

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript - Thursday, April 6, 2017

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
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>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of finance. This government loves to paint a rosy picture about the state of Ontario's economy. But yesterday a report on cbc confirmed that Ontario has the second-worst economy for young people in the country. The second worst in the country. Mr. Speaker, why the Liberals failing Ontario's youth and the next generation? Why are they not giving young people hope and opportunity in the province of Ontario?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question. I recognize that all of us are concerned about ensuring that Ontario grows inclusively for all. We are outpacing the g-7. We're leading the way in Canada. We outpaced the average of the United States. Growth and jobs and our economy has been over 100,000 annually, over 720,000 since the depth of the recession. These are important factors. More importantly we need to continue to invest in our young people. That's why we've invested heavily in skills and training. That's why we've taken more steps towards university and College and postsecondary. That's why we put more into trades, all of which is helping our young people succeed. We recognize that youth unemployment has been a dramatic issue across the world, including the United States and other parts of Canada. We need to lower that unemployment rate for our young people. We need to foster experiential learning. I commend our Deputy Premier who has taken extraordinary steps to do just that.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, I was hoping I would get a response by the Minister of finance about this report that said it's not just the world. Here in Ontario, the second worst in Canada in terms of young people and the economy. That's not a record you should be proud of. Whatever the government's been doing for 14 years, it's not working for young people. The report, Mr. Speaker, part of generation squeeze's code red campaign noted that, in recent years, full-time earnings have fallen for young people in Ontario by \$4,600. That's putting young people below the national average when it comes to income for full-time work. This is causing young people to put off important milestones according to the report. Mr. Speaker, this is not encouraging for Ontario's youth. The second worst economy for young Canadians is in the province of Ontario. What is this Minister of finance going to do about that? Will he make sure young people are not let down in this province?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we all recognize that we need to invest in skills, in our highly trained work force to ensure that our young people are prepared for the jobs of tomorrow. The member opposite has oftentimes gone back to glory days of assembly line work with smokestacks and manufacturing of the past. They may want to go back to coal. They want to go back to the days when people weren't as skilled as trades for the necessary jobs of tomorrow. We're doing that, Mr. Speaker. We're doing that through the work that's being done by all the universities across Ontario and the leadership taken by Kitchener- Waterloo, Toronto and Ottawa on new innovation, on new techniques in agri-food processing, in clean tech. Clean tech, which is the future for many young people. That member opposite. Actually does not agree with, Mr. Speaker, and we need to ensure that our young people are prepared for those future opportunities—

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of finance. I'm shaking my head at that response. It was absurd. We get a response on coal, but we have a cbc report here "Generation squeeze" talking about the fact that young people are struggling in Ontario more than almost anywhere else in Canada, where you've seen full-time earnings have fallen by \$4,600, where there's jobs available in Ontario that this government's not equipping young people for. The chamber of commerce report showed that we lose billions each year for jobs available in Ontario that young people aren't equipped for. And so rather than talk about coal or something -- nothing related to the question. What I'd appreciate is an answer from the Minister of finance on this report that was published in the C.P.C., that shows young people in Ontario are falling behind. What is the Minister of finance going to do. To make sure young people in Ontario aren't put last in Canada by this government?

>> Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the fact is youth employment actually rose 7,500 in February of 2017, and youth unemployment rate actually went down by 1.7% but more can be done, Mr. Speaker. It's why we are trying to reduce the skills gap by a skilled work force. I've got to tell you, Mr. Speaker, the employment Ontario network has now helped along approximately 1 million Ontarians, many young people from 2015 to 16 including 122,800 employees across Ontario. We're investing \$173 million in 2016/17 to offer a range of products that support apprentices, employers and trained delivery agents. In April 2016 the government also invested 55 million over three years to help the next generation of skilled tradespeople. And as a result of the government's investment and support of the apprenticeship programs, new apprenticeship stages have grown by 17,100. And more than 25,000 in 2015/16. More needs to be done, Mr. Speaker. We are doing our utmost and we put so in the budget --

MPP Scott to Minister Lalonde Re: Sexual Assault Training for Judges

>> MPP Laurie Scott: My question's to the Minister of status for women. Can I count on the Minister's support for my bill requiring that judges be educated about how to properly handle sexual assault cases?

>>Minister Marie-France Lalonde: It gives me great pleasure -- I thank the member for her question. Sexual assault is a very, very serious issue that demands attention from all levels of government. And I have to say, as the Attorney General has said before, this is a nonpartisan issue, Mr. Speaker. The Attorney General has made it clear that we are actively looking into what more kblg done -- can be done about sexual assault education for judges. The chief justice has reassured the Attorney General that the ongoing education of our judiciary is critically important to public confidence in the system. The court has provided education on issues related to sexual assault and violence against women for over 30 years. I also know that Ontario judges have expressed to the federal training program. Have access to the federal training programs offered by the national provincial institute and can directly benefit from these new supports.

>> MPP Scott: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to go back to the Minister for the status of women, because I know she, in particular, must be aware of the importance of this kind of training. There are still incredible stigmas attached to sexual assault. Sexual assault is chronically underreported in Canada, with about 90% of women never bringing their cases forward. Our judges should have the tools they need to treat these cases with the utmost sensitivity. So I've spoken with many women and victims' service organizations and all of them support mandatory sexual assault law training. This is a nonpartisan issue. So we must protect women from being revictimized, especially after having the bravery to come forward about their exp Eriences in the first place. Since this Attorney General has not been clear where he stands on this issue, I'm wondering -- If I can count on the support of the Minister responsible for the status of women to convince him of the importance and help move these changes forward.

>> Minister Lalonde: Again I thank the member for her question, and I have to say I think the Attorney General has made it very clear that we're actively looking into what more can be done about sexual assault education for judges. We are actively looking into more about what more can be done, and as the member has mentioned and we're saying, this is a nonpartisan issue. So, Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her questions and will -- thank you very much.

>> MPP Scott: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe the Minister for the status of women was trying to answer my previous question so I will go back to her again. I want to share a story Rona ambrose shared in the federal pdarliament. Instead of a health act taxi driver who was acquitted of sexual assault charges. The judge in question ruled that clearly at drunk can consent. We know that not to be true as countless legal experts have torn that ruling to shreds. We can't have such basic mistakes being made in our courts. So, Mr. Speaker, will this government mandate sexual assault training before Ontario has a case as egregious as was in nova Scotia?

>> Minister Lalonde: Again, thank you very much for the supplement. Mr. Speaker, you know, I have to say that this is a very important issue, and I think that we all agree and I know a Colleague here in the House, the member from Davenport, has also and is a strong advocate for this. I want to say thank you to the member actually from Davenport for interest in this very important area. As member of this House, she has the rights and responsibility to raise important issues affecting her constituents, and we look forward to renewing -- And I have to -- and by saying actually I look forward, and I think we all do look forward to reviewing the bill once it is tabled in the legislature and the ongoing dialogue and debate -- And again, I'll say, as a member of this House, as a woman, as a mother, I know how this issue is sensitive and important, and I know that we can do more. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Horwath to Minister Matthews (Ballard) Re: Housing Costs

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the acting Premier. The Premier said this week that reports of some residents in Toronto seeing their rents double is unacceptable. This morning I called for unanimous consent to pass a bill that would make this unacceptable practice illegal now. The Premier's Liberal government said no to stopping the unfair gouging right away. Why?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Thank you, Speaker, and happy birthday. The Premier's been clear many, many times. The Minister of housing has been clear that we are moving forward with the plan to address Ontario increases in rental costs. She has made that clear, Speaker. The NDP know that we have -- we have said that, and we're actually happy that we're on the same page when it comes to helping families who are feeling the pinch of a rental market struggling to keep up with demand, Speaker. I can tell you that our plan will go further and do more than the NDP is proposing. So the political games that are being played, Speaker, are not particularly helpful. We are looking forward to introducing a bill that will actually address at larger problem, Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Once again, after 14 years of doing nothing, this Premier and her Minister of housing have admitted that there's a problem. This morning we did something very simple, and we asked for the Premier's Liberal government to close the 1991 rent control loophole today to protect tenants from unscrupulous landlords. This should have been a no-brainer, Speaker. Are the Liberals allowing more renters to be ripped off while we wait for their bills because they fear that supporting the bill currently before the House won't give them enough political credit?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the leader of the third party for the question. Again as the Premier has said, and made clear many, many times, along with myself, we will be bringing in -- we'll be bringing forward a plan that addresses these unfair increases in rental costs. And as I've said time and time again in this House and outside this House, sooner rather than later. Mr. Speaker, there's a whole host of things that we will be bringing forward. We will -- the plan of the third party is the one issue, a one-issue-only idea. We have been looking at the R.T.A., the residential tenancy act since last June, Mr. Speaker. Bringing forward a very robust change

>> Andrea Horwath: Here's one issue. It's the issue that people are getting double rent increases and they can't afford them.

[Applause] That's the issue, Speaker. And -- clearly the Liberal government is playing partisan games with this issue. Sadly, it's what Ontarians have come to expect from the Liberals. What do the Liberals have to say, Speaker? What do they have to say to those people -- Who will see their rents double in the coming days, the coming weeks, while the Liberals drag their feet to score some political points before the next election?

>> Minister Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker. You know, it's wonderful that the NDP have finally come to the table to talk about -- we have been working on this, Mr. Speaker, for many, many months. The rent control, the R.T.A., since last June we've been looking at this. Speaker, why don't we just stop the games on the other side and move forward together? Let's have Ontarians realize

their dream of having an affordable place to call home, Mr. Speaker. Politics has no place when it comes to finding people a good place to live. Thank you, Speaker.

MPP Horwath to Minister Ballard Re: Housing Costs

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My next question is for the acting Premier. Look, the Premier and her Minister have admitted that renters need help. Apparently they've been working on it for a year. Well, in the meantime, time has been ticking and people are losing their apartments because of economic evictions. But given the chance to do the right thing this morning, they said no. And I guess they said no because there's just not enough in it for them. Will the acting Premier tell us how many Ontarians are going to lose their apartments due to excessive rent increases while they wait for the Liberal government to do the right thing?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Well, thank you again, Speaker. Thank you to the leader of the third party for this continuing dialogue, because it allows me to be able to stand up -- Thank you, Speaker. Because it allows me to remind the leader of the third party that we are going to do more than simple rent control -- rent control. That is a key part of what we are bringing the expansion of rent control. But we have been studying the whole host of surrounding issues through the residential tenancy act, Speaker, and we'll be moving forward with some pretty significant changes in the near future. Mr. Speaker, we've said this time and again. I really wish the politics would stop on the other side. I really wish that the party opposite -- The third party would stop playing politics and really focus on making sure people have a good place --

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, since the Premier and her party refuse to allow a bill to pass today that would protect renters, and they seem unconcerned with the number of people that will be hurt waiting for the Liberals to finally -- Will the acting Premier, at the very least, tell renters that the Liberal bill, when it eventually gets here, will in fact be retroactive and cover the folks receiving rent increases this week and next week and the week after that while they're by looking out for their own political interests?

>> Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. You know, what I want to talk about now is that, looking at the whole residential tenancy act since last June entailed us travelling across Canada, talking to land lords, talking to tenants about what needed to be changed. We will have a robust package of change that we'll bring forward, along with expanding rent controls, Mr. Speaker. It's just not as simple as doing one. You have to do a whole bunch of them. But while I'm at it, Mr. Speaker, I can walk through a whole list of things that this government has done to ease the burden on renters and affordable housing. You know we've made secondary streets legislation. We've passed inclusionary zoning. We've frozen the municipal tax on rental properties. We've doubled, doubled the maximum refund. For first-time home buyers. Mr. Speaker, we're Collecting data. We're working with the federal government to get it done.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, when there is a crisis, the government has to act quickly, and there is a crisis in the rental housing market today in Ontario. But the Premier seems more concerned with doing what's best for the Liberal party as opposed to what's right for Ontarians. She refuses to tell people what she's going to do or when she's going to do it. But renters are suffering right now. Instead of playing politics, at the expense of hardworking Ontarians, will the Liberals commit today to retroactive legislation that will protect renters now, facing huge increases and the loss of their homes?

>> Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. And I should say happy birthday as well. Now, Speaker, again, I'll go back to what the Deputy Premier started with her comments. The Premier has made it clear many times that we're moving forward with a plan to address unfair increases in rental costs. The NDP know that. The third party knows that. We appreciate that we're on the same page. We're delighted that they're on the same page with us. When it comes to helping families who are feeling the pinch of the rental markets and who are struggling, who are struggling to keep up, a market that's struggling to keep up with demand. But, Speaker, as we said at the outset, our plan will go

further and do more than what the NDP is proposing. You know it's not the first time we've seen the NDP playing political games on issues like this.

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault Re: Small Business Hydro Rates

>> MPP Todd Smith: Thank you, Speaker. Good morning and happy birthday. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Premier this morning. Big trouble for G.T.A. Employer kitsco Freezies has more than 200 employees here in Toronto that saw their hydro bill go up \$100,000 last year. \$100,000. According to their president, they don't qualify for the government's hydro scheme. He said, quote -- we get nothing back. We pay and we pay. Speaker, how many more jobs is this Liberal government going to chase out of Ontario before they do something for our job creators?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to rise and talk about our plan, Mr. Speaker, the one that's actually going to help 500,000 small businesses and farms right across the province, Mr. Speaker. And let's not forget, too, the Minister of economic development and I were just in Brampton this morning talking about how another company is going to be saving 20%, Mr. Speaker, \$2 million on their electricity bills. And all of this, Mr. Speaker, is part of our Ontario fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, a plan that is actually going to be put into effect by this summer, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that we can help everyone right across the province. Unlike the party opposite, Mr. Speaker, that has no plan. We heard that they once had a five-point plan and then a 3-point plan. And now, Mr. Speaker, they have no plan. No plan for hydro. No plan for Ontario, Mr. Speaker. We are the government that acts and helps businesses.

>> Minister Smith: Speaker, this is the government that has bungled this file like no other file that we have ever seen. And they have the audacity to stand here and expect us to clean up for them. Their plan has so many holes in it, it's like Swiss cheese, Mr. Speaker. Speaker, kitsco Freezies creates jobs here in Ontario. Create jobs with their suppliers as well. They source their corrugated containers, their plastic and most of their supplies right here in Ontario. But their C.E.O. Told global news this is week more and more businesses are going to pack up and move to the United States. We know there is a coalition -- Manufacturers in Ontario hanging on by a thread. So why doesn't your latest scheme help fix that for those employers here in Ontario?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very, very pleased to rise and talk about that specific company. They qualify now, Mr. Speaker, thanks to our program because 600 kilowatts of power. We confirmed with Elektra, their electric company, that they qualify for the I.P.I. Program. So we have a plan that's help businesses. They have no plan, Mr. Speaker. They're too busy writing hockey policy and not worrying about the people of Ontario. We are worried about the people of Ontario. We are making sure that we are addressing this issue, Mr. Speaker, and helping these businesses. We're building infrastructure. The 427, Mr. Speaker, the MPP from Vaughan the Minister of transportation is working hard that this business will see access to this. We're making sure they've got access to the I.P.I. Program, Mr. Speaker. They can keep talking about hockey policy. We'll keep working for the people of Ontario.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Executive Salaries

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Speaker, for the second time in about a week, the Minister of energy has defended outrageous salaries for hydro executives. Sorry. To the Minister of energy. The C.E.O. of Hydro One now makes six times the salary of his predecessor. And the C.E.O. of O.P.G. Made over \$2 million last year, even though the C.E.O. -- Somehow, somehow makes do with less than a third of that. But the Minister of energy thinks it's ok for C.E.O.s to extract these outrageous salaries from their customers. Is this why the Minister thinks it's ok for private investors to drive up hydro bills so they can extract outrageous profits from the ratepayers of Ontario?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleased to rise and comment once again on

recognizing that, yes, Mr. Speaker, we've all acknowledged that these are high salaries, Mr. Speaker. But when it comes to O.P.G., the one individual that the Honourable member mentioned, this is the individual that is actually running our nuclear facilities, Mr. Speaker. We want to ensure that we have the best in the world to make sure that our nuclear facilities stay safe, Mr. Speaker. We also want to ensure that we have our nuclear facilities, Mr. Speaker, on refurbishment right now at Darlington, Mr. Speaker, that they're on time and on budget. And the work that our executive team at O.P.G. is doing, Mr. Speaker, is keeping them ahead of schedule and under budget, Mr. Speaker, and that's fantastic news because all of those savings, Mr. Speaker, go back to ratepayers. And when you're talking about salaries, Mr. Speaker, we're not even talking about a cent that would be on anybody's bills, Mr. Speaker. We're looking at making sure that we're taking 25% off all bills, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to do that come summer. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Tabuns: Speaker, back to the Minister of energy. The values of those who think these outrageous C.E.O. Salaries are acceptable are the same values of those who think it's acceptable to drive hydro bills up to the point where people have difficulty paying them. Ontario used to have a hydro system that reflected our public values. But the P.C.S and the Liberals have replaced this with a system based on different values, a system based on private profits, not public good. Will the Minister restore the public values of Ontario's hydro system and stop the sell-off of Hydro One?

>> Minister Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, the system that he's talking about, Mr. Speaker, when they were in power and when the Conservatives were in power, Mr. Speaker, the system, they let it actually disintegrate, Mr. Speaker. They let it fall apart, Mr. Speaker. We had to invest \$50 billion. Let me say that again. \$50 billion to ensure that we have a reliable system, Mr. Speaker. Now they want to go back to the way it was. It's like they want to be like the P.C.S, Mr. Speaker, and bring back coal. We actually eliminated coal, Mr. Speaker. That's like taking 7 million cars off the road. Investing -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is not looking back, Mr. Speaker. This government is looking forward. We're creating jobs. We're building Ontario up. We're lowering electricity bills for everyone, Mr. Speaker. We won't look at the past like our opposition parties.

MPP Colle to Minister Leal Re: Ontario Vegetable Farming

>> MPP Mike Colle: I have a question for the Minister of agriculture and rural affairs. Mr. Minister, one of the things that Ontarians really appreciate is the safe, clean, fresh, wholesome food that they can get at their local grocery stores across Ontario. They love the fact that they can go into a grocery store and be assured that you have local farmers producing food that is produced locally, provides jobs, and they can eat that local food. I know that recently some people have said what more can we do to ensure that we not only invest our local farmers, like littledale farms. Make sure that Ontarians appreciate the locally grown cabbages, beets, potatoes and carrots. Not always depend on foreign --

>> Minister Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from Eglinton-Lawrence for that question this morning. I've had the opportunity to tour the member's riding, and what is always very impressive is the number of backyard gardens in many of the homes in the riding in Eglinton-Lawrence. Supporting local foods. Jobs and support economic growth in communities right across the province. All 107 members in this House should be extremely proud that we have 52,000 family farms in the province of Ontario. We produce more than 200 different foods and commodities that cater to the diversity of our populations. Mr. Speaker, since the obsession with then ag Minister bill Newman, Ontario food bread is turning 40 this year and serve as our government's primary tool to inform Ontarians of the many local food options. They have access to when buying their groc Eries increasingly and eating out. Foodland Ontario is one of the most recognized brands in the world today.

>> MPP Colle: Yes. And I know that foodland Ontario is celebrating its 40th year, and if you're talking about backyard gardens, you'll see in my riding what's being grown now in the backyards is garlic, because garlic is now selling for \$400 a bushel. So therefore they see the opportunity to have that locally grown garlic replaced by foreign garlic that is no good. So we've got to encourage local food --

And I want to say, you know, when I was in my local grocery store lady York, there was somebody complaining about cauliflower from California for 10 bucks. I said forget the California cauliflower. You can buy a bag of Ontario potatoes for \$2.99. Bag of potatoes

>> Minister Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the supplementary from the member from Eglinton-lawrence. Perhaps we should have an emergency debate this afternoon whether tomato is a fruit or a vegetable. I know that all of us here today are particularly proud of what's grown in Ontario, and Ontarians take this opportunity to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the foodland. For my friend the member of St. Catharines who's a high-tech guy, I encourage everyone to also join the conversation online using #foodland40 or #love on food. 40 ways to celebrate local food. That will be featured throughout the year, Mr. Speaker .

MPP McNaughton to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Costs

>> MPP Monte McNaughton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question this morning is to the energy Minister. A very sad story from my riding. A constituent in the town of Glencoe lost their house to a fire on January 8th of this year. But what followed in February was salt in the wound. A hydro bill for delivery of absolutely no energy after the removal of the hydro meter in the amount of \$35. But, Speaker, what really set off alarm bells was the following month, when this constituent received yet another bill. This time for \$193.55 and which stated that Hydro One read the meter on February 28, 2017. To be clear, Hydro One claimed to have read a meter that was not there and presented a bill on the basis of this fictitious reading. Speaker, does the Liberal government think it's right to charge someone for hydro. Whose house was burned down and no longer exists?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And that is a problem that should -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying it's awful for that family. It must be difficult for them to be going through that. One of the things I would suggest is that they follow up with Hydro One because Hydro One has been correcting those issues, Mr. Speaker. That's the one thing that they've been doing. That's the one thing they've been doing, Mr. Speaker, is enhancing their customer service. When you hear things like this, Mr. Speaker, of course no one agrees with it, and that's why Hydro One has been acting quickly to ensure that they can fix and correct issues like this, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP McNaughton: Speaker, back to the energy Minister. The bill that followed the fake meter reading isn't just an issue for this constituent. It actually has caused for all taxpayers in Ontario as well. Through the Ontario electricity support program, taxpayers were on the hook for almost \$100 on top of the almost \$200 the ratepayer was charged. Speaker, how can this Liberal government expect people to trust that energy prices are fair for families and businesses when people are being told their distributor is reading a meter that no longer exists, executive salaries are through the roof, and the cost of cap and trade is hidden?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, you know, we feel for that family and of course hope everything is working well for that family. Again as I'll say, Mr. Speaker, Hydro One recognized in the past, the new management team recognized in the past that their customer service needed improvement. The Ombudsman actually was -- brought forward many recommendations that the Hydro One management team and Hydro One staff have been acting upon, Mr. Speaker. I again would encourage my friend opposite to have that family call Hydro One immediately and that is something that will be rectified as quickly as possible, Mr. Speaker, because it is one of the important things that Hydro One is doing, Mr. Speaker, and the team there is very proud to say that they're working to change that dynamic. And I would hope that he tells them to follow up.

MPP Campbell to Minister Hoskins Re: Lyme Disease

>> MPP Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. After a 10-year tick host study conducted across Ontario revealed that corkscrew island, located 20 kilometres southwest of Kenora, has the highest infection prevalence of Lyme disease ever reported in Canada,

a research study last year determined that Lyme disease was found in eight species of ticks with 41% testing positive for Lyme, a disease with no cure. This research is a bombshell for people living in the northwest, and despite its author sending a copy to the ministry of Health and Long-Term Care last November, the government has not so much as even notified the public about it. The people in Kenora and across the northwest are worried about contracting Lyme disease and far too many are already suffering with this debilitating disease. Why is this government not acting on a health crisis that is greatly affecting northerners?

>> MPP Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, this Lyme disease is a disease that is affecting many, many parts of this province and many Ontarians. It's an important issue and it's the reason why in July of last year I -- Ontario launched the combating Lyme disease through collaborative action action plan, which is a 10-step education and awareness plan partly to deal with this specific issue that has been referenced with regards to the north, is to help Ontarians understand the risk that exists in many parts of this province, including in the north, but also the steps that they can take as individuals, as parents, as owners of animals as well, because this is a disease that affects humans and animals, dough mess tis indicated pets. Certainly when it comes to human infection, there are important measures that can and need to be taken to prevent as well as individuals are infected, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Campbell: Thank you, Speaker. With a we already know about this, about chronic Lyme disease is that it is a horrific disease with the potential to affect every system in the body and that it can result in paralysis. We also know that the most effective prevention of Lyme disease, once a tick has been attached for more than 24 hours, is to quickly treat it within 72 hours after it's removed. The problem is that the government doesn't have a strategy in place to treat Lyme disease and not all physicians are versed in the best treatment options. Nearly three years ago, in 2014, this House passed the motion from the member from Algoma- Manitoulin, calling on the government to create a comprehensive and integrated Lyme disease strategy for Ontario, but it still hasn't happened. Minister, the risk of Lyme disease is at potentially crisis levels in Kenora. When is this government going to develop not just an awareness plan. Robust strategy on Lyme disease to protect the people in the northwest and families all across this province.

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is true that the member from Algoma- Manitoulin has been a very vocal about this issue. We've had many conversations we -- I think -- in a collaborative way I'll be meeting with him and some stakeholders that are concerned about this issue in the coming weeks, Mr. Speaker. We also in addition to that action plan that I referenced, and there is federal action as well taking place, because this is an issue that doesn't just affect Ontario, but last year we also created a Lyme disease stakeholder group to lead a review on existing Lyme disease I issues. We are working with public health Ontario to update on all elements of Lyme disease, prevention as well as treatment, education and awareness including of health care professionals. I agree with the member opposite that this is -- A multifaceted issue. The Minister of climate change reminded mee when it comes to the north as well.

MPP Anderson to Minister Coteau Re: Grandview Children's Centre

>> MPP Granville Anderson: Speaker, my question is for the Minister children and youth services. We know that this government has shown time and time again their commitment to supporting children across this great province. As the MPP For Durham, I am grateful that the government continues to support special need so that children centres like grandview can help children and youth to succeed. Tour grandview satellite locations are located in my riding of Durham, one in port Perry and the other in bowmanville. The staff and families I have met are formidable and I'm extremely supportive of the important role they play in our community. But despite all their great work, the families supported by grandview are constrained by the amount of space available for treatment. There is an overwhelming need for an expansion of grandview that brings all locations together under one roof. Speaker, through you to the Minister. Can you please share what you'll be doing to make sure grandview has the space to expand their services and continue to do great work.

>> MPP Michael Coteau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take a moment just to thank the

member for his question. You know, as the former chair of a school board and the work he's done around F.A. S. In education, he's a strong advocate for the children in his community of Durham. Mr. Speaker, since 2008/2009 my ministry has invested over \$312 million of capital funding into children's treatment centre. I want to take a moment to recognize the great work that grandview's doing and I also know that many of my Colleagues, including MPP Dickson and MPP Maccharles also recognize the important work that they do. My most recent visit to grandview I met with families, staff and children. They shared stories with me on the incredible growth that's taking place in their region and the support needed for the children at grandview. They also stress that there just wasn't enough -- To deliver the type of services that children need. They want to do more but they couldn't. Grandview's capital request continues to be one of my top priorities and a decision will be coming soon.

>> MPP Anderson: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the Minister for sharing your experiences with the staff, children and families of grandview. I would have to agree with you it is truly a remarkable centre. They are doing great work to support young people in Ontario. I mentioned earlier grandview has two satellite locations in my riding and I see first hand the great work being done by the staff to support young people in Durham. Speaker, through you to the Minister. Can you tell us about your most recent visit to grandview children's centre and share some of the incredible things they are doing to help young people to succeed?

>> Minister Coteau: Thank you again. Happy birthday, Mr. Speaker. As soon as the legislature recessed for winter break, I made it a priority to get out there and to visit grandview children's centre. And, Mr. Speaker, it is truly a remarkable centre. The staff at grandview do great work every day. I would like to thank them for their dedication to helping children. They help young people increase their ability to participate at home, at school, in the community and they prepare them to achieve their goals for adulthood. I value the services provided by grandview and their continued commitment to providing support for children, youth and families. Mr. Speaker, as a government, we want to make sure that we provide the types of supports that allow for young people to reach their full potential and that families are supported. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Wilson to Minister Del Duca Re: Highway 26 Construction

>>MPP Jim Wilson: Speaker, since the Premier was in Collingwood today I'm going to ask the Minister of transportation about highway 26. Ok, Speaker. By not completing the five-laning of highway 26 in the east end of Collingwood, the province is holding up job creation and economic development. If this section of highway was completed, the town could extend Sir Sandford Fleming drive to highway 26, a move that would spur significant commercial development in the area. This issue with the highway has been unresolved now for over a decade. And that's totally unacceptable. I've written the Minister on several occasions about this matter, but apparently common courtesy has gone out the window because I can't get a response. Mr. Speaker, so I ask when will the Minister commit to finishing this section of highway 26 and will he state when the work will take place?

>>Minister Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member opposite for his question. I think he and I have chatted about this perhaps informally. I'm aware of the challenges around highway 26 in the Collingwood area. In fact, Speaker, I've had the opportunity to meet with the mayor and with municipal staff in the past regarding this particular stretch of highway. I know that M.T.O. has also been working closely with the municipality, and I understand the challenge. But it's a challenge that goes beyond Collingwood, Speaker. As that member may be aware prior to 2003, for many, many years, there was chronic underinvestment in infrastructure in every corner of this province. And that means that since 2003 in particular in the last four years, we are playing both catch-up and keep-up. I'm happy to respond with additional information as a follow-up question but I do appreciate the member's advocacy.

>> MPP Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister, but history of this was, during our last two years in office, we started the realignment of highway 26. Within a month of coming into office in 2003 you took the bulldozers off the highway. They remained off the highway for over a decade. Finally

when Donna Cansfield came along, mainly because she had a place up in Collingwood she put the bulldozers back on. You got most of the realignment but failed to do the autos end of Collingwood that goes into Collingwood. It doesn't look very nice for tourists coming into the gateway of Georgian triangle, and there's a number of jobs held up, about some 70 jobs for various businesses that want to move forward. Their properties are frozen right now by your ministry. They can't move forward. It's a bit of anticipate eye sore. It's -- the council and mayor, as you know, Mr. Speaker. The Minister are at wits' end. There's a culvert or a bridge that's falling down. Your ministry said get some boards this there to prop it up. It's going to cave in. Someone's going to get hurt.

>> Minister Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I thank the member for the follow-up question. As I mention under my first answer, I'm aware of the challenge. The Minister will continue to work with that community. I have an expectation not only in Collingwood but every corner of Ontario we will continue to make sure the shovels stay in the ground and that we can keep building, Speaker. It is interesting to note from the heckles coming on the other side of the House, Speaker. There are members on that side who have literally been talking to me for close to three years to demand we spend more ironically only in their riding Speaker. Those members, including the one asking that question, have voted consistently against the budgets from this side of the House that are building this province up, Speaker. And just a few weeks we're sure the Minister of finance will stand up and deliver another budget that will dedicate billions towards highway construction and expansion. I sincerely hope that moment and his team finally support our budget to support his community up as well as ours. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Bisson to Minister Hoskins Re: Helicopters for Medical Services

>>MPP Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of health. Minister, I was very surprised on Friday when I was up on the James Bay, to find out that we're going to be shutting down the air orange helicopter base in moosonee this summer. As you know there's new equipment that's been put in that base, as has been across this province. But for some reason the base at moosonee, the only one that they're doing this way, they're going to be shutting down the base for two months in summer to take the helicopter away for faint -- maintenance. We're not doing that anywhere else in the province where we shut down bases when we do maintenance on helicopters. Why are we shutting down moosonee? And will you help us turn that around?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I greatly appreciate the member opposite raising this issue with me. I believe we had a similar situation a year ago where there was the potential for a pause in the operations of an aspect of orange's work in moosonee but we were able, quite frankly, with co-operation and collaboration with the member opposite, we were able to come up with a solution that resulted in seamless and continuous orange operations and another model to address that. So I'm not familiar with all of the details of what's being proposed for this summer. I appreciate the fact that the member has raised it with us here in the legislature. I will pursue more information and see if there's an opportunity to look at the required maintenance in a different way.

>> MPP Bisson: Last year, Minister, the issue was it was new equipment and we had to train the pilots. Obviously you have to train them before you can fly them. We made accommodations in order to allow that to happen. Fair enough. In this case we're maintaining the helicopter. Every so many hours, we have to do routine maintenance to make sure that those machines are safe to fly for both the pilots and the crew, along with patients. My point is, if we're not shutting down bases across Ontario -- I'm not advocating we should -- why then are we allowing air orange to shut down the moosonee rotary wing base in order to maintain helicopters when we did he want do that anywhere else in the province? Can you please look at it, turn this around?

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank u.again I appreciate the question. So I know it's a different situation than it was last year. One was training. This is maintenance. And -- but, you know, I referenced last year because I think that we were heading in a similar direction in terms of the potential or perceived disruption that would occur during that training period. I referenced it because I think that perhaps there might be an opportunity here. I know the hospital officials have been consulted. I know that

local officials have been consulted by orange with regards to this -- I think we all agree maintenance is certainly required. I will look into this in more detail, speak to the member opposite to see, to provide the best possible solution we can, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Kiwala to Minister Flynn Re: PTSD Workplace Treatment

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of labour. One year ago today, first responders across Ontario celebrated as our government passed bill 163, supporting Ontario's first responders act. Since then I have heard from firefighters, paramedics and police officers from Kingston and the Islands who have benefitted from this piece of legislation. In my riding I know this increased level of support and heightened advocacy for mental health has had a significant impact in the lives of our community's first responders and those who are closest to them. First responders help keep my community safe and are always there for us when we need them the most. This legislation was a big step forward for Ontario to make sure that they get the help and resources they need right away. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister -- what progress have we made this year. 63 becomes law? And please give a round of applause for our first responders who are here with us today.

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member for that very important question and her own personal involvement in this issue. Speaker, we know that mental health in the workplace is an issue that demand the attention of everyone. That's employers, employees' union and the government. When we passed bill 163 in the House a year ago, we knew it was going to do something to help people in this province. Because it provides a sense of security for those first responders and for their families. It ensures faster ACCs to the wsib treatment and resources. Speaker, I'm proud to stand in the House today and tell you, as a result of the actions of this House, more than 600 first responders have already been helped by legislation in one year alone, Speaker. That's 600 men and women who will be seeing quicker -- who will receive quicker access to benefit and the services they need to bet -- get better. I visited with paramedics, Halton police, Oakville fire this morning. We should all be proud of what we did a year ago.

>> MPP Kiwala: I'd like to thank the Minister for his answers. I'm thrilled to hear that this legislation has also helped so many people across Ontario. I think we can all be extremely proud that these efforts have felt in every community across this province. It's encouraging to know individuals felt confident they could come forward and that there would be help on the other end for them. I have spoken to chief char Bono from the paramedics of Frontenac county about this and he's been pleased with the measures taken. It says a lot about the importance of eliminating the stigma around mental health and how our efforts in this area are working. In the last year, first responders in my community have talked to me about the second part of bill 163 that requires them to create PTSD prevention plans. I know they've been hard at work on these plans in my riding and as well across the province. Can the Minister please tell the House more about these efforts. First responders in each of our communities are putting these plans together?

>> Minister Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. Thanks again for that question from the member for Kingston and the islands. PTSD, Speaker, unfortunately the cure to PTSD continues to elude us. So we need to put a tremendous amount of effort into preventing PTSD in the first place. When we passed the bill, we included in the legislation a requirement that all employers of first responders file their prevention plans with my ministry as of April 23rd of this year. I'm looking forward to seeing those plans, seeing how we can highlight some of the best practices within those plans and sharing that information right throughout the province. I want everyone to benefit from the plan, Speaker. I want everyone to submit the best plan they possibly could. That's why I'll be putting them online, posting them publicly, Speaker. This is the next step in keeping our first responders in Ontario healthy and safe, giving them the dignity, the respect they deserve, and thanks again to the House. Particularly the member from Parkdale-high park, for what she did to make us all work together on this.

MPP Hardeman to Minister Ballard Re: Affordable Housing

>> MPP Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of housing. Under this government, the waiting list for affordable housing has grown by 45,000 families. Every day we hear from people who are having trouble afford a place to live. Yet this government is allowing money that was supposed to go to social housing to be wasted and misused despite the fact that I pointed that out repeatedly. Social housing money at the housing services corporation has gone to luxury vacations, bottles of wine, fancy dinners and many, many trips to Europe. In 2014, a provincial appointee, who was supposed to provide oversight resigned. After it was revealed he was being paid thousands of dollars every month to his consulting firm as well as being paid to be chair of the board. If this government is on top of the housing file, can they explain how they have failed to. To fill this provincial appointment after two years?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker. I know certainly Ontario is answering the call to provide more affordable housing across the province. I want to touch on a couple of things. Since taking office, we've committed more than \$2.4 billion to affordable housing. I think total now is for housing in general. It's about \$5 billion this government has put into housing across Ontario. I know that about 1.4 billion of that is the housing in Toronto alone. You know, this is quite a u-turn from the previous P.C. Government that abandoned any responsibility to support municipalities Housing and downloading. You know, I can tell you, Speaker, those investments this government has made have helped create over 20,000 affordable housing units and more than 275,000 repairs to social and affordable housing units. We're acting on this.

>> MPP Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, back to the Minister. I believe he missed the first question. Millimetre every dollar that social housing services corporation gives is a public dollar that was intended to provide social housing. We've heard from housing providers across Ontario that they could have saved substantial amounts of money if they weren't forced to buy through the housing services corporation. The city of Toronto found they saved \$6.3 million in a single year if this government would allow them to purchase natural gas at the best price. That means that into three years I raised this issue, Toronto alone could have had proxy \$1 million more for social housing, enough to reopen 380 of the units that they boarded up because they're not fit to live in. When Toronto community housing. Average of one unit a day, why does this government refuse to let them save millions by simply buying the same products for an extra price?

>> Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member for that question. Again I'll go back to what I said at the opening of my initial response that Ontario is answering the call to provide more affordable housing across the province. Mr. Speaker, we know that when people have a home, a house, they're healthier. They're able to pursue employment and better equipped to participate and contribute to their communities. So I'll go back and say, since 2003, this government has put \$5 billion into affordable housing. Speaker, \$22 million has been provided to Oxford county for example. I can go on, Speaker, with a long list -- Of things that we've done. For example one of the most exciting things we're able to announce is \$1.1 billion --