

***Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 3rd Session
Tuesday, March 27, 2018***

Unedited Transcript

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Fedeli to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you and good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. The newest Liberal billion dollar scandal is a real doozy this time over at the independent electricity system operator, the auditor-general says the iefo's quote annual deficit would be understated by \$1.3 billion their accounting shell game. Worse, the auditor is being blocked from completing her investigation. The energy Minister says they have been quote forth right and fully responsive, but the auditor says, quote, they stalled on giving us information and quote wouldn't sign the forms confirming that they have given us all the information. The auditor then asked when it came down to the crux of it, why can't you sign a document that says you gave us all the information? Speaker, it's no wonder that people of Ontario don't trust this government. Just what information does the Premier not want us to have?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd pleased to rise and talk about the great work being done at the iso and the system operator, the iso had assured my ministry they've made every effort to be forth right and responsible for the request for information. For example, Mr. Speaker, they made work spaces for the A.G. Staff in the iso headquarters. Make sooiingure these accommodations to extend the duration of the auditor-general's staff on the premises from the initial two weeks to seven weeks, Mr. Speaker, and then during this time, they received and responded to over 200 information requests from the a.g.'s staff. They accommodated every meeting request, 40 meetings took place, Mr. Speaker, between the iso and A.G. And also accommodated their request to meet with the board and the audit committee. They'll continue to work with the iso just like our government does, Mr. Speaker .

>> Vic Fedeli: Thank you. Back to the Premier. Despite what the energy Minister says, the obstruction by iso has gone to extreme lengths, including holding secret meetings. They held a board meeting to approve their statement, but they didn't tell the auditor or her staff. So contrary to what the Minister says, the A.G. Says, quote, when is the board meeting we'd like to come. They did it without telling us. The energy Minister says these concerns aren't anything new. But because this government can't be trusted to properly report their numbers, the auditor has threatened anned verse opinion. That would be a first in Canada. We would say Minister, that is something new. Speaker, is the Premier going to come clean on this billion dollar scandal?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again when it comes to the board meets and audit committee, Mr. Speaker, the iso accommodated every A.G. Request on this, Mr. Speaker. They also made sure that their audit and the auditor-general staff had direct access to the iso staff, Mr. Speaker, to ask questions. As I said before, Mr. Speaker, they made sure that

they had work spaces for the a.g.'s staff and accommodated from their requests from two weeks to 7 weeks, answered over 200 requests for information, made sure Na over 40 meetings took place between the iso and the A.G. Staff, Mr. Speaker. We're going to continue to have the iso work with the A.G. Just like they've been doing in the past, Mr. Speaker, because when it came to making sure that we brought forward real relief for families, the fair hydro plan did that, Mr. Speaker, and that party on the other side, as usual, voted against it, Mr. Speaker .

>> Vic Fedeli: Back to the Premier. The auditor says this is all due to the government's quote bogus accounting on the hydro plan. The ministry Minister says this accounting is common in other jurisdictions, but the auditor says most of his examples are in the US And none use Canadian standards. So this government paid \$600,000 to an outside auditor, nearly seven times their normal fee, just to defend this position. The auditor-general said quote, it's ridiculous. They said they spent \$230,000 just to answer the a.g.'s questions. Not only is it ridiculous, Speaker, it's wrong. Speaker, how can families ever trust anything this government tells us again?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Jurisdictions right across north America use rate-regulated accounting. Alberta, new England, New York, Michigan and Texas and many entities here in Canada including Ontario power generation, Toronto hydro, fortis, Hydro One, they use this type of accounting. When it comes to trust, Mr. Speaker, they seem to trust the numbers we have on this, because they put it in their people's guarantee, Mr. Speaker. They make sure that right in the people's guarantee, the Conservatives included the fair hydro plan in their platform magazine, it and now are standing there criticizing it, Mr. Speaker. Worst of all, when it came time to provide real relief for Ontario families, for half a million small businesses and farms and low-income consumers, Mr. Speaker, they voted against it, Mr. Speaker. Time and time again, they demonstrate they have no interest in helping the people of Ontario.

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Todd Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. The auditor-general found something a little fishy in this audit. She said documents were given to them in a box of papers after we were basically finished the audit. In there was quote documentation around the fact that the assets of the Hydro have been pledged as collateral and security against the fair hydro trust. What does that mean? According to the A.G., it means the generators fall behind the creditors for the fair hydro plan trust. The government is playing financial games with assets they have no right to play with, Speaker. So Mr. Speaker, did the government try to play this shell game on the generators just like they tried to play the shell game with the auditor-general's office?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, as I said before, we made a choice. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We made a policy choice to insure that we continue to have a clean and reliable and affordable system. Electricity system, Mr. Speaker, for rate payers, of today and tomorrow and the fair hydro plan keeps the cost of borrowing within the rate base and not the tax base, because Mr. Speaker, that's the logical thing to do. Electricity financing should remain within the electricity system. Officials from the treasury board, finance, opg, iso, the Ontario financing authority -- Along with external advisers that included Ernst & Young, Deloitte all worked on the accounting relating to the fair hydro plan.

>> MPP Smith: And they all benefitted from unfair hydro Liberal plan. This is the body that won't stay buried. It keeps giving and giving. This financial shell game they're giving clearly worries this government. The auditor-general -- Speaker, the A.G. Asked management and the board to disclose this in their financial statements and they haven't done so. They added that Bruce Power would be concerned that they pledged the incoming collaterals they would receive from the local distribution companies. The generators fall behind the creditors at the bank now, basically in receiving their money. How far does this go? Quote from the A.G. At this point, we know it's at least an over \$1 billion adjustment from this accounting. That is one heck of an adjustment, Mr. Speaker. Did the government secretly mortgage a billion dollars of taxpayer money to finance this shell game?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, what we have done has been open and transparent about the whole process when it comes to the fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So Ontario families and small businesses that are paying less by average, Mr. Speaker, on their bills than in any other jurisdiction, Mr. Speaker, and that is because of the fair hydro plan that we brought forward. Families in cities like New York, Boston, San Francisco actually pay more than they do in Ontario, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to the auditor-general and accounting dispute, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the office

of the controller --Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The office of the provincial controller insured that this plan was in accordance with public service. And as I said, treasury board, finance, opg, the iso and Ontario financing authority along with all the other external advisers agreed with this, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Smith: Not all the skull drudger is at the level of scandal. Look at the missing million dollars in the a.g.'s report that came out on the fair hydro plan. During the accounting process, another missing million was found. Quote, if you don't need the money anymore, you pay back the security deposit. The A.G. Found over \$1 million they couldn't figure out whom they owed the money to. They were never doing the proper reconciliations. A million dollars, poof, no one knows where it went. No one knows who received that million dollars, Speaker. This level of secrecy over the mysterious missing million is astounding even for this Kathleen Wynne government, Mr. Speaker. Folks want to know. How many more millions of dollars are simply just missing or unaccounted for as a result of their --

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, when we're talking about rate regulated accounting and talking about the work being done by the iso, Mr. Speaker, all of this is done to the standards, through the public sector accounting standards, Mr. Speaker. And of course this is huge. In many other jurisdictions, Alberta, new England, New York, Michigan, Texas, Toronto uses this, Mr. Speaker, fortis Hydro One all use this type of accounting, and this, Mr. Speaker, is common practice in the electricity sector, because that's where you keep the debt, Mr. Speaker. You keep it within the electricity sector. For us, Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to work to make electricity reliable and affordable for everyone in this province. The fair hydro plan did just that, Mr. Speaker. And we'll continue to work for the people of Ontario.

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

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thwack. My question is for the Premier. 1/3 of working people in Ontario don't have a dental plan. For people who work in the gig economy and artists, that statistic is worse. The Premier and her Liberal government have had 15 years to address this issue. Why didn't they?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I have said in the House a number of times, we're very glad the NDP has come into the discussion of this issue, because we have been working on this, Mr. Speaker. We understand that dental care is a gap in health care, Mr. Speaker. We understand that, which is exactly why we have expanded the healthy smiles program, Mr. Speaker, provides free preventative, routine and emergency services for children and youth and helping 450,000 kids across access important dental services, Mr. Speaker. We know there's more to be done. We recognize that, Mr. Speaker. And we know that whether it's pharmacare or dental care, that we need to be working to find solutions so people people who don't have those services can access them in an affordable way.

>> Andrea Horwath: Two-thirds of Ontario seniors don't have a dental plan. Folks on social assistance have no minimal standard of dental coverage either. Why didn't the Premier and her Liberal government insure families have access to the dental care they need in their 15 years in office?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And to reinforce what the Premier has just said, we have our expanded healthy smiles program, and I think it's really important to recognize there is no limit to our funding for the healthy smiles program. And we do work with dentists to insure that every single eligible child has the necessary services available. And we started with children and youth as evidence that suggests that oral health programs are most prevalent, of course, in those particular low-income families and the children are the particularly vulnerable. Of course through our throne speech, and I know the anticipation is really rising for our budget tomorrow. I'm sure all members are eagerly anticipating that. We want to make sure that we make the appropriate investments to insure more people. Will have access to this type of care. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

>> Andrea Horwath: Every three minutes, someone in Ontario goes to the emergency room or a physician, a family doctor to get dental care. Parents are being forced to watch as their kids grow up with pain in their mouths. Notwithstanding what this Minister has said, just the other week, the medical officer of health in Hamilton was sounding alarm bells asking that city council to help provide more dental care for the children in our community. Their system has been failing kids for years, Speaker. No one in this prosperous province

should go without the dental care they need, least of all, our children. Why does the Premier disagree?

>> Minister Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased the third party has come to our way of thinking on this very important area of health care. It provides funding for over 200 dental clinics to insure access to services. These include services in public health units, community health centres, portable clinic, mobile clinics like dental buses and Aboriginal health centres. We realise there's more to do. Our government provides dental benefits to those receiving income support under the Ontario disability support program and under Ontario works, adult males receive coverage when the need for emergency dental care or help them get back on their feet and participate in the employment. We're going to continue to make them. I acknowledge that the medical officer of health that Hamilton put out a useful and interesting report and also emphasized the need for people to know the services in the community and they can access.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne Re: Dental Services

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. 4.5 million Ontarios don't have access to the dental care they need because they can't afford it. In a province as wealthy as Ontario, this is absolutely unacceptable. But instead of showing Ontarians that she cares about these issues too, the Premier has focused her energy on other things like selling off Hydro One after she said she wouldn't, and taking the money away from health care while lining the pockets of wealthy investors. Why did the Premier choose selling off Hydro One over making our health care system better?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, I appreciate the leader of the third party bringing forward at this point a discussion on dental care. We have been concerned about this for sometime, Mr. Speaker. We have been working on it as the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care said to expand those services, and we know there is more to be done. Mr. Speaker, we also know that there are other investments that are needed in this province. One of them, Mr. Speaker has been investments in infrastructure whether that's roads or bridges across the province, hospitals and schools, including in the Hamilton region, Mr. Speaker. We made an announcement this morning, Mr. Speaker, that we'll be flushed out in our budget, and it's interesting that there hasn't been much talk about childcare from the third party for sometime, but we made an announcement about preschool childcare starting September 2020. I'm sure many of the same families the leader of the third party is talking about will be happy to hear that announcement.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, 2.2 million Ontarians can't afford the medicine that their doctors prescribe. 2.2 million Ontarians can't afford to get their prescriptions filled. People literally cut their pills in half to make the bottle last longer. Many of these people are over the age of 24. Why has the Premier chosen to fund tax cuts to profitable corporations instead of a plan that covers everyone in Ontario regardless of age?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that question, I'm sure the leader of the third party is pleased that our plan is to expand free pharmacare to everyone over 5, Mr. Speaker, that will mean that 47% of people in this province will have access to free pharmacare. We understand that there needs to be a full program of pharmacare across the whole population, Mr. Speaker. We understand that. But what we have determined is necessary is to make sure that the people who have free pharma-area, the O hip from their fifth to their 25th birthday, that they have access to all the drugs on the formulary, the 4,400 prescription medications as will seniors, Mr. Speaker, next year. They'll have the opportunity to have free pharmacare. We recognize there's more to be done. We believe that making sure

people have access to the full formulary means they'll believe able to look after themselves better and their family.

>> Andrea Horwath: Decades of cuts by Conservatives and Liberals have meant our hospitals are overcrowded and some people are falling through the cracks, people. Governments can fill those cracks. We can end hallway medicine and make sure everyone can go to the dentist. We can make sure that the people can afford their prescription medications. The Premier's fond of saying we all know someone who needs more care. She's right. For 15 years, her and her Liberals took that care away from Ontario families. Why does this Premier expect Ontarians to believe the desperate promises she's been making over the last week or so?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, when I came into this office as Premier in 2013, 1 of the first things we did was to tackle retirement security. I think there's no more important aspect of a senior's life than being able to rely on a pension, Mr. Speaker, to know there's going to be money coming in every month and to be able to rely on that. Mr. Speaker, my reason from S is to make sure people have the supports they need, to listen to the people in the province and build the province up so that --To build the province up, Mr. Speaker, so we have the resources to put the supports in place for people to care for themselves and their families. That's what we've been doing and our budget will bring forward the next steps in that care.

MPP MacLeod to Premier Wynne Re: Bill 148

>> MPP Lisa MacLeod: We need to make life more affordable for families. Costs have gone up and families haven't seen a real raise in over a decade. The Liberals too fast, too soon policies have cost people their jobs and led to hours being cut for many others. We can make real change, but real change that is affordable for the people of Ontario, particularly free on families. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier lower taxes for those in need and make life more affordable?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are two things in that question that I think we need to understand. First is that the member opposite does not believe that people who are working 40 hours a week at a minimum wage job should be able to feed themselves and their family. The member opposite believes that \$15 an hour is too rich for people and we should take that money back from people. We don't believe that, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite believes it is obviously to have less money coming in to the treasury. She believes -- At cutting taxes and saying to people, you just fend for yourself. You'll be ok. That that's the way we should go forward. That is the opposite of what we believe, Mr. Speaker. People need more care, and government needs to be a part of providing for people the things they can't do by themselves.

>> MPP MacLeod: The Premier has been running around and giving everybody what they want with other people's money, and she's got a massive deficit that's going to be coming, and we know it's going to be a substantial deficit because her government has boasted about this -- This style of management for the government is not going to work. What Ontario doesn't need is more Liberal waste, mismanagement and scandal. Instead of spending more for Liberal insiders, we should be making life more affordable for everyone in the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, why does the Premier not care? Why is she comfortable in costing these people jobs? And why won't she lower taxes and make life more affordable for regular folks?

>> Premier Wynne: You know, Mr. Speaker, the children and their parents who were in the room this morning when we were talking about free preschool childcare, they don't think of themselves as insiders to anyone. They think of themselves as people who need some support because th're making decisions about whether to have another child, because they don't know whether they can afford childcare. And you know, the Minister of education and whose responsibility for childcare has been working on a plan for over a year, Mr. Speaker. She's listened to people across the province, and if you go through, Mr. Speaker, I think it would be pretty clear, you listen to the questions from the other side, questions about why isn't there more support for mental health? Yez ba why isn't there more support for hospitals. Why isn't there more support for my project in my riding coming across the floor, Mr. Speaker. People in every corner of this

province, whether they're represented by a Conservative or NDP or a Liberal are looking for support to do the things they can't do by themselves. That's what we're going to do.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault (Sousa) Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Last may, the accountable officer confirmed the government is needlessly wasting \$4 billion of hydro rate payer money on a complicated private financing scheme whose sole purpose is conceal \$40 billion worth of hydro debt off the government's books. The auditor-general has repeatedly warned that this scheme violates public sector accounting standards. But yesterday the Premier stood up and defended the integrity of her \$40 million hydro borrowing scheme, saying quote it's been approved, unquote, by private consultants, paid by the government. Since when do the government's private consultants approve the government's book and not the independent auditor-general?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again we're talking about a policy choice we made to insure we have a clean, reliable and an affordable electricity system for rate payers of today and rate payers of tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. The fair hydro plan keeps the cost of borrowing, Mr. Speaker, within the rate base, not on the tax base, because that is the logical thing to do, Mr. Speaker. Electricity financing should remain with the -- within the electricity system, not the tax base. And Mr. Speaker, the treasury board, finance, opg, the system operator, the Ontario financing authority along with external advisers and world-leading, world-class experts erst & young and deloitte along with the office of the controller insured this plan was within accordance with public sector accounting and within this plan, we reduced rates on average by 25% right across the province, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again for the Premier -- actually I'm surprised they didn't have Arthur Anderson in on that deal. Anyway, the auditor-general pointed out the iso hired kpg to finance the \$40 billion finance scheme and then hired them to audit the scheme it was hired to design. That's a huge conflict of interest. That makes this Audi untrustworthy even if we ignore their recent record with accounting scams like the isle of man tax haven scandal. The auditor-general is the only one who has no other interest but to insure the government's books are presented honestly. Will the Premier stop hiring private consultants who will report whatsoever she pays them to report and instead take the advice of the independent auditor-general?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has just gone after a world renowned accounting firm respected all across the globe. The member opposite also doesn't recognize, and he should, that in order for us to prepare and provide for reductions of rate payers for electricity rates to the tune of 25% and in this cases over 40%, that's also being done, we also had Ernst & young and deloitte, all of these firms have recognized in other jurisdictions, this

form of accounting is permissible and occurs in Canada as well, Mr. Speaker. We are doing exactly what the auditor's calling of the auditor-general have recommended we do. We have done so. Now if there's a dispute between accountants, I cannot resolve them. I can only do, and our government is doing what the people of Ontario wants. Reductions in their rates.

MPP Potts to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Education Investments

>> MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of education. After we inherited an education system that was underfunded and total disrepair, our government has made it a top priority to invest in teachers, education workers and students and our publicly funded education system. Our focus is to support the people of Ontario including nearly 2 million students and thousands of tireless educators. Ontario is an international leader in education. We are graduating students at a record pace. We're on a path to refresh the curriculum and core skills like math, and we're investing in school-based mental health support and supports for students with special needs. All the while, Speaker, while we're maintaining our commitment to equity by carrying out the first-ever action plan to address systemic barriers. My question is to the Minister of education. What are we delivering to work and health the students and school board educators in the poorest province of Ontario.

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you to the member from Beaches- East York. Mr. Speaker, our government is making historic investments in education. And Ontario students consistently rank amongst the highest in national and international student achievement results in reading, math, and science. In addition, the graduation rate is the highest it's ever been. Speaker, since 2003, we have added more than 40,000 education workers to our publicly funded education system. And now, following yesterday's grants for student needs announcement, we'll be adding more. 2,000 more. Yesterday's Speaker, I was joined by the Premier and the member at Timberlea public school in Toronto announce next year the GSN will be increasing by \$625 million to \$24.5 billion. Bringing our per-student funding to 12,300. These investments in education are so important for our students.

>> MPP Potts: Thank you, Speaker and thank you especially to the Minister of education for not only her great work she's doing in education but the work she does to support her constituents in Halton. Now nearly \$25 billion is a very significant investment in our publicly funded health care system. We know no government in the province history has added more on expanding education system more than our government and I'm proud to be part of a government that cares and is committed to providing opportunity for the people of Ontario. What is clear from the official opposition's report is that bills are planned in cuts and education will be on the chopping block. Duting just \$1 billion from our schools means that thousands of teachers, education assistants, will be fired. The education funding we've announced and grants for student needs yesterday in my riding of beaching East York. Was very significant. Can the Minister tell us how we're going to support these kids and special education needs?

>>Minister Naidoo-Harris: Thanks again to the member for that important question. Mr. Speaker, this \$24.5 billion investment will mean so much for students, staff, and educators. Speaker, we are providing envelopes permanent funding of \$300 million over three years to support students with special needs. This funding will wipe out special education assessment backlog and wait times. Speaker, as I mentioned 2,000 new staff will be coming to classrooms including additional staff, social workers, psychologists and speech language pathologists and also includes more education assistance and additional guidance counsellors to grade 7 and 8 students can transition successfully into careers. Finally, 400 new mental health workers over the next two years will help high school student it is achieve their best --And in life. Instead of making cuts, we're make investments in our children and in our classrooms.

MPP Yurek to Minister Jaczek Re: Hospital Wait Times

>> MPP Jeff Yurek: Earlier this morning, the Ontario medical association released their platform for better health care. To quote their platform, wait times are one of the biggest health care problems facing Ontarians today. Week after week, we're treating patients in hallways, forced to cancel surgeries and watch our patients wait to get the care they need. Simply put, patients wait too long far too often. In my riding, patients can be expected to wait 393 days for a knee replacement surgery. Many ridings across the province have similar times. This government should be ashamed of themselves for their health care record. My question to the Minister, is when so many people have been suffering for so long, why has health care just become a priority for this government on the eve of an election?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to welcome the members from the Ontario medical association here today. As of last year, I'm a life member of that organization, and I'd like to acknowledge, of course, the great work that our physicians do across this province. Our government knows that everyone in Ontario deserves high-quality care when they need it, and our skilled, dedicated health-care professionals including physicians deserve the right resources to deliver it. We believe they deserve to be compensated well for their high-quality work. I'd like to remind everyone, Ontario's doctors are among the highest paid in Canada and higher than most OECD countries. Wait times are a concern for all of us were that's why tomorrow's budget will include more funding for hospitals, home care, and elder care. And we're making headway, Mr. Speaker. Our wait times are the best in Canada from MRI to C.T. Scans, ultrasounds and overall specialist wait times. Our wait times for knee replacements are the average.

>> MPP Yurek: This government has continued to attack doctors over the past three and a half years. Four years without a contract. The people that are suffering -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's the patients who are suffering due to this government's inability to work with Ontario's doctors. They refused to work with Ontario and failed to fix the strained relationship with the health-care professionals which have lost opportunities for patients to access improved care. Our wait times are out of control for surgery, for mental health treatments, and we have an opioid crisis that's overtaken our province. This government has failed to properly manage the health care system. My question to the Minister after 15 years of cuts and vilifying our doctors, how can Ontarians trust you heading into the election?

>> Minister Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It really sounds like the member of the official opposition agrees with all the announcements that we've made

recently. Obviously, our investments all on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we're all about care. We're not about cuts as we anticipate from the side opposite. We need to know that the cma's campaign has a lot to do with the election and using political pressure to get the best deal for its membership. We understand this. This comes from us being in government. But on this side of the House, we're very aware it is our responsibility to use public dollars as wisely as possible. If we work in the public interest, and we are building a health care system that is serving everyone, and that comes from us being in government. We are investing more, but we also have to insure every dollar we are currently spending is providing the most it can for patient care. So we're completely committed to driving down those wait times. We want to added capacity to our hospitals and expand home care, long-term care, and mental health services in this province.

MPP Natyshak to Minister Lalonde Re: Funding Corrections Workers and Inmates

>> MPP Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Speaker. I'd like to welcome our hard-working front-line dedicated correctional and probations parole officers here today. As well as community advocates who are here once again to highlight the crisis in corrections, Speaker. There are people who have worked nearly their entire careers under these conditions in corrections. Violence in the workplace is at epidemic levels. PTSD from exposure is at chronic levels. These correctional probation officers need resources not good intentions. They need training but most importantly, they need adequate staffing levels that can alleviate these pressures. Speaker, the Liberals claim they have created 1,500 new positions, but Speaker, this is simply a new metric of Liberal accounting. Because as far as --24 actual positions have been created. After 15 years, how can this government be trusted to correct the crisis in corrections th've created?

>> Minister Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much. Certainly I appreciate the question. And I know on this side of the House how appreciative we are of our hard-working, dedicated correction officers and correction staff parole and probation officers and everyone, Mr. Speaker. And certainly I hear the concerns, that we hear those issues that are raised, but Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk about some of the investment that we've been taking in the past few years. And you know, we made a commitment, and I share this earlier where we have hired 1,400 new officers, and we're fully committed to achieve our 2,000 new correction officers that we had intend. We have also hired more mental supports. Is there more to do? Definitely. And I'll talk more on the supplementary.

>> MPP Natyshak: Thank you, Speaker. As many as 50% of inmates have mental health and addiction problems. Another five went out on stretchers this past weekend in niagara due to overdoses. There weren't enough nurses even to make a dent. There are 8,000 inmates inside our facilities, many of these on remand. There are 45,000 in community on parole, yet serious underfunding of parole, officers has meant caseloads of over 50 per officer. Bill 6 after 15 years tabled after the last act of a Liberal government is too little too late. Where is the explicit xhement to increasing resources for those working every day in corrections.

>> Minister Lalonde: The member reflected on bill six, and certainly this comes from several I would say years of consultation, and addressing the challenges and every Tim hear -- You know, Mr. Speaker, every time I hear incidents that are occurring, you know, with our corrections staff, our correctional staff, or inmates issues. It's always something that I take very seriously. And as I said, safety and security of our staff and inmates are priorities to me.

MPP Qaadri to Minister Jaczek (Coteau) Re: Mental Health Funding

>> MPP Shafiq Qaadri: My question is from the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Speaking doctor to doctor, I'd like -- the both of us know the ground reality and the fact that one in three Ontarians will experience mental health challenges in their lifetime and it's hopeful that society has come a long way in reducing the stigma. With that increased awareness comes increasing support. Our government introduced comprehensive mental health strategy, open minds, healthy minds. In 2015, we enlisted the help of those who live with mental health issues by creating the mental health and advisory council. I'd also like to commend the Minister for the newer psychiatric expansion in my own riding at Etobicoke general hospital. My question, can the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care detail the investments our government is making to improve care for those with mental health or addiction challenges?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the member to speak to an issue that deeply affects the lives of so many. Mental health does not discriminate. It affects people of all ages in every province of the corner regardless of gender, race, culture or sets socioeconomic status. Mental health and wellness must go hand in hand for Ontarians to live their best lives. Addictions and mental health Ontario representing over 200 addiction and mental health organizations in the province has stated that. What makes this announcement historic is not only the significant sum of the investment but it's also how comprehensive the approach is. There is recognition of the importance of housing, the unique needs of historically underserved groups such as racialized and LGBTQ. For those living with mental illness, their loved ones, health-care professionals, educators and anyone else affected by mental illness, we hear you and support you.

>> MPP Qaadri: Speaker, I'd like to in all sincerity commend the Minister of health and Premier Wynne for what is a historic advance with mental health and addictions in this province. We know that 70% of young adults with mental health problems will in fact have reported their symptoms to begun in childhood. That's why this investment is so important, because it will help -- go a long way to identifying and treating mental health illnesses as early as possible. My Colleague will know that anxiety, panic, depression, mental health, mood disorders, post traumatic stress disorder and suicides and suicide attempts are on the increase. We have increased mental health spending every year. We need to do more to address the wait list. Can you please share the details of the investments we're making in child and youth mental health.

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was a real proud moment for me to be part of the announcement last week joining the Premier and my Colleague as we joined advocates, stakeholders, people who have been advocating mental health services in Ontario to make a historic investment into supporting children and youth here in the province of Ontario. It's important when a young person needs help they have access to the services in all parts of Ontario, and I believe this investment, this historical investment of \$570 million into children's and youth services, mental health sector over the next four years is truly that. It's transformative and historical. Mr. Speaker, 12,000 more young people will get access to service this year, and by 2020, 21, it will go to 46,000 young people getting more services. I want to thank the parents out there, families, stakeholders, advocates for working with us to build and transform it.

MPP Nicholls to Minister Lalonde Re: Bill 6

>> MPP Rick Nicholls: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question to the Minister of community and safety and correctional services. Bill six, the correctional services transformation act is supposed to be a thorough overhaul of a broken correctional system. Insuring the safety of everyone in our detention centres should be paramount. But bill 6 is all about the inmates and not the safety of our correctional officers. The crisis in corrections is out of control. Assaults on officers are all the an all-time high. Had leaves officers feeling abandon, unappreciates and backing management sift want when inmates physically assault an officer, even when throwing urine or feces, the penalty for an inmate is nothing or a minor slapp on the wrist. Minister, when will you get tough on crime and respect our officers?

>> Minister Marie-France Lalonde: Well, ok. Bill 6 -- where to start. To be fair it's where to start. I was very happy this morning to be at the breakfast and always happy, Mr. Speaker, to engage with our correctional staff, and certainly, every time you hear issues and challenges they are facing, we are working with them to address this. Bill 6 is a foundation of a transformation, and something may be that particular member, that particular party may not understand, because while they were in power, Mr. Speaker, they actually privatized our institutions. You know what? Mr. Harris negotiating a very bad space deals that have feel today impacted our inmates and our correction officers all around our province. You know, I hear, and I am very committed, and working with our correction partners to insure their safety, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Nicholls: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Minister. Under the Liberal regime for the past 15 years, parole and probation have put greater emphasis on P and P offender risk assessment. This is basically turned parole and probation officers into mental health. P & P officer are not to blame. The police say it's not their responsibility. Worse, offenders describe probation and parole sup vision as a joke. 60% of criminals on probation or parole are medium to high-risk. So Minister, who is going to supervise these dangerous criminals?

>> Minister Lalonde: So Mr. Speaker, I had the great privilege as I said for the past few months of being the Minister of correction services, and I have engaged with our partner. And actually visited some of our parole and probation offices. And you know what? When you talk about the reality, there is a reality that they are shared with me. And we're going to be working with them to address this. You know, in this bill, Mr. Speaker, is actually part of this transformation. It is finding the solutions together to enhance our way of delivering a sensitive and a more meaningful approach to our inmates. At the same time we want to protect the hard-working individuals who are taking care of. Mr. Speaker, we have

looked at mental health and accountability. We have looked at insuring that our probation and parole officers have the support that they need. Thank you very much.

MPP Horwath to Minister McGarry Re: Public Transportation

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Over 20 years ago, the Conservatives government cut the provincial funding that paid for half of the municipal transit operations. For the last 15 years, the Liberal government has kept these devastating cuts in place. The TTC, which was once the envy of the world still struggles to provide reliable, frequent, comfortable, and affordable transit service. The advocacy group TTC riders is coming to queen's park today to demand the restoration of provincial funding for transit operations. Will the Premier restore the province's traditional 50% funding formula for all municipal transit operations as the NDP has proposed?

>> Minister Kathryn McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker and thank you for the question. We continue to work hard on this side of the House in collaboration with all of our partners at the municipal and provincial levels to improve everyone's commute. Let me be very clear. Our government is investing more in public transit in Toronto than any other provincial government in history. We have made historical investments such as \$3.7 billion for GO. In the 416 that will enable smart buses and now through our partnership with the federal government, together we are contributing nearly \$9 billion to support the city's priority transit project. We understand the need to support municipal transit operations. It's why we made the choice to double the amount of gas tax funding in the municipality. And to date the city of Toronto has received over \$2.1 billion in gas tax funding to support their local transit priority.

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, we need to improve transit service standards if we're going to offer people a reliable, convenient, and affordable alternative to the car. That means funding for transit operations. The TTC is the most underfunded major transit agency in North America. And no other jurisdiction in the world forces major transit agencies like the TTC to rely solely on municipal funding and property taxes. But the Premier has repeatedly refused to restore the successful funding formula where the province paid half of the TTC's net operating costs. Will the Premier continue to support the Conservative cuts to transit or finally fund 50% of the net cost to all municipal transit operations as the NDP has proposed.

>> Minister McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker and thanks for the supplementary. You know, Speaker, we continue to find ways through things like fare integration to ensure we work hard to make the commute more affordable and more comfortable. We have dramatically reduced the cost of a trip by taking when you transfer between GO Transit or the U.P. Express and on your presto card. We have continued to invest more than \$400 million towards replacing 204 TTC cars. We continue to do work and know there's more work to do. We're

supporting the expansion of local rapid transit while also supporting operating needs through our gas tax program, which will double, again, from two cents to four cents per litre in 21-22. They have voted against countless budgets that support transit and continue to vote against the budget that will contain investments in the transit in Ontario.

MPP Fraser to Minister Albanese (Lalonde) Re: Francophone Immigration

>> MPP John Fraser: My Speaker is for the Minister of citizenship and immigration. Speaker, my riding of Ottawa South is home to a strong and vibrant Franco-Ontarian community. It's continued that we continue to support the francophone community. It's home to the largest francophone community in Ontario outside of Québec and a community that goes back more than 400 years and is a vital part of our provincial heritage. I know the minister along with her federal counterpart hosted a territorial forum on francophone immigration. Can you show what they're doing to show Ontario as a French-speaking destination place?

>> Minister Laura Albanese: Thank you for the question and to the member from Ottawa South for his question and advocacy for his francophone community. Mr. Speaker, it was a pleasure to welcome my counterparts here in Ontario. At the forum, we highlighted the leading role that Ontario is playing in the francophone and to reach our 5% target laid out in our immigration action plan. As part of the plan, we have launched the Ontario French-speaking skills workers stream, where 4.1% of our nominees within the Ontario immigrant nominee program in 2017, were French speaking. We are promoting also our province globally and prioritizing the expansion of services. And soon we are to find an on French-speaking immigrants with the federal government as part of our Canada --At the forum, we announced a new federal provincial action plan for increasing francophone immigration outside of Québec. And the plan outlined actions that we can --

>> MPP Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Minister for her answer. Our government has insured that equity is one of our priorities as a government. And that is also to insure that our 622,000 francophones have all the means necessary in order to live in French in our province. Our government continues to demonstrate our commitment towards Franco-Ontarians. Our government also understands the challenges of the community and are putting in all the efforts in order to provide the Franco-Ontarians' community with all the tools necessary in order to thrive in French.

>> Minister Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the member from Ottawa South for his question. Mr. Speaker, French immigration is essential to the Franco-Ontarian community in the province. That's why I'd like to congratulate the efforts of my Colleagues, the Minister of citizenship and immigration for attaining the objective of 5 francophone immigration. I had the opportunity to represent the voice of Franco-Ontarians in this province with my Colleagues on the second summit of francophone immigration that was held in Toronto last week. We have made progress since the first forum that was held in

moncton last year. Now we have an action plan that will insure that we have the measures to support francophone immigration in the province. Thank you.

MPP Yakabuski to Minister Flynn Re: Hearing Aid Program WSIB

>> MPP John Yakabuski: Speaker last January the workplace safety insurance board brought in significant changes to its hearing aid program without properly consulting audiologists and recipients and only handpicked three suppliers. After a year under these changes, we have feedback to know that workers have been adversely affected by this change. The new system does not save the wsib money, yet it forces workers, injured workers to rely on three suppliers for their hearing aid. A hearing aid is not a one size fits all. Choosing a hearing aid is a decision that should be made by the patients and their health-care professionals. Speaker, as a result of the on-job loss, we owe these people a good hearing aid system to work for them. Will the Minister reverse these changes that the wsib so injured workers can get the hearing aid that suits them best?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Speaker, thank you, and thank you to the member for the question, Speaker. Speaker, in the past, injuries have taken place in Ontario's workplaces, because practices weren't put in place at the time, and that has resulted in hearing loss for some workers. These workers need to know that they've got a system that will give them the hearing aid devices they need. The wsib has done a very transparent process. As a result of an rfp, three manufacturers was successful. Anyone that is renewing their hearing aid device, Speaker, there's a very specific health-related region, is allowed to go to the wsib and is allowed to submit the reasons for that and they're dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Speaker, I always appreciate advice from the other side and appreciate advice on how I can make the wsib work a little better. When we were trying to cover psychological injuries, index pensions, Speaker, where were they when the injuries workers were there?