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Unedited Transcript

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown to Minister Matthews Re: School Closures

>> MPP Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and happy international women's day to everyone. My question is to the Deputy Premier. Since her Colleague, the Minister of education, ran away from C.P. Reporter Allison Jones yesterday when asked about school closures, maybe she will answer her question today. Mr. Speaker, how many Ontario schools are under threat of closure?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Well, Speaker, happy international women's day as well. I am delighted to be here today to talk about significant improvements in education right across this province. You know, Speaker, when we took office, only 68% of students were graduating from high school. Only 68% of students. We now have exceeded 85%. So what I should tell you is that our education system is delivering real results. Our students are doing -- So, Speaker, when you measure our education system by the success of our students, which is I think a very fine way to measure the success of our education system, Ontario is a world leader. People are coming from around the world. To understand what happened here. So students -- Address in the supplementary the question that was asked. But what's really important is our students are rocking.

>> MPP Scott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Deputy Premier. So yesterday the Minister of education said that it's not about the number of schools and said that she wouldn't give an arbitrary number. Well, that's great because nobody wanted an arbitrary number. They want a real number. So I'll try again. Mr. Speaker, how many schools are under threat of closure? Is it as high as the 600 schools the Minister previously identified?

>> Minister Matthews: Well, Speaker, I think the numbers speak for themselves. Since 2003, we've increased education funding to \$22.9 billion. That's an increase of almost 60% since they were in office, Speaker. And despite declining enrollment, per-pupil funding has increased more than \$4,500, an increase of 63%, Speaker. Funding for rural boards have increased 43% since we took office, despite the climbing enrollment of 14%. So, Speaker, since 2003, our government has opened 810 new schools -- Renovated another 780 schools -- 450 real and improved schools in rural Ontario.

>> MPP Scott: Well, Mr. Speaker, I still didn't get a firm number of how many scoops you're closing. Let's talk about our lady of peace in Vaughan. There's 97% full and has both an English stream and French immersion program. But because of this government's twisted priorities, it will close its doors in June. The Liberals may have made up their mind about our lady of peace and signaled that there will be -- More closure to come when they voted down our motion on a moratorium on school closures but it's not too late for them to change course. They can still announce a moratorium today. I'm giving you a chance. So, Mr.

Speaker, will the Liberals announce a moratorium on school closures until they can get the process right?

>> Minister Matthews: As I was saying, we build, they cut. We have built 810 new schools. Significantly renovated another 780. And that includes 450 new and improved schools in rural Ontario, Speaker. We are investing -- Better schools, Speaker, because we are a party that believes in education. We are a party that believes every child in this province deserves the opportunity to achieve their full potential, and they do that in schools, Speaker, and that's why we are making the investments we are.

MPP Scott to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Wait Times

>> MPP Laurie Scott: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. This past week I was shown a letter written to a doctor. It read -- your patient will be placed on the waiting list for a surgical consultation. Can you guess how long that wait time was? It is and I quote -- approximately two years. Now, Mr. Speaker, two years is far too long a wait for surgical consultations. How is that an acceptable wait time for Ontario patients?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, not knowing the specifics of this case, but generally I would agree with the member opposite that two years is too long of a period to wait. That's why we're working with our physicians, with our frontline health care workers, with our primary care providers that are that foundation and often a gateway to specialists access that we're working with them through a variety of different means to speed up the two elements of referral which are both equally important. The time for individuals to get from their family doctor or their nurse practitioner to see a specialist in the first place and then if a specialist deems that a further intervention, a surgical procedure for example is required, that time as well. So we're working despite the fact, Mr. Speaker, we have across the board, particularly with regards to surgery, either the best or close to the best wait times in all of this country, Mr. Speaker. We're continuing to make improvements.

>> MPP Scott: Back to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. On Monday at the queensway- Carleton hospital, 22 patients were left on stretchers in the hallway waiting for a room. One gentleman was put behind a privacy screen and given a wheelchair to sit in because there wasn't a stretcher for him. Mr. Speaker, stretchers in the hallway, no beds available. Is this the health care legacy that this government wants to leave behind?

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and, you know, with regards to queensway- Carleton hospital and other hospitals that have over recent weeks have experienced capacity issues, and it is, you know -- I don't find it acceptable any more than the member opposite does. That's why we're continuing to make investments so that we can alleviate those pressures. The member opposite needs to -- I think would probably agree that there is an element of this that we saw an outbreak of flu but also respiratory illnesses this winter. Part of the effect that we're seeing is an annual effect due to the flu and this flu was worse certainly than it was last year. But, Mr. Speaker, we're making investments including in queensway- Carleton hospital and others to ensure that they have the necessary funding to do important work they do. The Ottawa heart institute a 4.1% increase in funding last year. Royal Ottawa health care group 2% increase. The Ottawa hospital \$14 million 2% increase as well to help them deal with these capacity issues.

>> MPP Scott: Back to the Minister. Leo Levesque, vice-president of patient care and chief nursing executive at queensway- Carleton hospital had this to say and I quote -- I would say it is a crisis when you are cancelling surgery and you've got 22 patients who are on stretchers and beds are being pushed aside to make room for hospital beds. Mr. Speaker, those are the words of frontline health care workers. How is it acceptable for Ontario hospitals to be forced to use office space as makeshift hospital rooms? It's not acceptable. You have to do something.

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned in the previous response -- We are working -- we're making the necessary investments to allow those hospitals and others across the province to deal with those capacity issues but what we don't do, Mr. Speaker, is we won't make the kind of commitments and promises that the party opposite did to cut 100,000 jobs, many of them in the health care sector as they did in the last election. We're not going to do what they did when they were in government, Mr. Speaker, and literally close dozens of hospitals across this province and cut thousands of hospital beds. And I know the former Minister of health is suggesting that they somehow didn't, but the facts remain that they closed dozens of hospitals when they were in government, Mr. Speaker. We won't do that. We will make investments. We made a 3%, almost 3% increase in the health care budget last year. We continue to invest in those -- Health care system that we're proud of, and we have some of the best records in the country in terms of performance.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro 25% Reduction Plan

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. I also want to wish all the women legislators and staff and all the people that work in this building who are women a happy international women's day as well as all the women across Ontario. My question's for the acting Premier. Over the past few months, I've been welcomed into the homes of many women in this province who are worried about their skyrocketing hydro bills, women like Adele from Cambridge, a single mom who fought back tears as she told me how her children go with less because her hydro bills have doubled in recent years. Why doesn't the Liberal government come up with a plan that will permanently lower Adele's hydro bill and invest in the service that is her family needs instead of saddling her kids and their kids with the bill?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Well, thank you, Speaker. I want to start by saying that we are implementing a plan that reduces the average hydro bill -- 25%, Speaker. We have already done the first 8% and we are looking to take the further 17% off later this year, Speaker. So let's remember, we are implementing a plan that will help people like Adele. Speaker, that is for all the House holds, 25% on average. For those who are low-income families, there's even more support, Speaker. And for those who live in the rural parts of Ontario, there is even greater relief. We have a plan. We're implementing a plan. It addresses the stories that we heard. From people across this province, Speaker. I'm proud of it. I wish the leader of the opposition would stand up and say good work.

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, Adele doesn't just need lower hydro bills. She needs good health care. She needs good schools for her kids. Instead of investing in health care and education, the Premier's hydro plan gives an extra \$40 billion to her well-connected friends on bay street. Bringing Hydro One back into public hands will put \$7 billion into the public purse, Speaker. It will mean we can invest in families like Adele's again. Doesn't the acting Premier think that making \$7 billion is better than spending \$40 billion, Speaker ?

>> Minister Matthews: You know, Speaker, I was really pleased when the NDP Actually came up with a plan to bring down hydro prices, because we had heard lots of identification of the problem from the opposition parties, both parties. We didn't see much by the way of solutions. Forth with a plan until I read the plan. And there just was nothing there that would bring down hydro prices, Speaker. There was nothing there that would achieve the goal that we all want, which is to provide immediate relief for people who are facing real challenges when it comes to their hydro prices.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, if there's nothing there, why did they scramble so fast to put -- All across Ontario, Speaker, we need to invest in schools and in

hospitals and in child care and in stronger public services. Stopping the sell-off of Hydro One and returning it to public ownership will give the people of this province a \$7 billion payday and lower their hydro rates permanently. How is the Liberal government's \$40 billion investment in bankers on bay street going to help women like Adele, her children and her grandchildren live a better life?

>> Minister Matthews: Well, Speaker, let's be clear. Our plan is vast. It is substantial. It is widespread. It is long-lasting. The NDP Plan, sadly, is very vague. It relies on these expert panels to be struck sometime in the future. Their biggest idea, to buy back the shares of Hydro One does not take one penny off one bill in this province, Speaker. There is zero evidence that keeping -Speaker, as far as I could tell, the only idea. To get the Deputy leader elected leader, then Prime Minister of Canada and he will give them 5% off.

MPP Horwath to Minister Chiarelli (Matthews) Re: School Closures/Community Hubs

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My next question is for the acting Premier. In her one-year report on the progress of her community hubs plan, the Premier told Ontarians, and I quote, she believed the province needs to remove Barriers to community hubs and that she was proud to say that they are doing just that. But a freedom of information document the NDP Obtained revealed that the Liberal community health plan is being threatened by what? By the Liberals' own so-called school board modernization plan, and they know it. Can the acting Premier tell us why the Liberal government is telling Ontarians one thing in public but acknowledging in private that they are doing the exact opposite?

>> Minister Bob Chiarelli: Thank you, Speaker. We are actively encouraging and supporting opportunities for community hubs, Speaker, to use excess school space in particular. The ministry of infrastructure's embracing an active role in making it easier for community partners to offer integrated and coordinated services through community hubs. In fact the Minister of education had about \$450 million, Mr. Speaker, to work with school boards and communities and municipalities, with particular emphasis on rural communities, Mr. Speaker, to engage community hubs. There are many services and communities that can benefit from coming together in a school, around a school and and mating the community, Mr. Speaker, to come together to -- animating. There's money in the budget, Mr. Speaker. There are resources that are made available to community leaders to enable them --

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, the F.O.I. Also shows that some schools calculated as being underutilized, and I'm quoting now from the F.O.I. -- some schools calculated as being underutilized are actually at full capacity. The government's own documents show that they are closing fully utilized schools based on the failed Mike harris-era funding formula that the Liberals have not had the political will to fix after 14 years. Since this government knows that their formula to determine school closures is broken, can the acting Premier please explain why their government continues to close schools across this province on that?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Speaker, I was very pleased yesterday to see that the Minister of infrastructure and the Minister of education sent a letter to community partners to municipalities, to school boards to say the best solutions are local solutions. Work together to find the best use, to find the opportunities in your community to put these schools to work, Speaker. There is hard work to do. When enrollment is declining, Speaker, we need to put resources into teaching our students. But those schools are an important part of a community. We all

understand that in our own communities, and that's why we're inviting and we're actually putting money into, Speaker, the notion that if communities -- School boards who serve the same geographic area can work together, if the municipalities and communities all work together. To device proposals for these buildings, Speaker, we want to be --

>> Andrea Horwath: People are already doing that and Liberals are still closing the schools. They're doing exactly the opposite of what the Deputy Premier just said. The Premier and her Liberal government are telling communities that they support community hubs and they're telling parents they're investing in schools, but in the reality the Liberal government has closed 20 -- rather 227 schools since 2011, while knowing that at least some of those schools were at full capacity. With some even being used as community hubs, housing child care centres for example. Now can the acting Premier explain, explain to the people of this province. Why she's closing full-capacity good neighbourhood-supporting schools when those families who depend on them are watching them fulfil. A broken funding formula from 14 years ago?

>> Minister Matthews: Speaker, on this side of the House we actually respect school boards and respect the difficult decisions that they have to make. But what I can tell you is that we are active partners in this new model of community hubs, Speaker. We think that there are opportunities here. We're inviting municipalities, community groups, school boards to work together to find these solutions. But I do want to repeat, Speaker, this is a fact. Ontario has opened 810 new schools. We have renovated an additional 780 schools, Speaker. And that includes 450 new and improved schools in rural Ontario. We remain committed to our students. We remain committed to ensuring that they have the best spaces in which to learn, Speaker.

MPP Martow to Minister Coteau Re: CPIN Implementation

>> MPP Gila Martow: Thank you, and my question is to the Minister of children and youth services. Mr. Speaker, when I still worked as an opt Tom tryst and believe me I miss it every now and then, implementing electronic medical records in an eye care clinic. I was no I.T. Expert, yet I managed to purchase my hardware, software and staff training within a budget. In contrast, this government has spent over \$27 million just to consult on the software design of our new child protection information network. All of us are committed to the idea of a provincewide electronic data system for child welfare but, Mr. Speaker, account Minister assure us at this time the government is implementing a system that will do everything workers and children needed to do?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for the question, because it is an important question. The information network we're implementing across the province is going to ensure young people, when they enter child protection, that their information will be protected, but also it will be shared among a different protection service agencies so we want to make sure, Mr. Speaker, that when a young person is place under protection in Oshawa and for some reason moves to Toronto that there's a communication line and no child is left behind. This is -- this is our plan to ensure that, you know, children are at the centre of decision making. And when they move from one jurisdiction into the next that all people that are there placed to make sure that they're safe have the right information on time and the most relevant information.

>> MPP Martow: Again to the Minister. Mr. Speaker, I think Ontario residents really do believe that Jeffrey Baldwin and Katelynn Sampson might be alive today if Ontario's children's aid societies had had a central database that would have flagged their murderers as unfit guardians. The government has spent hundreds of millions on spin yet few child welfare agencies are using the system and still needs costly upgrading and training. This new database isn't practical and not eveot fully searchable. Our social workers are now being asked to be trained stenographers rather than helping children. They must spend hours typing since no one has the thought to make cpin voice inputting friendly. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister tell us why Ontario residents should count on his government to suddenly show information technology savviness?

>> Minister Coteau: Speaker, I hope the member opposite doesn't think that this is just an easy task of putting in some information and moving it from here to there. We're talking about millions of records that date back many years when it comes to children. We need to make sure that the information that's being inputted is done accurately and it's done with efficiency. So I'll tell you, to date we've moved 40 million records, representing 15 societies, Mr. Speaker. That's a

lot of information that is being moved. So that represents 37% of all children and family records to date have been moved. So we've got a plan moving forward. We didn't want to do this overnight because, you know, we have to be careful on the approach. We have five more societies that are scheduled to be moved over into the spin system. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the progress we've made but we need to do this in a very careful way so we don't make mistakes. And it's exactly what the member opposite is suggesting we -- that she's doing. Thank you.

MPP Gelinas to Minister Hoskins Re: Drug Shortage

>> MPP France Gelinas: Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

[End of Translation] Somebody Bastian is a 68-year-old woman who has advanced stage cancer. She is one of the 100,000 Canadian women who get diagnosed with cancer each year. On Friday, Carmen got a very disturbing voice mail, telling her, and I quote, that there was a provincewide shortage of chemo drugs and her treatments would be delayed indefinitely. Speaker, I cannot imagine the worry and the stress that Carmen and dozens of other patients went through this past weekend. Carmen has a simple question, and I hope you'll agree that she deserves an answer. Why was there no backup plan to prevent cancer patients like Carmen from having their cancer treatment cancelled?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And by speaking directly to Carmen, I can only imagine the unnecessary stress and anguish that she and her family and loved ones had to go through as a result of that phone call. Mr. Speaker, it is important that those of us in the legislature, Carmen and Ontarians know that this was a national issue. It wasn't specific to Ontario. It was the result of a quarantine done by health Canada of a number of thousands of vials of 5 Fu, which is the specific anticancer MD indication used in a number of situations including breast cancer. However, when we were alerted to this, on the same day, Friday of last week, cancer care Ontario as well, we immediately contacted health Canada and put into motion a process that. Resulted in Monday afternoon, more than 3,000 vials of this cancer curing treating medication being released by health Canada, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Gelinas: Speaker, our health care system failed. It failed people like Carmen, who had to live through having her cancer treatments cancelled. I would like the government and the mister, after he agreed that he learned about this last Friday, I would like him to answer another question that a lot of Ontarians are wondering about. Will the Minister tell us exactly how many Ontario hospitals actually ran out of this chemo drug, and how many patients were affected and had their cancer treatments cancelled because of this shortage?

>> Minister Hoskins: So, Mr. Speaker, after we got involved on Friday through the ministry and cancer care Ontario, we, in conversations with health Canada, they understood just how much of a priority this was. Over 3,000 vials were released Monday afternoon. Mackenzie health received vials yesterday afternoon, Mr. Speaker. They have now either rescheduled or in the process of rescheduling every single one of those individuals. They're opening a clinic as well this weekend and are confident that within the week they will have provided the appropriate treatment to all of those individuals. We have a mechanism in

place, Mr. Speaker, to ensure coordination, and I can also say that Mack -- Mackenzie health was the only hospital impacted by this shortage. That problem is now solved, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Kiwala to Minister Naidoo-Harris (Jaczek) Re: Sexual Violence Against Women

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister responsible for the status of women. Speaker today is international women's day and we celebrate the achievements of women and look ahead at the work that needs to be done to create a fairer society. In fact just last Friday we were reminded of the fight that we, as a society, still face. I along with thousands of other Canadians was appalled to hear that there are those that still believe a drunk can consent. Last September I hosted a sexual violence and harassment community networking and advocacy session in my riding of Kingston and the islands. This session brought together key members of our community who worked tirelessly to fight sexual violence and harassment. I know that our province has done extraordinary work to fight this mentality, and on Monday I was pleased to see an update to the sexual violence and harassment action plan. This is a step in the right direction, but I know and we all know that there's more that still needs to be done. Speaker, through you to the Minister, can you please update the House on the ongoing work being done around sexual violence and harassment?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member for this very important question and her ongoing advocacy on this issue. Speaker, as a politician, a woman, a mother, the statistic that one in three women will experience some form of violence in their lifetime is absolutely unacceptable to me. All Ontarians deserve to feel safe from sexual violence and harassment in their communities, workplaces, homes and schools. In this province we believe strongly that consent has to be affirmative and ongoing. Yes means yes and no means no, which is why we built consent into the updated physical health and education curriculum, which we launched with our two public awareness campaigns "It's never ok" and "Who will you help." We not only want to raise awareness about sexual violence but also challenge attitudes and encourage behavioural change. After all we must talk to our children about safety. Speaker, this is all a step in the right direction. We're calling on all Ontarians. We all have a role to play in ending violence against women and girls.

>> MPP Kiwala: Thank you to the Minister for her answer. I know that this government recognizes the importance of educating the public on sexual violence and harassment. Speaker unfortunately the members in this House are well aware that violence against women remains a real danger in society. In fact more than 10,000 women and over 6,900 of their children were served by a violence against women shelter last year. Let's be clear, violence against women impacts us all, not just the women who are victims. It's their children, their families and also their communities. Speaker, our government recognizes this

and has increased spending on programs to reduce violence against women by over 60% since 2003. However, we know that there's more work to be done. Could the Minister please outline how we continue to support the violence against women sector in Ontario?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member from Kingston and the islands. We both visited Kingston interval House in her riding and it was obvious that she was recognized as a great supporter of women fleeing domestic violence. My ministry invests \$147 million annually to support the violence against women sector. Last summer we opened a new shelter in Elgin county, and earlier this winter I announced the building of a new shelter in Dryden. Through the \$1 billion rural reality fund, we help rural most and northern communities address the unique challenges they face. Along with partner ministries, we launched Ontario strategy to end human trafficking. Part of the strategy is a partnership with the native Ontario women's association to deliver five indigenous human trafficking liaison. Mr. Speaker ,. Our government continues to invest in supports and services to ensure we're building a safer future for every woman and girl in this province.

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

>> MPP Bill Walker: My question's to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Alister and Mary Mckerrow have been together for 69 years. Even helped build a nursing home Rebecca's home. When they get sick and frail the province's long-term health system forced them apart. Both the Premier and health Minister have stated in this House reunification and long-term care is and I quote extremely and personally important to them and keeping couples together is the highest priority. There's no other priority. My question then is, if it's so extremely and personally important, that there's no higher priority than keeping couples together, then why have Alister and Mary been forced today live apart for over a year?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate learning of here in the legislature, Mr. Speaker, of this couple, and we -- not that long ago, you know, we had a situation in another part of the province where I have to say the member, NDP Member at that time engaged me very directly privately and we worked hard together collaboratively to try and find a solution. Ultimately we were successful in find a solution for those individuals that, for a variety of reasons find themselves in similar circumstances. So I would invite the member opposite. I would be enthusiastic, overjoyed in fact to have the opportunity to work with him to see if we might resolve this particular case.

>> MPP Walker: Back to the Minister, Speaker. Well, Minister, Premier Wynne wrote the family last month February 24 to acknowledge the separation and asked you to deal with it. Either she didn't do what she said or you're not doing anything with the files. Sadly they are not the only couple forced today live alone and die alone under your long-term care policy. There are others who have been told by the ccacs that due to high wait times, the case -- is 3.5 to five years. It's not even worth trying to live together in long-term care. The fact is you left Ontario with a severe shortage of beds. As of today there are 26,500 seniors on your wait list, a list that will double to 50,000 within five years. The Ontario association of nonprofit homes with services for seniors -- and Ontario long-term care association have asked to you start fixing this mess by adding at least 2,500 beds in the upcoming budget. Given the heartache, given the inexcusable wait and suffering of all these seniors, Minister, will you commit to adding those beds as an absolute bare minimum?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, the member I think knows that we have committed to redeveloping 30,000 beds over the next number of years but over approximately the next decade we have added 10,000 new beds to the long-term care system, Mr. Speaker. We continue to make important investments and I need -- Mr. Speaker --, Mr. Speaker, as well now I do recall the couple in question and I do recall it because the member from Barrie has been discussing

this case with me and directly involved with my ministry in trying to resolve it and we have been working hard through the ministry with the member from Barrie to resolve this particular situation.

MPP Sattler (Forster) to Minister Flynn Re: Gender Wage Gap

>> MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Speaker, 2017 marks the 30th anniversary of pay equity legislation in Ontario. After 30 years, however, the lack of active enforcement of pay equity laws have contributed to a gender wage gap that is stuck at 30%, a gap that is significantly wider for immigrant and indigenous women and women with disabilities. The closing the gender wage gap steering committee called for amendments to the pay equity act in its final report last August. More than six months after the release of that report, nothing has happened. Can the acting Premier explain why she is dragging her heels on the immediate actions, like amending the pay equity act, that would make a huge difference to close the gender wage gap for women in Ontario?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member for that excellent and timely question, Speaker. There's no doubt I think all members in this House will agree that the gender wage gap, Speaker, still disadvantages women across Ontario and across every jurisdiction and we need to deal with it, Speaker. Other parties in the past have said they would deal with it, Speaker, but they haven't, Speaker. We haven't made the progress that needs to be made. The convention that is taking place right now in the province of Ontario, Speaker, involves some very real work that was done by the gender wage gap working group, Speaker. They work on behalf of government. They came from business. They came from labour. They came from the civil service, Speaker. They brought us their best advice. We're moving that on now, Speaker. We've got a group together of some of the best minds in this province, some of the best minds on this issue, Speaker. Their first meeting is scheduled for April the 13th. I want Ontario to be a leader in this. We should all want Ontario to be a leader in this. It's simply -- the level of tolerance for the gender wage gap simply has expired in this province, Speaker.

>> MPP Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker. This government has had 14 years. When the nonunionized auto manufacturers recently sought changes to workers' personal leave, the Premier changed the law for them overnight through quiet regulation. When large construction firms like ellis-don sought reforms that negatively impacted workers, you quickly changed the laws for them. What are you going to do today for the majority of low-paid workers in this province? Almost 60% of them women, to have a decent, secure work that pays at least \$15 an hour minimum wage?

>> Minister Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you again to the member. As I said this is a very timely question, Speaker. And I'm proud to stand in this House, Speaker. With the changing workplaces review, with the gender wage gap study, we're confronting issues where the solution has escaped previous governments,

Speaker. We're taking concrete action. When the advice came forward, Speaker, from the gender wage gap working group, there was work to be done in the future but they told us there's things you can do right now and we acted upon that, Speaker. Gender-based analysis is used by this government. It's required when we're passing any policy that relates to this government, Speaker. Needs to go through a gender wage gap lens, Speaker. That wasn't done in the past. It should have been. Under this government it is being done, Speaker. We're moving ahead on this issue. We're determined to put an end to the gender wage gap in Ontario.

MPP Martins to Minister Ballard Re: Rental Unit Costs

>> MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question is for the Minister of housing and Minister responsible for the poverty reduction strategy. On behalf of many of my constituents in the Davenport, I'd like to raise a critical issue, an issue I have raised in the past. Rental costs are rising at a dramatic pace in the Toronto area. I've heard from my constituents about a lack of stability in the rise of their rents, making it difficult for people to find affordable rental options. This is an issue that does not just affect those who are less fortunate but oftentimes middle income earners and young professionals who are just building lives and careers in the city. Not being able to budget for housing is security that makes it difficult for one to plan for one's future. Mr. Speaker, what is the government's position on rising rental costs in Davenport and across Ontario?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member for her steadfast advocacy on this issue. Mr. Speaker, finding an affordable home in a community we love is a goal we all share. It's about putting down roots. It's about raising a family and spending each day in a place we truly love. I know Ontarians face real challenges in our booming market as they search for an affordable place to live. Too many are feeling the pinch of a rental market that's struggling to keep up with demand. To the residential tenancy act, we provide protection for tenants. The act ensures that rent increase guidelines are kept to a maximum of 2.5% per year for units built before 1991, Speaker. For 2017, the rent increase guideline is 1.5% but we know there's more that needs to be done. That's why we're looking at ways to ensure increased protection for tenants.

>> MPP Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have had many important conversations with the Minister about the rising rents facing my constituents and always appreciate his attention to this critical issue. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased the Minister shares and understands my concerns. Individuals and families deserve the peace of mind of knowing that they can secure an affordable home that will provide them with a reliable foundation where they can live comfortably, secure employment, raise their families and thrive. That's what we all want. The supply of affordable rental units in Toronto is dwindling and government must take action to address this. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister inform this House what actions he's undertaking to get more affordable rental options into the market?

>> Minister Ballard: Well, thank you, and thank you again to the member for Davenport. Speaker, ensuring a robust supply of affordable rental units is critical to ensuring people have options to choose from. This includes working with our municipal partners to make secondary suites -- those are the self-contained

residential units that already exist in many homes -- available quickly, helping communities better respond to renters' needs. We've also just passed legislation that allows communities to use a new tool, a tool called inclusionary zoning to require affordable units being created and kept long term in new residential developments. Our government is also increasing the municipal property tax on apartment buildings to provide some relief to renters. Mr. Speaker, 82% of rental units in the province are pre-1991 buildings, and because of that. They're protected by rent control. But I know booming areas face concerns. I'm continuing to look at ways to increase the supply of rental options across the province.

MPP Nicholls to Minister Lalonde Re: Funding for Jails

>> MPP Rick Nicholls: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of community safety and correctional services. In May 2016, your Liberal government announced the Elgin- Middlesex detention centre's main facility would have its body scanner installed by the end of this month. After drug overdose death at emdc, former Minister Orazietti said that he would prioritize the installation of the body scanners. Now the new Minister 's office is saying the scanner is prioritized for installation in the fall of 2017. You keep using the word prioritize. I do not think it means what you think it means. Speaker, how exactly does failing to meet a deadline mean prioritize?

>> Minister Marie-France Lalonde: Minister Voice of Translator: Thank you. I would like to wish all women here a very happy international women's day.

[End of Translation] I thank the member opposite for his question. First off, one of my most important responsibilities as Minister is the safety and security of our staff and our inmates. Mr. Speaker, our government has recognized the challenging surrounding contraband at our correctional facilities, which is why we've announced \$9.5 million funding to install body scanners at each and every facility across our province by 2018. Mr. Speaker, this makes Ontario the first jurisdiction in Canada to install body scanners at every jail. We've installed one of the first scanners at the adjoining regional intermittent centre right next to the emdc. Where we can have inmates scanned in exceptional situations and emdc will be getting a body scanner this year. I can confirm that 11 facilities already have –

>> MPP Nicholls: Thank you, Speaker. Words need to be followed up with action now.

[Interjections] Back to the Minister. Ontario's gold standard jail, Toronto south detention centre, was recently called a billion-dollar hellhole by " Toronto life" magazine. The jail has been a disaster from the start. Unbreakable window was broken by inmates. Officers worried that inmates would grind glass into powder and blow it into their faces. They were told by management to wear goggles. Negative pressure rooms for inmates with contagious airborne diseases regularly malfunction. The software system controlling cameras, intercoms and locks regularly stopped working. When asked why a female officer was trapped in an elevator with inmates for an hour -- To keep quiet. It didn't work. Staff keep speaking out and the truth has been told about the cells. Speaker, to the Minister, why did the government go ahead with Toronto south detention centre's experimental designs despite warnings from the auditor general and staff?

>> Minister Lalonde: Again I want to thank the member for his good question. Mr. Speaker, we recognize the hard work and I want to tack the time today actually to recognized hard work our correctional officers, our nurse, our maintenance staff and our cooking staff. Everyone that works with challenging situation at times every day to keep our institutions and our inmates safe. I 'roads the Toronto south detention centre is not without its challenges and we know that more work needs to be done to make life -- to live it up to its full potential. We need to hire more staff, reduce the lockdowns and improve the overall condition of the institutions. In fact I was there a couple weeks ago. I visited the jail and I saw a group of passionate staff who are dedicated their vital growth in maintaining law and order in our society. And through this visit, I got a sense of the progress actually that needs to be made. So, Mr. Speaker, our government is committed -- To transformation and I'm working on this.

MPP Horwath to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Childcare Funding

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the acting Premier. This government talks a lot about child care but we see no action. They talk about the need to get women back into the work force and the reality that child care is just too expensive for a lot of families. But when it comes to taking action, this government fails. Last week the Liberal government voted against investing in not-for-profit public child care centres. Can the acting Premier tell us why she believes private corporations should be making money off children?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for this very important question. Speaker, I want to be very clear about what we mean when we're talking about funding for child care operators. This type of funding supports subsidies, subsidies for low and middle income families. It actually supports programming for children with special needs and supports increase wages for skills and skilled child care workers and early childhood educators. What I'm trying to say is essentially this funding follows the child. Speaker, absolutely. We understand the important role nonprofits play in our child care system. That is why in Ontario 77% of child care centres were nonprofit. Past capital investments have only gone to school-based not-for-profit child care. Speaker -- Families expect us to give them more options, not fewer. That means ensuring that all Ontarians have access to quality affordable child care spaces. Rural areas and urban areas.

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, all evidence points to the fact that not-for-profit and public child care is higher quality. And in fact when it comes to special nee kids, they are being better in not-for-profit and public child care, Speaker. That's just the reality that exists. But instead of supporting that model, the Liberals are spending public dollars on for-profit private child re. I guess this shouldn't be a surprise, Speaker. She always seems -- this Liberal government always seems to prioritize the well-connected and well-off -- Understand that regular families need support and that investing in nonprofit child care is the best way to help the people that really need it. Why did the acting Premier and her Liberal government want to see. Child care being traded on the stock market and kids being profited off of by private companies?

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: I'm so happy and pleased to be answering this question, because absolutely we are building child care in this province. We are transforming it, making it more accessible and more affordable for all Ontarians, not just for some Ontarians. The bottom line is this. Not all Ontarians have access to for-profit and not-for-profit centres in this province. We have to build a system that supports all Ontarians. In some instances, in northern areas, the only way to create more access is to ensure that those centres in those areas actually

get the support they need. We are not going to go in one route or the other. We're going to ensure that all Ontarians, all Ontario families get access to good, quality child care.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Flynn Re: Gender Wage Gap

>> MPP Ann Hoggarth: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of labour. As you've heard already today is international women's day. This day celebrates the social, economic, cultural and political achievement of women. But it also challenges all of us to seek change in society. The theme for this year is be bold for change, which calls for a better working world, a more inclusive gender-equal world. Speaker, Ontario has been bold for change, and in particular our Minister of labour has been looking at change in the working world through the gender wage gap consultations. Account Minister please update the House and talk about the progress that we are making?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Speaker, I want to thank the member for that question and the interest she has and the advocacy she has. Speaker, I also want to wish everyone a happy international women's day. To the women, to the men, to the boys and girls in this House, Speaker. This should be a day that we're all engaged on, Speaker, because I'm so confident that the be bold for change theme is going to continue to get people all over the world engaged on this issue. Speaker, this is an issue that begs the attention of all members of this House. It crosses partisan lines. This government's absolutely committed to closing the gender wage gap and to build on the progress we've already made. As I outlined earlier, Speaker, the first meeting of the group is April the 13th. We're going to get the best advice. We're going to get the best feedback and we're going to make sure the advice we received in the past is implemented. We've taken those immediate steps, Speaker, that we could take without further consultations. Speaker, we are bold for change in the province of Ontario. We're going to increase in this province. We're going to close the gender wage gap.

>> MPP Hoggarth: I want to thank the Minister for his answer and for being such a strong add very indicate for closing the gender wage gap. He is right. We all need to work together because international women's day reminds us that, despite our progress, there's still work to do. On average, women still earn less than men and simply put, this needs to change. We also know that all women across the economic spectrum are affected by the wage gap. But the gap is more pronounced for women who are minorities, Aborigines, newcomers or living with disabilities. Deloitte reported that the gender wage gap represents 2.5% of Ontario's G.D.P. And closing it could generate \$11.6 billion in increased annual consumption of goods and services. Speaker, through you to the Minister, can the Minister please explain what else our government is doing to ensure women continue to play an important role in our working world?

>> Minister Flynn: Speaker, thank you very much for that very, very good question. I want to thank the member again. Speaker, it's not only the right thing to do. The fact of the matter is that equality for women, when it comes to the

Ontario economy, to any economy, Speaker, simply makes good business sense as well. It makes sense for workers. It makes sense for business. It makes sense for our economy, Speaker. It increases productivity. It strengthens skill sets. It contributes to a healthy workplace. It prepares for the workplace of tomorrow, Speaker. It was great to see the Ontario federation of labour here at queen's park this morning contributing to this very important conversation, Speaker. Speaker, women play a critical role in our labour force. The Minister of labour were determined to improve the working lives and conditions of all workers in Ontario, including women. Speaker, on international women's day, we've got to redouble our efforts to engage with labour, business, continue to make Ontario one of the best places in the world to work.

MPP Harris to Minister Naqvi Re: Genetic Discrimination

>> MPP Michael Harris: Thanks, Speaker. My question's to the acting Premier. Speaker this government's federal Liberal counterparts in Ottawa today have an opportunity to take a great legislative step towards ending genetic discrimination. And yet, while government members here in Ontario seem brave enough to take that step provincially, and I commend the member for Eglinton Lawrence for his private member's bill that would take similar steps. Their federal cousins seem to be getting cold feet. After federal attempts to gut the bill last month, the justice Minister has been pulling our Premiers to drum up further opposition. Speaker, the justice Minister is looking for advice -- Bill -- those two vote this afternoon. Will the government ensure their federal cousins today that the people of Ontario don't have time for constitutional jurisdictional excuses. They want action -- And genetic discrimination. -- End genetic discrimination. Will you agree?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I thank the member opposite for asking the question. Albeit an odd question because sounds like this is a question that the member should be asking in the federal parliament because he is talking about a federal piece of legislation that is not up for debate in this House. Speaker, I think the member's referring to a bill called s201, which may be voted in the House. The federal Minister of justice, I understand, has advised their caucus that the bill may be unconstitutional because of division of power between federal and provincial governments under the constitution of Canada. Whatever the case may be, Speaker, that is a decision of the federal parliament and Minister of justice and has very little to do with this parliament. Thank you very much.

>> MPP Harris: I will remind the Minister that the federal justice Minister issued your government a letter asking for input. And so therefore it does become an Ontario issue. And so, Speaker, of course Ontarians and Canadians deserve to live free of discrimination. In fact constitutional experts consulted on the federal bill agreed that it does not overstep on jurisdictional boundaries. The government member from Eglinton Lawrence here in the province of Ontario, your member, called it appalling that they're hiding behind provincial, jurisdictional constitutional excuse for not ending discriminatory practices in province. He called it mind-boggling, and I agree with that member. The federal justice Minister has turned to Premiers for support. Will the Premier give her support to end genetic discrimination? Yes or no?

>> Minister Naqvi: Once again, Speaker, this is a federal matter. I'm in not any position as the Attorney General for the province of Ontario to be giving constitutional advice to the federal government. & they have a very robust ministry of justice, Speaker. They have a very robust constitutional branch, and they have the full capacity to be able to provide any legal advice whatsoever. The

federal Minister of justice has written I believe to the consul of federation. I leave it to that secretariat to be able to opine. But it is not our place to be giving advice on constitutional matters to the federal matters. That is solely within the sole discretion of the federal parliament. I know, Speaker, under our human rights code, we have very clear laws when it comes to -- comes to discrimination that includes grounds like genetic discrimination. I do want to applaud the member from Eglinton- Lawrence for bringing a private member's bill. Dealing with genetic discrimination. I believe that bill has passed through this on second reading. Thank you.

MPP Taylor to Minister Flynn Re: Minimum Wage

>> MPP Monique Taylor: My question is to the acting Premier. Two weeks ago, striking workers from York university and university of Toronto came to queen's park to hold a silent vigil. I had the opportunity to hear some of their stories. One in particular hit hard. This cafeteria worker on strike, a single mother paid just \$12 an hour, found it impossible to make ends meet. Just providing lunch for her daughter is always a challenge. Through tears, she told me that sometimes she has to ask the bus driver to let her on for free so that she can go to work. A single working mother shouldn't have to struggle or strike for fairness in Ontario. This woman works in a public institution, on contract. It's an example of the ever-growing precarious work in this province over the last 13 years. Workers at York just settled, with no help from this government, for \$15 an hour. Will this government raise the minimum wage for all workers in Ontario to \$15 an hour?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Thank you. Thank you for that important question. I do applaud the settlement that was reached in that regard, Speaker. Speaker, between 1996 and 2003, we had a frozen minimum wage in the province of Ontario. 6.85. Since 2003 to the present date, Speaker, we've increased the minimum wage by 64%, a total of ten times, Speaker. Asked for flexibility, Speaker. What the workers asked for, Speaker, what the workers asked for was furnace and they wanted to know increase wrs coming on a regular basis, Speaker. Speaker, the minimum wage right now in Ontario is 11.40. Speaker, it goes up every single year and it's predictable, Speaker. When the advice was asked for, Speaker, advocate – Where was the N.D.P? Nowhere to be found, Speaker. From the workers of this province. NDP To vote --