental care, Mr. Speaker. In fact we have for some time been making it easier for children to get the dental care that they need. Mr. Speaker, I'm not suggesting that it's perfect. There is more that has to be done. We recognize that. The issues of pharmacare and dental care really are gaps in our health care system, Mr. Speaker, that were not put in place in the '60s when medicare was established, Mr. Speaker, but we have been working for some time. We've made it easier for kids to get dental care through our expanded healthy smiles program --What healthy smiles does, Mr. Speaker, is it provides free preventative routine and emergency dental services for children and youth from low income House holds from across the province, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Mantha: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the Premier. Thee -- these kids are enrolled in the healthy smiles program, but this is necessary dental care, care that their dentist recommends be done right away isn't covered. There are millions of other families in the same situation as Pamela's is in right now. It must be heartbreaking for parents to know your kids are going without the care though need. Over the last 15 years, the Liberal government sat at the Cabinet table and chose their priorities. They cut billions in taxes for the most profitable corporations but left people like tam and her family unable to go to the dentist. Why has the Premier left everyday Ontario families to fend for themselves when it comes to dental care?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say to the member opposite that this government certainly cares about our children, and we care, we care deeply about oral health in general. And that's precisely why we instituted the healthy smiles program. We brought together a number of disparate programs across the province and put them through our healthy smiles program into effect across the province. We look to our Ihins and to our public health units to do the kind of analysis to where more is needed and we are responding to that. I had the opportunity to review the report of the chief medical officer of health for the city of Hamilton, Dr. Elizabeth Richardson. And she shows quite clearly that there are health inequities across the greater Hamilton area. This is very useful. As we plan our program. We will continue to look very seriously at this issue and I'm sure the member will be look forward to our budget on Wednesday. Thank you.

>>MPP Mantha: Again to the Premier and again they are not covered under the healthy smiles program. Universal health care is a Canadian value. But decades of cuts and budget freezes by consecutive Conservative and Liberal governments have meant that instead of improvements to the system, like dental care and universal pharmacare, Ontario family services has seen erosion. Pamela's kids need to have a few teeth pulled. Pamela should be able to count on her government to help her. That's the government that cares. Why didn't the Premier build that government when she had the chance?

>>Minister Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, we continue to provide services across this province. As we reaffirmed in the throne speech, our government will continue to make the kind of inestments that ensure more people without a drug or a dental benefits plan will have access not only to more affordable prescription drugs but also for dental care. That announcement obviously will be part of our budget. In the meantime we do rely on the expertise of public health professionals of our local health integration networks to assess the overall health of our communities. There's no one size fits all to these issues, and we are committed to looking at evidence-based solutions for our vulnerable population. We will continue to do this. We've been doing it very successfully over the last 15 years. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Sattler to Premier Wynne Re: Dental Services

>> MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Speaker, the London brewing co-operative is a business in my community. The owners have always wanted to provide dental coverage for their workers. They've investigated group plans but the cost has simply been too prohibitive. The London brewing co-operative is a good employer. The owners give back to their community and they want to do the right thing by the people who count on them. Speaker, why hasn't the Premier helped the London brewing co-operative offer their workers dental coverage over her 15 years in office?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know as we have said a number of times, we recognize that there is a need for more dental care in this province just period. There is more need for dental care in this province. I would suggest there's more need for dental care across the country, Mr. Speaker, because when medicare was instituted in the '60s, it did not include pharmacare. It did not include dental care. And so it has fallen to provincial governments to put in place supports, which we have been doing, Mr. Speaker. And we recognize that there is more that needs to be done. We have implemented the healthy smiles program, Mr. Speaker. There are hundreds of thousands of children across the province who get that support, Mr. Speaker, but we recognize that there is more that we have to do. And I understand that the third party has recently discovered this is an issue because, if we look at their platform, Mr. Speaker, and when I sat down with their leader Andrea Horwath when I became the Premier, Mr. Speaker, there was no mention of this. There was no hint -- That this was an issue that they saw as a problem. We've been working on it, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to work on it.

>> MPP Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, one of the owners, Aaron, said that the NDP Plan dental care for everyone, would mean that they could finally offer employee dental coverage and really compete for the best -- out there. Dental coverage for their employee also help them grow their business and put more money in the pockets of their workers. In their 15 years in office, Speaker, why hasn't this Liberal government made it easier for employers to offer dental benefits to their staff?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my last answer, we recognize that there's more that we need to do. I think that the NDP is now at this point chiming in to the conversation and they have brought some ideas forward. I think what they're bringing forward are interesting ideas, Mr. Speaker, and we need to look at how we can provide more support. The fact is we have been working on this. We have implemented the healthy smiles program. We have grown that program, Mr. Speaker. But I will be the first to say that there is more that we need to do and that is in the context, Mr. Speaker, of understanding there are needs. And it goes back to a question that the Conservatives asked earlier, Mr. Speaker, and that is what are our plans in the budget? We have been very clear, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that there are more supports that are needed so that people can care for themselves and care for their families. Whether that's in the area of mental health or health care in general, Mr. Speaker, or education. We are putting those supports in place as we have done for --

>> MPP Sattler: Speaker, last week this Premier made one desperate announcement after another. People know that the current health care crisis is because this Liberal government -- People know that the current health care crisis is because this Liberal government has been cutting health care spending for years. What they have been ignored by Why is it now, just 72 days before the election, that the Premier is making these promises when she has had 15 years to deliver?

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I am happy to talk about the past, if that's what the NDP wants to talk about, Mr. Speaker. Because for many years we have been implementing supports in this province making changes whether it's full-day kindergarten, Mr. Speaker, whether it is advocating for retirement security enhancements which is now in place across the country,

Mr. Speaker. Whether it's free tuition, Mr. Speaker. We have been working to put supports in place to respond to the people of Ontario. And, Mr. Speaker, in terms of what was happening last week we're in the run-up to a budget. And every year when there is a budget, Mr. Speaker, we work to make sure that people in the province know what it is we are about and what we are putting on the table, Mr. Speaker. And what we are saying something there's a need for more money for mental health supports. There's a need for more money for hospitals. There's a need for more money for special education. When what I hear from the third party, Mr. Speaker, they're going to vote against

MPP Smith to Minister McMahon (Thibeault) Re: Sunshine List

>> MPP Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, my question this morning is to the Premier. Premier last week the list of Ontario's richest political insiders was released. Though call it the sunshine list. But for the hardworking people of Ontario there's not a whole lot sunny about it. People of Ontario are struggling to pay the bills and put food on the table. Speaker, Liberal insiders are continually getting richer and that's what we learned from last week's release of the sunshine list. It's getting hard for people in Ontario to understand. Just look at the C.E.O. Of Ontario power generation. He got a raise of \$400,000 this year. His salary is now \$1.5 million. \$1.5 million. The former head of IESO was the fifth highest individual on the list and worked for four months. Mr. Speaker, when an everyday person in Ontario can't pay their bills, why are the Premier's friends getting –

>> Minister Eleanor McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for his question, because it allows me to do a couple of things, Speaker. First of all I want to recognize that certainly on this side of the House, Speaker, we know that \$100,000 is a lot of money and the people of Ontario have a right to know how those dollars are being invested. I'm going to get to that in a moment. First of all I want to explain and just outline, Speaker, that our decision to release these salaries is in keeping with our openness and transparency on this side of the House, Speaker. We are being saluted internationally for our open government and that is why we're making and have made the 2017 public sector salary disclosure public as well as every disclosure dating back to 1996 starting this year, Speaker, available online and accessible in downloadable format. Again we're keeping that \$100,000 threshold and we're not going to change it, even though in today's dollars it would be 151,000, Speaker. We know that's a lot of money to the people of Ontario. We're proud of our public servants and the quality of service they deliver to Ontarians because that is exactly what Ontarians are asking for and we're delivering on that, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Smith: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about six-figure raises here on the sunshine list. \$400,000. That's acceptable to Premier Wynne and this Liberal government. Mr. Speaker, did you know that there's also a secret list of Hydro One millionaires out there? They've had their names hidden from the sunshine list this year. They sit around the boardroom table at Hydro One and give themselves raises. At the same time they're always asking to increase the hydro rates for the hardworking people of tomorrow. The Premier doesn't seem to think the people of Ontario deserve to know how much these people are making. But voters need more transparency, Speaker, not less. They're getting less from this government. Mr. Speaker, why does the Premier continue to hide the salaries of the people at Hydro One and their millionaires club work interesting?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the first thing I should let the opposition know ISS that publicly traded company, meaning that the list of Hydro One's executive compensation can be found online, Mr. Speaker. You'd think a party that has a leader that's a self-proclaimed so-called businessman should know that very well, Mr. Speaker. On top of that, last week, Mr. Speaker, it's absurd

that the member opposite is trying to criticize employees on the sunshine list but it came to light during the Ford administration's term running the city of Toronto the number of staff on the sunshine list doubled. This is contrary to what the Conservative leader Doug Ford said in the past. In 2010 the city of Toronto had over 5,400 employees on that list. In 2014, after leader Doug Ford had served on the budget committee, that list doubled to over 11,000, Mr. Speaker Let's not forget Conservative candidate Ron Phillips was on that list. Christine Elliott is on that list and 24 hours later he was canvassing --

MPP Armstrong to Premier Wynne Re: Dental Services

>> MPP Teresa Armstrong: My question's to the Premier. A single mom contacted my office because her 2-year-old son fell and hit his mouth. He has now has a painful abscess and needs his front teeth to be extracted. His mom is on social assistance. Her dentist contact healthy smiles program and they have agreed to pay for the extractions but not for the \$395 anaesthetic fee. Apparently this 2-year-old boy is supposed to sit still while his four incredibly painful and infected teeth are pulled without anaesthetics. Why is the Premier leaving so many people, including children, without the dental care that they need?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know the details of this situation, but I certainly hope that you would share them with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and in fact could have shared them with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care beforehand so we could have looked into it, Mr. Speaker, because that sounds like a situation that absolutely needs to be dealt with. I can't imagine that, in 2018, there's any health practitioner that would do that. But if you would share those details with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, then we will certainly look into it, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Armstrong: Children should never have to endure painful teeth extractions without anaesthetics. Parents shouldn't have to take on credit card debt to get the dental care that their family needs. No one in Ontario should live in pain because they can't afford to go to a dentist. The M.D.P. Has a plan for every Ontarian to access dental benefits either through work or on their health card. Why doesn't the Premier?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, again I will say to the third party it is great that at this point, for the first time, the NDP is starting to talk about dental care. We understand that there's more that needs to be done, Mr. Speaker. We have been looking for ways, by working with the local health providers, public health providers, Mr. Speaker, the healthy smiles program has been expanded. But we recognize that there's more that needs to be done so we welcome the interest from the third party. We are working to find more ways to expand the accessibility of dental care across the province, Mr. Speaker. This is a gap. It is absolutely a gap as pharmacare was gap when medicare was introduced in the '60s, Mr. Speaker. It needs to be dealt with and we are working on both fronts, both on pharmacare and to find ways to expand support for dental care across the province.

MPP Kiwala to Minister Jaczek Re: Hospital Overcrowding

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Providing all Ontarians with timely access to the care they need, whether at home, in the community, or in one of our outstanding hospitals is of the utmost importance to our government but also to me as a member of Kingston and the islands. We are fortunate in Ontario to have outstanding hospitals across this province. Our government has increased investments in health care each and every year, allowing us to treat more patients, provide better care and reduce wait times to some of the shortest in the country. Last year we invested over \$500 million in funding in our Ontario hospitals, which is a 3.2% overall increase to the hospital sectors. And this is on top of our 2016 investment of nearly half a billion dollars in our hospitals. We're also investing more than \$19 billion over the next ten years to improve and expand hospitals. Mr. Speaker, could the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please tell this House of the incredible new investments being made in our hospitals?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member from Kingston and the Islands for the question. Our government knows that everyone in Ontario deserves high quality care when they need it and our skilled, dedicated health care professionals deserve the right resources to deliver it. Last week I was proud to stand with the Premier and the Minister of finance at north York general hospital to make a historic investment of an additional \$822 million in Ontario's publicly funded hospitals. This 4.6% overall increase will increase capacity, decrease wait times, improve access to care for families across Ontario, and this funding will directly benefit people in Ontario. It will increase the number of essential services in hospitals, such as cardiac care, critical care, chemotherapy and treatment for stroke. It will decrease wait times for hips, knee, cardiac, shoulder and cornea surgery. On this side of the House we're investing where it matters. We're investing in the people of Ontario.

>> MPP Kiwala: Thank you to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care for her answer. And thank you for the continued support for Kingston health sciences centre, Brockville general hospital. And the state-of-the-art new Providence care hospital in my riding of Kingston and the islands. On Friday I was thrilled to announce that Kingston health science centre will be receiving a 8.2 million. Providence care will be receiving 1.04 million dollars. Brockville general will be receiving \$1.7 million for 2018/19 year. It was a tremendous moment in our community. Not only is this government investing in the resources needed to deliver high-quality health care, but we're also making critical investments in capital to ensure the success of our hospitals for years to come. Such as \$500 million for Kingston health sciences centre. Mr. Speaker, could the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please tell this House about the monumental capital announcement our government made last week –

>> Minister Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member for her ongoing advocacy not just for health care but in my previous portfolio I know how much she cares for the vulnerable in her community. Mr. Speaker, we're making sure that our world-class hospitals have the resources they need to continue saving lives. In Ontario we're fortunate enough to have sickkids hospital, one of the world's largest and most respected pediatric hospitals that transforms the lives of hundreds of thousands of children and families across Ontario. On Friday, our government committed to supporting a new patient care centre at sickkids, an investment of \$2.4 billion to transform the hospital into a 21st-century facility to continue providing leading edge care for children. This will give more children and their families faster access to the best possible care. We have a health care system here in Ontario that we are proud of. We'll continue to support our incredibly skilled and compassionate health care professionals to care for our loved ones.

>> MPP Michael Harris My question is for the Minister of transportation. I'm hoping that the Minister can explain to hardworking Ontarians why according to the sunshine list, the former metrolinx C.E.O. Made \$100,000 more, yes \$800,000 more, working only four months in 2017 than he did working the entire year in 2016. I'm wondering how that makes sense.

>> Minister Kathryn McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker. I apologize for my voice and thank you for the question. So it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the earnings of an individual metrolinx employee. But, however, metrolinx has a vital role to play in our plan to deliver an integrated regional transit system right across the gtha. We need to have the right leadership in place to make sure that we can deliver on time and on budget. Bruce Mcquaid left metrolinx a far stronger and more mature organization than he inherited and necessary work to make sure that the massive transit bill this side of the House is involved in is under way. Now our newer C.E.O. Phil Verser is overseeing the transformative bill. At the end of the day commuters in our region will see critical improvements -- improvements like new rapid transit lines, four times the number of weekly G.O. Trains and electrified service. Bring clean reliable service across the region. It would be good in that member would vote for some of the investments contained in our budget.

>> MPP Harris: Well, Bruce Mcquaid also left metrolinx \$100,000 richer than he did in 2016 and only worked four months. Speaker, neither the Minister nor anyone at metrolinx wants to answer because they know they can't make sense of it either. After being paid \$364,000 for an entire year's work in 2016, former metrolinx C.E.O. Bruce Mcquaid walked away with \$486,000, plus another 12 grand in benefits, in April 2017. That's only four months into the fiscal year, for only four months' work. How do they add that up, Speaker? I'll give the Minister one more chance. Will the Minister please explain how the metrolinx C.E.O. Got to walk away from four months of work pocketing \$100,000 more than his previous year's entire salary? And I guess the follow-up question to that is. Resign on his own accord or was he fired? Which one?

>> Minister McGarry: Thank you, Speaker. Our government continues to strengthen Ontario's efforts to become the most open, transparent and digitally connected government in Canada, proactively releasing information on public sector salaries is an important part of Ontario's open government commitment. We recognize \$100,000 is a lot of money. People of Ontario have a right to know how their tax dollars are being spent but it is inappropriate for me to comment on the earnings of one individual at metrolinx employee. Speaker, I find it interesting to hear this commentary from this member of the Ontario Conservatives. Under the Ford administration at city hall, the sunshine list doubled. Clearly have a double standard when it comes to criticizing employees on the sunshine list. That member, that party should vote for the investments contained in our budget for all of our transit programs in Ontario.

MPP Vanthof to Minister Jaczek Re: Dental Services

>> MPP John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Dalima Dubsi a senior living in Timiskaming shores. Like two out of every three seniors in Ontario she doesn't have dental coverage and can't afford the care she needs. Dalima has several serious health issues made much worse by infected teeth. She needs to have them extracted but it will cost \$4,000. Money she doesn't have. Why has the Premier ignored Dalima and 1.5 million seniors like her by failing to provide dental benefits to the people who built this province?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased that the third party is now engaged in this very important issue of dental care and oral health care. Of course in the throne speech, I'm sure the member does remember that our government has said specifically that we will be making investments to ensure more people without a drug or a dental benefits plan will have more access to affordable prescription drugs and dental care. Specifically last week, the Premier made a major announcement, something that's going to be in our budget, to help seniors in terms of their drug costs. So now we have eliminated the deductible and the co-pay for everyone over the age of 65, in addition of course to their access to prescription medication. Through our Ontario drug benefit plan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Vanthof: Premier, in desperation dalima wrote to you several years ago, pleading for you to act and help people like her. Your office answered with a letter but nothing else. Without access to dental care, her health and quality of life has been hurt, while you and your Liberal government have failed to act. All across Ontario, people like dalima are living in pain because they can't get dental care. They don't need pain medication. They need to get their teeth fixed. People are suffering. And for 15 years, your government has done nothing to help these people. The NDP Has a plan to fix this problem and deliver dental care for everyone. Why doesn't the Premier?

>> Minister Jaczek: Well, just to expand a little bit on what we announced last week, to make life more affordable for seniors, we know that what we're doing with our expansion of ohip plus for seniors will make life more affordable for some 2.6 million seniors and their families. As we committed we will work on building a larger dental program for lower income adults that will provide peace of mind for these families and individuals and allow them to enjoy life, have a better quality of life. It is interesting, Mr. Speaker, that over the last year, until very, very recently, until last week, the NDP Only asked one question about dental care in the whole of the last year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Moridi Re: 5G Tech Investments

>> MPP Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of research, innovation and science. Technologies and next generation networks are advancing at an unprecedented pace. We have already seen them become the new global standard for wireless communications. They have allowed wireless communication speeds to become 100 times faster than current rates and have advanced seamless communication between billions every connected devices. Such advancements have caught the attention every international technology companies, making nations eager to invest and advance these technologies in their own economies. Minister, can you inform the Speaker and --The members of the House how Ontario intebds to remain competitive in 5g and next generation digital economy.

>> Minister Reza Moridi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from Barrie for that very question. Mr. Speaker, lastonday in Ottawa, I was thrilled to be a part of this \$400 mill hundred billion of -- \$400 billion every investment in 5g networks. Ontario is partnering with Québec and federal government to accelerate to 5-g in our country, Canada. This province, Mr. Speaker, is investing \$67 million in Partnership with multinational technology corporations. This game-changing initiative will build two high-speed 5g in Ontario and give our companies access to these technologies. This will allow them to create transformative products and services to compete globally, improve communication services, advances our innovation economy and improve the day-to-day lives of Ontarians. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that answer. It is always exciting to hear about Ontario's role in such beneficial and constructive investments. These investments not only advance 5g technologies but they could lead to breakthroughs in fields like artificial intelligence, cyber security and other transformative technologies. We know that investments in these technologies will transform our economies as they will create new jobs and industries. I understand that this investment aligns with Ontario's successful \$650 million business growth initiative, which has helped the economy grow by promoting an innovations-based economy. Could the Minister please inform the House, 000 these investments in fifth generation technologies and next generation networks will drive innovation and strengthen they're's economy?

>> Minister Moridi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again thank you to the member for that question. Mr. Speaker, these new test bits will allow small and medium business enterprises to test and develop 5g technologies ahead of competition in order to stay ahead of the game. This will give Ontario businesses a first-to-market advantage in using these new technologies. Moreover, approximately 2,000 jobs will be secured in Ontario by S.M.E.S accessing these technologies. The initiative is will also expected to retain nearly 1,000 jobs in the first five years and secure global redevelopment mandate for Ontario companies. Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment and thank our Ottawa caucus members from Ottawa south, Ottawa West, Ottawa- Vanier, Ottawa-orléans, Ottawa West- Nepean for --City of Ottawa as well as for innovation economy in our province of Ontario, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Pettapiece to Minister Leal (Sousa) Re: Ajax Downs

>> MPP Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the Minister of agriculture and food and rural affairs. Speaker, it's been many weeks since the Minister of agriculture spilled the beans about Ajax downs. Apparently the government has passed a secret plan to sut shut down the casino and move the slots to Pickering. The people of Ajax have rallied together against this backroom deal. Ajax council passed a resolution -- or passed a motion calling on the government to do a fulsome, fair, transparent third-party review. Yet the mayor of Ajax tells me they haven't heard a peep from this government or the O.L.G. Radio silence, Speaker. Will the Minister finally come clean and confirm his government's plan to kill 1,700 rural jobs?

>> Minister Jeff Leal: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to answer the question of the member from Bruce Wellington. On Friday was a historic day in the province of Ontario, Mr. Speaker. We had the opportunity to be in beautiful flamboro downs. A number of our Colleagues were there for the announcement. On Friday we announced over the next 20 years, we will be providing \$105 million per year for a sustainable horse racing industry in the province of Ontario. But, Speaker, I just want to say all the leaders of Ontario's horse racing industry were there, whether it was a thorough bred industry, the standardbred industry or the quarter horse industry in the province of Ontario and they had one response on Friday. This is the greatest news for horse racing in Ontario in four decades in the province of Ontario.

>> MPP Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, for the Minister 's reference, I was talking about Ajax, the Ajax quarter horse racing business. Back to the Minister of agriculture, Speaker. Speaker, the secret plan to shuts down Ajax casino has been botched from the start. The town of Ajax was blindsided when they learned the news in the Peterborough newspaper. They weren't consulted at all. Now the government wants to politicize the process by announcing that Ajax casino will move to Pickering. The town of Ajax doesn't want this to happen. The town -- the people of Ajax don't want this to happen ants 1,700 workers losing their job certainly don't want this to happen. Minister, why are you doing it?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate the tremendous news that was provided on Friday to the horse racing industry, the breeders and all of the individuals involved with the industry, including Ajax downs, Mr. Speaker. We made point of reaffirming our commitment to the industry to support horse racing and to provide support especially for those small tracks. The member opposite is talking about the casino. He may want to talk to Rod Phillips, Mr. Speaker.] That member, that candidate was the one that was architect of modernizing the O.L.G., including some of those slots in those racetracks. But we are there to support Ajax downs for --Going forward. Being open and transparent. Throughout the process we are going to support this industry. Modernization of the casino business.

MPP Forster to Minister Flynn Re: Workers Benefits

>> MPP Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Premier. While in Thunder Bay in January, the Premier promised to meet with local workers to talk about the many issues that injured workers routinely face. But she hasn't. Despite two attempts by the workers to set up a meeting, nothing has happened. I can guess why. Maybe it's because the Liberals have once again promised big business a premium rate cut of 3%. That's after delivering a 6.2% rate cut last year, or maybe it's because her former chief of staff received \$440,000 last year for being the head of a nonprofit agency. The premium savings to the wealthiest continues to be borne by injured workers who routinely have their claims denied. So I ask the Premier, is this yet another Liberal promise made and broken?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Speaker, thank you to the member for that question. Certainly the workers and families in this province need to know that, should they suffer an injury on the job or even worse, that they will be looked after by workers' compensation system that allows them to collect, allows them to move on with their life, hopefully allows them to return to work, Speaker. I have met with numbers of injured workers' groups and injured workers themselves around the province of Ontario over the past three or four years, Speaker. Some of the advice we received, some of the advice we've received are changes we should be making to the workers' compensation board, is advice that I have heeded, Speaker. Certainly the Premier has supported that as well and we have made those changes. I think if you look, Speaker, back at the last three or four years, the changes have been made to the workers' compensation board in order to protect the interest of workers, Speaker, are something this province should be proud of. Do we have further to go? We absolutely do, Speaker. I'm in the process of looking at a number of initiatives.

>> MPP Forster: Well, Speaker, the government certainly hasn't dealt with the deeming issue. Maybe the Premier hasn't bothered to follow up with injured workers that she met at her election-style event in Thunder Bay because her own Liberal government continues to leave thousands of injured workers to fend for themselves after they are being misclassified through deeming in working in jobs that they never held for a wage that they never got. Speaker, the Democrats put forward amendments to bill 148 that would have prevented injured workers from being wrongfully assessed at the newer higher minimum wage rates but Liberals and Conservatives refused to support those amendments. Why is the Premier refusing to meet with injured workers in Thunder Bay as she promised?

>> Minister Flynn: Speaker, as I noted in the previous answer, I have travelled to Thunder Bay myself. I have met with the injured workers' groups right in the office of the member for Thunder Bay, Speaker. He's facilitated those meets. The injured workers themselves have come down to Toronto and have met in my

office as well. On a six-month basis, Speaker, we have injured workers come into the wsib. I attend their meetings as well, Speaker. Some of the -- three of the biggest asks we've had from injured workers was full indexation, Speaker, for those that are -- full indexation for those that had a partial disability, Speaker. We increased survivor benefits, took the steps to further dis incent employers from hiding claims, which was happening in the past, Speaker. But we also listened to first responders. We passed legislation that allowed for presumptive --Coverage. The changes that have taken place over the past three or four years have been based primarily on the advice that we've received from workers. And that's how it should be, Speaker

MPP Dickson to Minister Sousa Re: Horseracing in Ontario

>> MPP Joe Dickson: Thank you, Speaker. To the Minister of finance. This government, under the leadership of this Premier, has been working hard to develop a long-term funding solution for horse racing and the industry. As you know, the horse racing partnership fund provided \$100 million a year for the industry. In the 2016 budget, this investment was extended until 2021. While the government works with industry to develop a long-term funding model, the industry needs this funding stability to make important decisions around horse breeding and planning. On Friday, I was pleased to hear our government's in co-operation with the industry has developed a long-term funding plan to order to contribute to support this important industry. Can the Minister please explain the details of this new funding model?

>> Minister Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank and take the time to thank the member from Ajax for his dedication, his advocacy for horse racing industry, a champion --This member as many members on this side of the House have worked hard to ensure the horse racing industry in Ontario remains a thriving industry. That's why this government's worked together with the industry to develop the long-term funding commitment this will provide \$105 million a year for the next two decades. This agreement will provide the stability needed to strengthen and to save horse racing and breeding in Ontario. We know this industry is an important part of this province's heritage and an important part of rural communities. The new agreement will build on the co-operation between the industry partners, horse people, breeders, racetracks and more, which we know is essential to maximizing the success of the entire industry. Plau.

>> MPP Dickson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Minister. I was so pleased to hear that the government has listened to the needs of the industry and now racetracks across Ontario will now be able to better plan for the future of this historically important industry. I understand the long-term funding is essential for horse breeders so they can have stability in their planning, and in turn the racetracks are able to accommodate more capacity over the long term. I know that nearly two decades of stable funding is not the only measure this government is taking tone sure the stability of all racetracks, including Ajax downs. But there will also be programs available to smaller tracks to encourage innovation and expand their revenue sources. Can the Minister please explain the additional measures that the government is taking to ensure the success of small tracks in Ontario?

>> Minister Sousa: Thank you again to the member for Ajax. To further assist the industry, the Minister of agriculture and rural affairs will extend their enhanced horse improvement program and they'll also introduce a new racetrack sustainability innovation plan to support regional tracks, to help them innovate, diversify and expand revenue sources to achieve long-term sustainability and O.L.G. Will also provide additional funding to some racetracks that may be exp Eriencing financial shortfalls all with the intent of providing for security in the breeding and -- especially quarter racing which is important in Ajax. And to strengthen transparency and accountability for all horse people, racetracks ant public, a newly formed

Ontario racing board will be responsible for representing the interests of the entire industry. They will be responsible for providing three-year strategic plans and regular audited financial statements and reports and. Therefore it will be equally represented by all the racetracks and breeders, Mr. Speaker, so that we can have a strong, proud and sustainable horse racing industry for many years to come.

MPP Hillier to Minister Flynn Re: Ontario Workers Benefits

>> MPP Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of labour. I was recently contacted by Jeff Willkinson in my riding who had suffered knee and back injuries while at work for which he needed surgery. He made a claim with the WSIB and was granted health care and loss earnings benefits. When his four weeks of acute care were over, he was still suffering from his injuries so he applied for an extension of coverage. Jeff was denied this extension. The WSIB claimed he was now suffering from a pre-existing condition. However, that same day his employer was notified by the WSIB that their second injury enhancement funds request has been rejected because -- and get this -- the WSIB stated there is no pre-existing condition. Speaker, what medical and bureaucratic magic allows an injured worker to be both free from a pre-existing condition while simultaneously suffering from one?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Speaker, thank you to the member for his enquiry on behalf of a constituent, Speaker. Work continues on the WSIB. I think over the years, Speaker, there's been a partnership between the government and the workers' compensation system. As we have moved through that, Speaker, as we listen to advice from both business and from labour and from injured workers themselves, Speaker, we try to enhance the system. We try to make it work better, Speaker. And over the years we made I think tremendous, tremendous strides in that regard, Speaker. More people are returning to work. More claims are being processed faster. Speaker, obviously in the House, I can't talk to an individual case, were the member to give me some details on the case, perhaps at the end of question period today, I'd be happy to look into it. Had he done that previous to this, Speaker, I'd be happy to do that as well, Speaker.

>> MPP Hillier: Thank you, Speaker. Yes, I did speak to the WSIB and their liaison officer and that's why I'm here today and hearing more hocus-pocus from the sounds of it. Another employee in my riding filed a WSIB claim after suffering an injury on the job. She was rejected continued benefits because the injury was due to a pre-existing condition. The employer filed another claim with the WSIB for that very -- citing that same pre-existing condition. The employee's claim was rejected on the basis and I quote -- no evidence to support a pre-existing condition. Speaker, it's clear these aren't isolated cases of bureaucratic hocus-pocus. This is a trend that frustrates and circumvents WSIB's mandate to protect injured workers. Would the Minister not only stop the WSIB from dodging employers and workers from their benefits. But also tell us who are they lying to, the workers or the employers? I withdraw.

>> Minister Flynn: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you again to the member for this question on behalf of a constituent, Speaker. In response to a previous question I said over the years we've made improvements to the system as a result of advice we received from injured workers. Speaker, when we reinstated the full indexation of the benefits to full C.P.I. For the first time in many years, a huge move forward, those workers are starting to get a payment. They weren't getting in the past. We increased survivor benefits, Speaker. We took steps to make sure that employers were playing the game fairly as well when it came to abiding by the rules. We've listened to the first responders in this province, Speaker, passed legislation to allow for their coverage. But when we did the reinstatement of the full indexation, both opposition parties voted against those -- so when the time has come to make a difference for injured workers in this province, both opposition parties have been missing in action, Speaker.

MPP Gelinas to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Francophone Education

>> MPP France Gelinas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question is for the Minister of education. In the east of Toronto, there is an excellent francophone centre. For ten years, parents have been asking for francophone high school in in order to protect the French language for the next generation. Recently the V.M.O. School board expressed interest in acquiring one of the tdsb's schools, which had been declared a surplus school. Parents are worried that this school will not be equivalent to anglophone schools that have auditoriums, cafeterias and space for students. What will you do to make sure that these buildings will be equivalent, the same as English schools?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the member opposite for this very important question. Merci beaucoup. I really appreciate this question. Because, Speaker, I do want to point out that our government is absolutely committed to supporting students in French language education with learning environments that provide the best conditions possible for developing French language and cultural skills. And, Speaker, I have been having many conversations with members of the French community and I'm pleased and proud to say we have a very good working relationship. Because we into that our French public education system is currently in a state of growth in many parts of the province and we're responding with historic levels of investment. So absolutely in this instance, it's about boards working together. But let me just tell you a little bit about what we have been doing to fund French language school boards. We have been increasing annual funding by more than \$340 million, an increase of 25% since 2013. And I'm happy to say more