

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Monday, September 11, 2017

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Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Monday, September 11, 2017.

MIT did not receive any questions of interest.

MCI did not receive any questions of interest.

MSA did not receive any questions of interest.

Official opposition questions were on a number of topics including hydro rates, the opioid crisis and funding for the Ring of Fire. NDP Questions today remained largely related to the Sudbury by-election trial.

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

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

Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Monday, September 11, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown to Premier Re: Hydro Rate Reduction

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much. I want to start by welcoming all members back to the legislature. I know I know how hard everyone works over the summer in their constituencies and I want to acknowledge that and to welcome everyone back to do this part of our job in the legislature. And, Mr. Speaker, I know that the member opposite is very aware that people across the province saw a 25% reduction in their electricity bills this summer, Mr. Speaker. And you know as we do that that makes it much fairer for people across the province, particularly people in rural and remote areas who saw up to a 40 to 50% reduction, Mr. Speaker. The reality is -- the reality is, Mr. Speaker, that -- Facing many challenges in this province, and we have a responsible and a fair plan to address those -- Fair hydro plan is part of that. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, I asked the Premier a question about the proposed Hydro One rate hike, which is entirely in the government's power to stop. They've had 100 plus Ministerial directives where they've been interfere and meddle in the energy market in Ontario. Now there's a rate increase \$141 that Ontario families can't pay and the Premier's saying nothing. The Premier's not going to stop it. So I will ask again, will the Premier do the right thing and stop this hydro rate hike?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of travelling the province this summer, and all over the province I was talking to folks and hearing from them about changes that we're making, Mr. Speaker. There are more than 180,000 young people in postsecondary today paying zero tuition. Because of the -- because of the OSAP changes that we made, Mr. Speaker. We have people in this province who have seen

200, \$300 reductions on their electricity bills, Mr. Speaker, because our fair hydro plan. Across the province, residents have seen at least a 25%, 23 to 25% reduction on their electricity bills, Mr. Speaker. So we recognize that there are challenges that people are confronting. That's exactly why we have a fair hydro plan. That's exactly why we have reduced tuition and made it free for young people across the province, Mr. Speaker. Those are the results that –

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. I asked a question about the hydro rate hike and the Premier starts talking about tuition. Just for once it would be nice if the Premier answered the serious concerns that Ontario families have. Here we have a \$141 hydro rate hike at a time when the government promised relief. And what's unbelievable and disappointing is that the time they're trying to grab more money for hydro, Hydro One's about to pay \$6.7 billion for an American energy company and the evista C.E.O. Says this allows them to spread the cost burden out. Spread the cost burden out? Does that mean Ontario ratepayers would be subsidizing ratepayers in Washington and Montana? So maybe, for a third time, maybe the Premier can say yes or no, is she going to block that hydro rate hike?

>> Premier Wynne: So as I said, Mr. Speaker, the leader of the opposition knows that people have seen reductions on their electricity bills. He also knows that rate hikes are being held at inflation for the next four years, Mr. Speaker. Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the fair hydro plan put in place today on average 25% reduction for people across the province and for four years hold any increases at inflation. So, Mr. Speaker, I would say to the leader of the opposition, who has not brought forward a plan in any way, Mr. Speaker, to deal with electricity prices, that this is a fair plan and it helps people across the province. Mr. Speaker, I would also say to the leader of the opposition that, on top of that, we have got in place programs to help people who are living – Income, Mr. Speaker. He knows in rural and northern communities people are seeing a 40 to 50% reduction, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Brown to Duguid (Hoskins) Re: Opioid Crisis

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. And I had hoped that I would have gotten a response on the hydro rate hike. Instead I have the Premier say they tie it to inflation. It's gone up 300% on their watch and that's tied to inflation? They don't want to talk about that. Let me try something else. Mr. Speaker, to the Premier, yes or no, does the Premier support her government's decision to give a \$4.9 million grant to the billion-dollar maker of the deadly drug oxycontin?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I'm trying to think of the best way to say within the rules of parliamentary procedure that the member is completely all wet with that question, Mr. Speaker. That's the best way I can say it. We -- this government has never given any grant to any company that I'm aware of that -- that would be going towards the development or the establishment or the building of oxycontin. We do, Mr. Speaker, invest in research and development, and that's one of the reasons, Mr. Speaker, in this province why we have an unemployment rate at 5.7%. Lowest unemployment rate in 60 years because we make investments in r&d, Mr. Speaker. We make investments in our bioscience sector. We make investment in I.C.T., Mr. Speaker, and we're going to continue to make those investments.

>>Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. That was a pretty weak response and probably why the Premier didn't want to respond herself. Mr. Speaker, an internal government document from 2008 read, and I quote -- Purdue firm Canada has been named in three class-action lawsuits across Canada over the last year or so in connection with oxycontin line of painkillers. The note mentioned the company settled a \$600 million settlement in United States connected to oxycontin. But this government went ahead with the grant and then tried to hide the deal from the public. This is their work. This is a government document. MC can the Premier herself truly justify funding a company that is partially responsible for the opioid crisis Ontario is currently facing? And please don't pass it off. This is a very important issue to Ontario families.

>>Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, let me be very, very clear. This grant went towards the construction of a 26,000-square-foot expansion to produce manufacturing facility in Pickering. This funding supported a doubling of their r&d capacity in Ontario. The agreement specifically stated that Ontario's funding could not be used -- The leader was being straight up, Mr. Speaker, he would know that this agreement specifically stated that Ontario's funding could not be used directly or indirectly for any work related to the oxycontin

line of drugs. Mr. Speaker -- investments that we make in research and development that that party has always opposed, We're Lee -- leading the g-7 in growth. We're going to continue to make those investments in our research innovation ecosystem, Mr. Speaker .

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. This Liberal shem game at work again. No matter what the money was earmarked for in the grant, the money was given to the maker of oxycontin -- A drug rest responsible for countless addictions, overdoses and deaths. The drug that was the greatway to the opioid crisis in Ontario. Saying otherwise is telling the people of Ontario the Liberals gave money to a cigarette company but the company isn't using the money to sell cigarettes. Their logic does not work. There are no IFS and buts about it. The Liberals funded the production and distribution of oxycontin -- And it is unacceptable. The money Mr. Speaker -- Mr. Speaker, the government's own internal documents warned them what was going to happen. So my question is very direct, Mr. Speaker. Once again to the Premier -- Will the Premier apologize for her government's decision to fund the maker of oxycontin knowing full well its contribution to the opioid crisis in Ontario?

>>Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely shocked that the leader of the opposition --I'm shocked that he knows -- he knows well and this has been in the public domain that that grant had absolutely nothing to do with oxycontin. In fact, Mr. Speaker, his party is entirely devoid of ideas, ideas that I've welcomed for more than a year because we have a public health crisis on the opioid crisis right now and he takes his time to illustrate a story, to try and make a connection that he full well -- he well knows there's no connection to be made. Mr. Speaker, we have invested almost \$300 million in the opioid crisis. The Premier two weeks ago met with a dozen frontline harm reduction workers. I met with that same group myself last week. We are providing naloxone across the country. We are providing rapid access to treatment. Safe injection sites, Mr. Speaker. That party has had no ideas except

MPP Horwath to Premier (Naqvi) Re: Sudbury Trial

>> Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question's for the Premier. The trial of two top Liberal -- including the Deputy chief of staff got under way last week in Sudbury and it didn't take long for Ontarians to learn shocking new details about how far the Premier and her Liberal party were willing to go to win the 2015 Sudbury by-election. It's alleged that the Minister of energy demanded paid jobs for staff in exchange for running as the Liberal candidate in the by-election. Can the Premier tell us right now, does she agree

>> Premier Wynne: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I've been very open with the legislature. been open with the media and with the public about the allegations related to the Sudbury by-election, Mr. Speaker. As the leader of the third party knows, parliamentary privilege extend to all members, exempt the member from the Normal obligation to attend court if summoned as a witness, Mr. Speaker. I've said all along that I would be open and transparent and that I would work with the process, and that is exactly what I have been doing, Mr. Speaker. Therefore I will waive my parliamentary privilege. I will appear as a witness on September 13th, Mr. Speaker, and the matter is before the courts and we really need to let that process play out, Mr. Speaker.

>>Andrea Horwath: Speaker, it appears from the evidence that the only son the Minister of energy himself has not been charged is because, under the law, it's illegal to offer a bribe but not illegal to expect one. The Minister appears to be hiding behind a legal technicality, and the Premier appears to be- When will the Premier show the kind of leadership that the people of this province expect, admit that there was wrongdoing in Sudbury and ask her Minister to step down from Cabinet?

>>Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I think, Speaker, the leader of the third party and all members of this House very well know -- the legal process, independent legal process that is ongoing and refrain from asking questions that could have an impact on that important case that is going on. Thank you very much.

>> Andrea Horwath: Appropriate is the shenanigans that went on in Sudbury. That's what's highly inappropriate. Demanding jobs in exchange for running is a pretty serious allegation and Premier should take it seriously, too. She should ask her Minister of energy to step down from Cabinet until this trial

concludes, and it could be determined by the courts whether or not the Minister was offered or accepted a bribe. Will the Premier ask her Minister of energy to step down?

>> Minister Naqvi: Speaker, again I believe it's worth repeating that this particular matter is before the courts. There is actually court proceedings that are ongoing as we all know. It will be highly inappropriate for anyone to engage in speculation or commentary on that case and we should respect that process, and I urge all members to respect that process as closely as possible, Speaker, and move on to issues that are important to the people of Ontario and talk about issues that will improve the lives of Ontarians and build a fair Ontario.

MPP Horwath to Minister Naqvi Re: Sudbury Trial

>> Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My next question is to the Premier. Time and time again the Premier told Ontarians that there was nothing wrong with what happened in Sudbury. But last week during the trial we learned that while she was making those very assurances, she may well have known that her Minister of energy requested paid jobs for staff in order to run for her party. Did the Premier authorize this quid pro quo in order to secure the Minister's nomination for the Ontario legislature?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, again, you know, the leader of the third party knows the rules very well, and I fully -- I expect that she respects the rules as well. Speaker, as you know very well, and you and others in your role have clarified that when matters are before the courts, it is inappropriate to ask questions about those matters, inappropriate to answer questions about those matters. Speaker, in this particular instance, there is a court process that is ongoing as we speak and as it will be highly inappropriate for any member to engage in a line of questioning that could -- that could undermine that legal process. So therefore, Speaker, I urge all members to respect the rules of this House, to respect our independent judicial system. And refrain from asking questions that relates to that particular matter.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I find it unbelievable that the Liberals are lecturing the rest of us about the respecting of the rules. When it many could to the Sudbury by-election all we wanted is for the rules to be respected. The Premier's former Deputy chief of staff is accused of offering the Minister of energy a bribe to run in the Sudbury by-election. That's not in synch, Speaker, with the rules of the way people are supposed to behave in this legislature. We know from the testimony that the Minister requested paid jobs for staff to run in the by-election. Did the Premier direct Ms. Sorbara to give in to the Minister's demand so that he would agree to be a Liberal candidate in the by-election?

>> Minister Naqvi: Speaker, what's shocking and surprising is the leader of the third party continues to play politics when there's -- legal process that is ongoingment I think that, Speaker, is unacceptable. This House is not the court of law. This House is not the judge and the jury. This House, Speaker, is there to represent the interests of the people of Ontario. This House is here, Speaker, to talk about things that are important to the people of Ontario. This House is not here to interfere in a legal proceeding that is going on. I again urge all members, including the member of the third party, to respect the trial that is ongoing as we speak in Sudbury. Thank you, Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, it seems the only way to get the facts out of this Premier and her Liberal party is to drag them through court. When will this Premier stop hiding behind the trial, order her Minister of energy to come clean about his role in the actual scandal and start answering Ontarians' questions about what went on, what she knew and when she knew it?

>> Minister Naqvi: Speaker, I will repeat my answer again because I'm going to follow and respect the rule. That is the matter's before the court. It will be highly inappropriate to answer any questions relating to the case that is ongoing right now in Sudbury. Thank you.

MPP Romano to Premier Re: Ring of Fire Funding

>>MPP Ross Romano: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. The ring of fire is one of the greatest opportunities northern Ontario has ever seen. And yet, for 11 years since its discovery, this

government has claimed that the north matters. But actions speak louder than words. All we've actually received is announcement after reannouncement and always during an election year, but no actual progress to date. Leading up to the 2014 election, they promised us \$1 billion but then they axed it from this year's budget. Recently the Premier made yet another reelection announcement but they've already taken the money away, and they still haven't even bothered to speak to the federal government for help. It's just more of the same old story. So, Mr. Speaker, will the Premier just admit what we already know, that these announcements are nothing more than Liberal photo ops. Win over voter support in an election year?

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me welcome the member to the legislature. It's great to have you here. But I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that we probably need to offer you a technical briefing. The ring of fire, Mr. Speaker. In fact the billion dollars is in place, Mr. Speaker, and in fact we have worked with the first nations communities, with the mining companies, Mr. Speaker, very, very closely. We are now at a place where we actually have a framework agreement with all of the metawab first nations, Mr. Speaker, and we have an agreement with three of the first nations wab quay, Martin falls, Mr. Speaker, to move ahead on building community roads. That, Mr. Speaker, will mean that the infrastructure that will be paid for by that billion dollars. And we're moving ahead. That's a great success, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to that –

>> MPP Romano: Thank you. Again to the Premier. I appreciate the lecture but perhaps we can actually get a question and answer for this next question. During these last 11 years of inaction on ring of fire, this government has attributed the delay to promises that they were consulting with all of the impacted met wab communities, the right way. And to ensuring that all five of those communities were on board with the development. And yet in the Premier's recent development announcement, we learned that she has only obtained the support of three of the five communities. They have publicly stated they have not been properly consulted with and that they will oppose this development. Hows the Premier failed to secure their support as previously promised? And how can the Premier possibly keep this year's election promise in the face of such opposition?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that the member opposite at least was told by his policy folks that there is an agreement with the three first nations. That is a huge step forward. And, Mr. Speaker, I have met with the nine -- there are actually nine metawab first nations. I have met with them repeatedly with the Minister of intij nus relations, with the Minister of northern development and mines and, Mr. Speaker, it's a complex issue. There is no doubt about it. There are competing interests within the nine groups, Mr. Speaker. There are those communities are looking for slightly different things in terms of the infrastructure build. But, Mr. Speaker, it is important for all of us in this House to know that we will continue to work with all of those first nations. The fact that we have an agreement with three, Mr. Speaker, does not preclude that we will continue to work with the rest. We will in fact continue to work with all of the other six first nations, Mr. Speaker. They know that. They've sat at the table with me. They know that we're going to work with them, Mr. Speaker, and we will find a way to make sure that this development benefits all of the --

MPP Tabuns to Minister Naqvi Re: Sudbury Trial

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question to the Premier. The government is in court on a second matter today with former Liberal staffers facing criminal charges related to the Liberal government's politically driven billion-dollar cancellation of two gas plants. The Premier rolled out a public inquiry into this matter. Then on the same day that the public learned that the OPP Have raided government offices, she shut down legislative hearings before hearing from two Liberal staffers, one of whom is in court today. The Premier has done everything she can to prevent the public from learning the truth about her party's ruthless, self-serving culture. Why is it that the only way to get the truth out of this government is to haul them into court?

>>Minister Yasir Naqvi: Well, Speaker, perhaps the same advice to the member from Danforth as I gave -- as I was suggesting to his leader that, when it comes to matters before the courts, there is a very clear rule that is outlined in outstanding orders, well established in all parliaments that it is not the place of this House to discuss those matters, that they are properly before an independent court, which is independent

from the House and executive and lieutenant-general staff branch of the government. And it would be incumbent upon us to respect that process so I urge the member opposite to do the same. It will be appropriate, Speaker, to speak of those issues or to speculate about those issues in the House. Thank you.

>>MPP Tabuns: Again to the Premier. As a Cabinet Minister and campaign co-chair, the Premier went along with the gas plant cancellations that she should have known would cost over \$1 billion. Then after becoming Premier she admitted this was, quote, a political decision, unquote. Apologized and then she shut down legislative hearings and told everyone to just move on. But instead of learning her lesson, the Premier doubled down and spent the next four years enacting the exact same sort of politically driven policies from the hydro files and the transit file all to serve the Liberal party and not the people of Ontario. When will the Premier stop abusing the trust of the people of Ontario and put the interest of the public ahead of the interests of the Liberal party?

>>Minister Naqvi Well, Speaker, the members of the third party can ask the same question any which way. The advice remains the same which is this matter is before court and would be highly inappropriate for anybody to engage in any conversation, Speaker. The appropriate place for that is the court, where the proceedings are taking place. So, Speaker, I will not be answering any question as it relates to the legal matter. Thank you.

MPP Kiwala to Minister Hunter Re: Education Funding

>>MPP Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of education. In my riding of Kingston and the Islands we've seen a significant investment in school infrastructure including several new bills. Most recently St. Francis of Assisi which opened its doors this fall at Molly Grant elementary school just last year. I would like to thank the government of Ontario for supporting the creation of new and innovative spaces that ebb Hans student learning. While it's important to invest in infrastructure, it's obviously critically important to invest in programs that nurture students. Our government is investing in new and expanded well-being programs for students across the province. Ontario is an international leader in education thanks in large part to the hardworking educators and school staff. We always want to ensure that young people can reach their full potential and thrive inside and outside the classroom. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister, what is the Ontario government doing to improve the well-being for students across Ontario?

>>Minister Mitzi Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I want to say thank you to the member for Kingston and the Islands for this question. Promoting well-being is one of the key pillars of our government's renewed vision for education in Ontario. Last year we travelled across the province to hear from students, from parents, guardians and education partners about what well-being means to them. We've heard that student achievement is directly linked to well-being and a safe and welcoming learning environment helps everyone succeed. Students have said they want well-being from the front of the class to the back of the class, Mr. Speaker, and that's why just last week, Mr. Speaker, I announced that over the next three years we're investing \$49 million to focus on cognitive, social, emotional and physical well-being for students. As we've begun this new school year, these new investments in initiatives will strengthen the well-being of all students in our schools. We know that students are better able to learn when they feel safe and welcomed at school. And have the tools to succeed.

>>MPP Kiwala: Thank you, Minister. We are extremely proud of the investments made toward our government's renewed vision for education in Ontario. I also want to thank the Minister for her advocacy and for her consultations that she's had all across the province in our schools. These investments are helping to improve and expand the well-being programs for all students. This is very important that our government continues to support well-being programs that enable young people to achieve their full potential. Minister, can you please tell us more about what school board can achieve with the additional funding announcement announced for students' well-being?

>>Minister Hunter: Mr. Speaker, with this new funding we are increasing investment in the school mental health assist program from 1 million to \$6 million over three years. This doubling of this program provides boards with tools and leadership and resources to support our students. Increasing our support from 6

million to \$12 million for local well-being priorities such as bullying prevention, peer mentorship programs and breakfast programs to help students to thrive. By investing over 6 million in new supports and programs to support staff well-being and violence prevention, something our education partners like OSSTF and others have asked for, we will continue to build our commitment to work towards a climate of health and safety in our schools. As well we're investing in active transportation. Promote more options for students to walk or wheel or cycle to school and the investments are informing thousands, Mr. Speaker. Of students in Ontario.

MPP Yakabuski to Minister Flynn Re: Minimum Wage Increase

>>MPP John Yakabuski: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Minister of labour. This summer I travelled across the province for committee hearings on bill 148, from Thunder Bay to Ottawa, Windsor to Niagara. We heard from individuals and groups expressing their concerns about this legislation. The P.C. Party believes that the minimum wage should be raised in a responsible manner. And that includes -- conducting an independent -- That includes conducting an independent economic analysis so that all parties fully understand the ramifications every enacting these significant labour changes. Regrettably the government did the wrong thing when they voted down our amendment to require such an analysis before bill 148 comes into force. Will the Minister of labour correct this error and commit today to an economic impact analysis so all parties have the necessary information before these significant labour changes come into effect?

>>Minister Kevin Flynn: Speaker, thanks very much to the Honourable member for the question. Speaker, it's not a surprising question. It's a topic of the day, Speaker, obviously. But what I'm hearing so disconcerting, it's disappointing to the people in the province of Ontario because we know that that party has now come out and said it's against increasing the minimum wage in this province. And that is simply wrong much the leader has said he's not going to support a plan that will help so many families across this province, Speaker. There are people out there working 35, 40 hours a week, more than that, Speaker, and they're not able to get by. We've been out. We've been consulting with these people. We've heard from these same people, Speaker. We could not agree with that party any more, Speaker, than what they're saying. We don't believe anybody in this province that puts in a good day's work should not be able to pay their expenses, feed their family, buy clothes, Speaker. That is so disappointing.

>>MPP Yakabuski: Speaker, back to the Minister. Given your and your government's about-face regarding the \$15 minimum wage, it is perplexing to hear the Minister refusing to get all of the necessary information before enacting significant changes to employment standards and labour laws. As recently as January 19th of this year, the Minister said this about a \$15 minimum wage, and I quote -- when you dig down a little deeper into the issue, though, you realize it's got ramifications that go beyond the first initial political appeal. There's actually an awful lot of economic forces at play, close quote. Speaker, we believe the minimum wage should be raised to \$15 in the responsible way. But given the fact what the Minister's saying -- That now completely contradicts what he was saying earlier this year. What is the reason for not supporting -- Our pragmatic amendments beyond craft political calculations and trying to save the electoral fortunes of your sinking ship.

>> Minister Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you again to the member for the supplementary. Speaker, you're either in favour of bill 148 or you're opposed to bill 148, Speaker. Speaker, bill 148 will change the lives of ordinary working people in the province of Ontario. Who tells us that? The opposition parties that can ignore the economic analysis from the centre of economic policy and research, the Canadian centre for policy alternatives. He can ignore the letter, Speaker, that came from 53 economists -- Across Canada. We had a fellow with the Royal Society of Canada. Two former presidents, Speaker, of the Canadian economic association, one who used to consult with Jim Flaherty and the Conservatives, Speaker. Ignored the support of seven Nobel prize winning economists in the United States. Speaker, we have done our homework on this. We have gone out. To know that the best thing for people in the province of Ontario is to pass bill 148. They either support it or they oppose it.

MPP Vanthof to Minister Naqvi Re: Sudbury Trial

>>MPP John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of energy. The courts have heard testimony the Minister of energy demanded paid jobs for staff before he agreed to run in the Sudbury by-election for the Liberals. We want to know from the Minister, is this accurate?

>>Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. NDP Continues to The rules of the House, Speaker, and continue to ask questions that are before the courts. Speaker, it will be highly inappropriate for, as I said, any member to answer any questions that are before the courts, and I again urge the members opposite, especially the NDP, to let's focus on issues that are important to the people of Ontario, like bringing their hydro rates down, like increasing their minimum wage to \$15 an hour and making sure that people are living -- working in fair workplaces and have good jobs in the province.

>> MPP Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the Minister of energy. Just because it's not legal to accept a bribe doesn't mean it's the right thing to do. Does the Minister think it's appropriate for someone to accept a bribe just because there's no legal penalty for doing so?

>>Minister Naqvi: Speaker, this matter's before the courts, and it will be highly inappropriate to answer any of the questions here in the House .

MPP Vernile to Minister Flynn Re: Changing Workplaces Plan

>>MPP Daiene Vernile Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of labour. Speaker, I spent the last few months in my riding of Kitchener Centre listening to many constituents. There are many different conversations that we had and I know that I'm not alone when I say that the one topic that was continuously raised was the plan to address inequality in the workplace. I heard this in my office. I heard this at the grocery store. I heard this at many public events that I attended. I would agree with the Minister in saying that people are working hard to put food on the table and to take care of their children but they're finding that the money is just running out before the end of the month. They're working a full 35 to 40 hours a week and still they're struggling to make ends meet. Speaker, our economy is doing well, and while businesses are expanding and creating wealth, many workers are just not feeling it. Minister, what are you doing to help these workers and their families?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn:Speaker, thank u.thank you to my Colleague from Kitchener Waterloo for that important question. Something we've all heard of, Speaker, from families around our province and our ridings. It's true the Ontario economy is doing very well. Leading the g-7 in growth. Manufacturing sector's up. Lowest unemployment rates, Mr. Speaker, we've seen in this province since 2001 but there are families working 35 and 40-plus hours a week, Speaker. They're falling behind even while they're working hard, Speaker. He's not right. It needs to change. That's why we're mofg ahead with the fair works places and better jobs act, Speaker, bill 148. It's going to bring transformative change to our province's workplaces much it's going to ensure workers across this province are paid a decent wage, a living wage, Speaker, and they're treated with dignity and respect, Speaker. It's about doing what is right, what's fair and what's decent, Speaker. Ontario where greater opportunity is available for everybody, decent pay is available for everybody, Speaker. Thank you.

>>MPP Vernile: I would like to thank the Minister for his answer. I was able to join my Colleague this is summer on committee to hear feedback from Ontarians on this plan. As you know the committee travelled to 10 different cities. We heard from almost 200 Ontarians. In Kitchener Centre we heard from workers, business owners, labour groups, poverty reduction advocates and many more. Speaker, it was very clear, and I hope it's clear to members on the other side of the House to sat on this committee, that this legislation would have a profound impact on the lives of Ontarians, not only for people who are currently working for less than \$15 an hour, but for those who aren't given any notice of their work schedule, those who can't risk taking a day off when they're sick, those who are being paid less than their full-time counterparts and those who aren't afforded any time off to deal with difficult situations and those who face intimidation when trying to organize. Speaker, could the Minister please tell us what he is doing to address these specific concerns?

>> Minister Flynn:Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member from Kitchener- Waterloo for that

supplementary. It raises what I think is an incredibly important point, Speaker. The legislation is not just about the minimum wage but putting forward a plan that's going to provide wage equality, regardless of whether you're full time, part time, temporary, paid sick days for the first time in the province of Ontario, Speaker, for all workers, increasing their vacation time after five years, and leave the rest for by members of the opposition for survivors of domestic and sexual violence and more fair and transparent organization, Speaker. They want to see more robust enforcement in the workplaces in the province. After a summer of dancing around the ish issue and having this opinion this day and this opinion the next day, Speaker, the opposition finally announced they will be voting against it, Speaker. That's disappointing to me, Speaker, because they'll be voting against giving 30% of the people in this province, Speaker.

MPP Coe to Minister Hunter Re: Special Education Funding

>>MPP Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker. To the Minister of education. A recent social media post on the Ontario autism coalition Facebook page showed that parents of a local school are asking for volunteers from the community to help with special needs students in the classroom. Speaker, if teachers, parents and students are desperate for more resources and supports for special needs students, this Minister simply has not done enough and parents are reaching out for help. When will the Minister stop ignoring the pleas of teachers and students and put in place more special needs resources and supports in Ontario schools?

>>Minister Mitzi Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I am a bit confused by the member opposite's question given that he is the education critic and he knows full well, Mr. Speaker, that we have increased our support for special education in this province, and we're supporting young people in ensuring that they get the help and the support that they need. Mr. Speaker, I want to actually tell the member opposite how we're supporting students with special education needs. Funding has increased to \$2.86 billion, and it's a 76% increase since 2003. We know that every student in our province deserves the access and the support to be successful in schools, including students with special education needs. Mr. Speaker, just in the recent grants for students' needs, we have provided additional funding. So that there are more caring adults in schools. 2,400 more caring adults in schools to support all of our learners and especially students with special –

>>MPP Coe: Thank you, Speaker. And back to the Minister of education. Minister, too little too late. Speaker, this is the state of special needs education under the Minister and the Liberal government. Because of the government's scandals, waste and mismanagement over the past 14 years, they can't afford to provide students and teachers with the special needs resources they desperately need. Parents and teachers, Speaker, are working harder, paying more and getting less under this government. When will this Minister finally take concrete action and support teachers and their students with special needs?

>>Minister Hunter: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, we've dramatically increased funding for special education and we will continue to do so. Let me tell you about one program and that's what we're doing for students with autism. Mr. Speaker, our government is moving forward with an unprecedented investment in autism services. In 2016, we announced a historic \$500 million more to improve autism services in Ontario including \$39 million for autism supports in schools. We're working very closely with my Colleague in the ministry of children and youth services as they implement Ontario's autism program to provide families with more flexibility and individualized services. This school year, school boards are receiving more than \$2.86 billion as I said. A 76% increase since 2003 in special education. We've also invested --\$77 million to strengthen our schools' capacity to improve the learning environment for students with special education needs. Mr. Speaker, we're supporting --

MPP Natyshak (Gretzky) to Minister Mauro Re: Flood Clean-up

>>MPP Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Speaker, for the second time in less than a year, Windsor and Essex county residents have been hit by debilitating floods. Residents have experienced power outages, from property damage and more than 5,000 basements were flooded. For the second time in 12 months Windsor residents have had to rebuild and recover from this debilitating flood. The Premier tweeted that she was ready to help but we've really seen nothing. Mr. Speaker, all staff continue to be spread thin desperately trying to keep up with the amount of debris that

needs to be cleared. For the health and safety of our region the people of Windsor- Essex need action now. When will the Premier back up her tweets with action by making available all provincial resources without delay and unnecessary red tape?

>> Minister Bill Mauro: Speaker, thank you very much. I want to thank the member for the question and I will begin by thanking, Speaker, and congratulating and expressing our consideration for the first responders, Mr. Speaker, all officials, for the volunteers who are on the ground again for the second time in less than a year and doing what they can to effect as best possible the situation that people find themselves in through no fault of their own. What happened in Windsor- Tecumseh, Lakeshore, Amherst, cycles municipalities that were affected is again unprecedented. We understand that this is becoming more normal unfortunately and we need to do everything that we can to prepare ourselves as best we are able all across the province and all across the country I would say, and I will more specifically address the member's question in the supplementary, Speaker, but I would say that to imply in any way, shape or form that we have not responded. Is incorrect and I'll provide some of that detail in the supplementary.

>>MPP Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. We acknowledge that the Minister has activated the disaster recovery assistance program, a program that has left people from last year still waiting for help. But this funding does not address the fact that municipal resources are wearing thin and staff are being stretched to their limits. Garbage trucks cannot keep up with the volume of debris and are filling up after visiting only a handful of House s. We know that the cleanup process would be expedited if this Liberal government would stop giving the city the runaround and allow garbage trucks from Michigan to cross the border in order to help. They keep passing the buck from ministry to ministry, leaving the municipalities to try and coordinate services themselves. Speaker, we know the Premier is preoccupied with her testimony for the bribery scandal, but why is she letting this scandal get in the way of -- Assisting the people of Windsor- Essex in their time of need?

>>Minister Mauro: Mr. Speaker, thanks again. Speaker, in terms of people who are still waiting for assistance from last year, yes from time to time when the program is activated, some people don't get the assistance as quickly as we will like. I would say most people get it very quickly. Sometimes we need receipts. We need complete applications before the support can be expedited to them. In terms of the issue related to garbage trucks, this is the first time -- issue related to the garbage trucks, this is the first time I've heard that, Speaker. If the member has anything to come to me in short order. This program was just reconstituted two years ago in consultation with Amo. It had their support. It no longer requires local fund-raising, and because of that significant change, the support to the people who need it can't happen much quicker. Now sometimes within weeks or months rather than a much longer period of time. So a newly designed program, it offers support to low-income people on sewage backup. It's not intended to be a replacement for insurance as has been suggested by some of the leaders of the opposition.

MPP Potts to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Daycare Funding

>>MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister responsible for early years and child care. Now, Speaker, I'm very proud that our government is committed to ensuring families have access to quality and affordable child care in Ontario. In my own riding of Beaches- East York, I have many new and very young families who are starting to call east Toronto home. And they need good local day care. And I've heard from so many families that they are just not enough spaces for child care and that they can afford, and I want to ensure that we are providing child care options for these families. And it was partially because of this that I brought in my private members' bill that helped regulate day care wait list fees. Speaker, account Minister responsible for early years and child care tell us what this government is doing to make sure that families' needs for new affordable and safe day care spaces are being properly met?

>>Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hardworking member for Beaches- East York for this very important question.

[Applause] Strong advocate for constituents on this issue. Speaker, I have heard about the challenges families across the province face when it comes to finding quality affordable child care, and I want to

assure the member that our government is working hard, working hard every day to help Ontario families find more affordable quality child care options. We are taking swift strong action and that's why in our 2017 budget we announced an additional \$200 million to transform, transform Ontario's child care system. This investment will help 24,000 more children access quality licensed care across the province. And I'm happy to tell the member from Beaches- East York that this investment in Toronto will see an additional \$34.5 million going towards child care in the city and that brings the total number and amount to \$368 million going to -- This will help 3,880 new licensed child care spaces for children. Think about that. This funding will change lives.

>>MPP Potts: Well, thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for that answer. The tireless work she is doing on this file is very much appreciated by young families across the province. And it's encouraging, Speaker, to know that the government is working to address the needs of Ontario families. But I recognize there's a lot of work to be done and families are keen to see how Kingston road montessori school and centre 55 which has recently announced an application for 40 new spaces at Ted reeve arena. Speaker, would the Minister please let us know how the ministry is working and how all these institutions bring new child care spaces on line?

>>Minister Naidoo-Harris: I'm pleased to answer the member's question and this is a question I get asked often. In fact last year we announced our commitment to give 10,000 more children access to licensed child care spaces over the next five years. It's a historic investment and one that will benefit all Ontarians. As part of this expansion, our government committed a massive \$1.6 billion in new capital funding, which will support the creation of 45,000 new spaces in publicly owned buildings across Ontario.

[Applause] And we are well on our way. We've already received proposals for building new child care spaces in schools and I'm happy to report that the number of positions has exceeded, exceeded expectations. That's amazing. That means child care spaces will now be coming T many schools all across the province. And I am pleased to say there will be another round next year and I encourage parents, families and child care providers to get in contact with their local service managers to see how they can get involved.

MPP Fideli to Minister Sousa Re: Provincial Budget

>>MPP Vic Fideli: Thank you. Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the finance Minister. For years this government has been presenting our legislature with made-up finance numbers. Whether it was from the independent experts or the government's own confidential Cabinet documents received in the gas plant scandal, it's been proven that the numbers they present to the public are simply made up to fit their story. Last week the financial accountability officer provided irrefutable evidence -- Last week the financial accountability officer provided irrefutable evidence they were using, quote, unlikely assumptions for dead reduction claims. He projects, quote, steady deterioration in the budget deficit over the next five years. All of their made-up numbers don't come anywhere near historical numbers. It's only wishful thinking. Speaker, I would ask the Minister, if he can't present the province's finance -- With integrity --

>>Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again by thanking the financial accountability officer for the work he does, and their department, recognizing such -- they provide which we recognize. Every year similar accusations are made by the member opposite and, Mr. Speaker, every year we exceed our targets. Every year, we exceed our targets at public -- and public accounts confirms that. We beat our deficit by \$3.3 billion this year, Mr. Speaker. We are loo the leading jurisdiction in north America when it comes to economic growth. Our unemployment rate is at 5.7%, Mr. Speaker, and we're on track to balance the budget as we said we would this year, next year and the year after that. Thank you.

>>MPP Fideli: Back to the finance Minister. And this the blistering commentary from the F.A.O. Wasn't enough, the auditor general has now weighed in. She said this government's annual deficit is understated, that debt is understated and accumulated debt is understated and we're not talking nickels and dimes. The auditor says our deficit is \$1.billion more and our net debt is \$12.5 billion more than reported. So for the second year in a row, the auditor has said, quote -- based on the evidence, the statements are significantly misstated. Both of the legislative officers have told us this government's numbers can't be trusted. Speaker, I ask the Minister why does it always take the financial accountability officer, the auditor

general or the O.P.C. To get to the truth in Ontario?

>>Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, investors around the world are investing in Ontario for a reason. They recognize that Ontario's economy is growing. They recognizing our fiscal responsible approach to growing the economy, investing in things that matter are working and our plan is working. We're borrowing \$30 billion less than we had anticipated. Our net debt to G.D.P. Is lower now than was anticipated and tracking to go further down. Mr. Speaker, as we produce and as we move forward we're taking every necessary step to grow the economy. And as we grow the economy it enables us to source more opportunity to invest in things that matter to Ontarians, things that that member and his party opposite have voted against. They voted against providing more free tuition for our students. They voted against the very nature of extended pharmacare for every young person under 25. These are the reason we're able to do that. We're take the steps necessary in steps that make us competitive and balance the books.

MPP Gelinas to Minister Naqvi Re: Sudbury Trial

>>MPP France Gelinas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Premier. Speaker, I spend the weekend at community events in and around Sudbury and Nickel Belt. Everywhere I went, people were lining up to talk to me about the bribery trial. The god people of Sudbury are ashamed of the three-ring circus that the Premier has created in our hometown with the bribery scandal. The Premier needs to stop hiding behind legal technicality, take responsibility for her actions and the action of her staff and party members. What will it take for the Premier to realize that the longer she hide behind technicalities, the less the people of Sudbury and the people all over Ontario for that matter, can trust her and her Liberal government.

>>Minister Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, this matter's before the court. It will be inappropriate to answer any questions relating to this matter.

>> MPP Gelinas: Speaker, back to the Premier. Time and time again the Premier has said there is nothing wrong, nothing wrong went on in Sudbury, but it was all business as usual. But it was not, Speaker. It took only a day of testimonies in the bribery trial to find out more shocking information about the length of which the Premier was willing to go to win back Sudbury. Speaker, can she not see the damages that she is doing to all of us? The damages she's doing to our democratic institutions, damages she's doing to the Legislative Assembly and the process that goes on in here. Does the Premier think the people of Ontario deserve to learn the truth from her, learn the truth from their Premier?

>> Minister Naqvi:Speaker, the people of Sudbury very much know that this matter is before the courts, and people of Sudbury very much respect the judicial process and the Independence of that process. It will be highly inappropriate, Speaker, for anyone in this House to speak to these issues given --The court case is ongoing as we speak.

MPP Mangat to Minister Hoskins Re: Pharmacare

>>MPP Amrit Mangat: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. This summer, I have been in my great riding of mississauga-brampton south talking to my constituents about what matters most to them. One of the top topics in these conversations health care, specifically pharmacare. Our government believes that having access to necessary prescription medications is critically important in this province. That is why I'm proud that our government has taken immediate leave towards establishing the provincial pharmacare program for children and youth. Can the Minister for health care and long term please inform this House of the historic investments our government is making in Ontario's children and youth?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I'd like the member from Nickel Belt, the lines waiting to see me across the province, families, individuals, young people who want to ask me about ohip plus, our pharmacare program. That we're rolling out on January 1st. I want to tell everybody that we are on track. We'll be on time, and it's remarkable access for every Ontarian with a health number, ohip number to more than 4,400 medications, absolutely -- More than 4,400 medications absolutely free of charge. No co-

payment. No annual deductible. No up-front costs. Mr. Speaker, that would be for asthma drugs. It will be for drugs to treat epilepsy, drugs to treat H.I.V., rare diseases, cancer, skin conditions, ear infections, the works. We're all very proud on this side of the legislature, Mr. Speaker, for a program that's. Dramatic effect for 4 million Ontarians beginning January 1st.

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