

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript - Tuesday, November 29, 2016

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period

41st Parliament, 2nd Session

Tuesday, November 29, 2016

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown to Minister Sousa (Del Duca) Re: Toronto Highway Tolls

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister - Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of finance. The Liberals need to open their eyes and realize that life is too expensive in Ontario. They need to open their eyes and realize that 416 and 9505 commuters can't afford these new Liberal tolls. The tax on commuters must end. There is no doubt. Mr. Speaker, my question to the government is will they make a u-turn before tollbooths are on the ramps for the gardiner and the D.V.P.? Do they not appreciate that commuters can't afford this giant new toll?

>> Min. Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And commuters and the people of Ontario appreciate this. You need to make decisions. You need to ensure that we continue to invest in our infrastructure and continue to look forward to the future, Mr. Speaker, and continue to be open-minded about what is being

proposed. No decision has been made. The council hasn't even reflected on the recommendations suggested being put forward by the mayor and the member opposite has put no ideas whatsoever forward in order to re-- relieve the issue that's before us.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister. Let's hear what stair stakeholders are saying about this. Durham chair Anderson had this to say about the Liberal plan to allow taxes on Toronto roads. He said I quote -- I think this is shortsighted solution. They're literally taxing the 905 to pay for roads that have already been paid for. Anderson says that tolls will end up hurting businesses. He concluded -- I think this is going to back fire. I agree with the Durham chair that this is going to back fire. The government is forcing people of Ontario to pay for roads they've already paid for. So my question is, this to the Minister of finance. I know that Durham Liberal MPP S must be pleading with the Minister of finance not to put this tax on Durham. I hope they're doing that. So the question is, to the Minister of finance. Heed advice of the Durham chair? Will he take advice from Durham Liberal MPP S and not impose this toll?

>> Min. Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I thank the leader opposite for his question. He has a follow-up on what the Minister of finance said on his first answer, Speaker. Everyone on this side of the House, everyone in Durham, everyone in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area understands very clearly where this government stands with respect to making sure that the transportation and transit system that we committed to in 2014 gets fully built, Speaker. And you know besides chair -- to cite chair Anderson from Durham in the context of that question is a little bit surprising to me, Speaker, because I've got to tell you any time I've had the chance to speak to any of our members from Durham or the chair himself, I've heard him celebrate the two-way all-day G.O. Train service. The support for the Durham V.R.T.. 407 phase 1 and phase 2 building out to the 35/115. That chair and our members understand we believe in producing results not turning away from tough questions. That leader could take a lesson from us. Thanks very much, Speaker .

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of finance. It's not just the mayor of mississauga. It's not just the Durham chair. It's most of the municipal leaders in the 905 saying this is a reckless bad Liberal tax. Let's hear what someone else said. Just listen to the mayor of Oshawa. John Henry. "I had no prior heads-up until I heard about this on the radio this morning. Would I support it? No." Henry -- Mr. Speaker, I know the Liberal members opposite don't like hearing what municipal mayors are saying about this Liberal tax. But let me continue. The mayor of Oshawa continued by saying -- there is just no money left that people have. They can't afford these tolls. So there's no mandate. In 2014, the Premier did not run on tolling the D.V.P. Ant gardiner. The mayors are saying no. Commuters are saying no. Why are they giving the city of Toronto this submission? Why do they want to tax the D.V.P. And the gardiner? It's wrong and the people can't afford it.

>> Min. Del Duca: Hangs very much, Speaker. Let -- listen, I've got to tell you two years and five months that I've been serving as the Minister of transportation, Speaker, and every corner of the greater Toronto and Hamilton area -- Speaker, in every corner of the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, what I hear from both commuters and from municipal leaders is their strong support for the transportation plan that our Premier and our government are delivering, Speaker. Go regional express rail, the Eglinton cross town, the finch west cross town, the finch west L.R.T., the Hurontario L.R.T. In mississauga, Speaker. The Hamilton L.R.T. The list is literally endless. But, Speaker, I have to share with the House, when I talk to municipal representatives in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area and beyond and when I talk to residents in every single community I just referenced they have a question for me. They want to know when the leader of the Conservative party stands on transit fund go ahead and transportation funding, and more importantly they want to know why ten years in Ottawa he was M.I.A.. On these very issues.

MPP Brown to Minister Murray Re: Mining Sector

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, since I can't get an answer on the Liberal tolls to the D.V.P. And gardiner I'll try something new. A question for Minister of the environment. A billion-dollar capital project that could lead to 1,000 jobs during construction and another 400 to 500 full-time jobs during operation sounds fantastic. But that very project that I'm describing is being held up by this government's red tape. The provincial and federal environmental assessments started at the same time in 2013. The federal government approved the project in April, but the provincial deadline of July 22nd came and went. Mr. Speaker, why is the Minister of environment single-handedly holding up the billion-dollar coté gold mine project near Timmins for no reason whatsoever? Why are we the slowest place to do business in Canada?

>> Min. Glen Murray: So, Mr. Speaker, over the last two years we have gone through major reforms in turnaround time because the wait times when I became Minister were long. Some of them were taking up to two years, and we had some real challenges. What is actually happening now is, on January 1st, we will be introducing measures that will cut those turnaround times in half, and as members are also aware we are computerizing and operating on the Easter system which will give us some of the fastest turnaround times in the country. As to the particular of the complexity of a gold my, I know the member for Nickel Belt and I have been discussing that and raising that. We are reviewing it right now and I will assure the member opposite it will be dealt with expeditiously.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Minister of the environment. A billion-dollar project, a local community on board. The local indigenous populations on board. The federal government, on board. Yet this government continues to wage its unexplained war against Ontario's mining industry. Not only did the Minister miss his legislative deadline in July but now he's asking local groups for reasons to oppose the project because he can't come up with any himself. The deadline to respond, mid December. More than five months after your own legislated deadline. But there's hope, Mr. Speaker. There's hope because the auditor general is reporting tomorrow on environmental assessment delays just like this one. So, Mr. Speaker, the Minister has seen the report. Did he pass with flying colours or is what's happening with the billion-dollar coté mining project the norm in this province and we are the province of red tape? Please tell us.

>> Min. Murray: So when the party opposite was in power, there was almost zero reform in this area, Mr. Speaker. Since Premier Wynne came into power, she immediately directed the reform of the E.B.V., which is under way, the E.C.A. System which is under way, ant environmental assessments which are moving to a highly automated Easter system. This is groundbreaking national leading reforms that will make us one of the user-friendly and simplest systems to use. With the particular issue of gold mines, it's interesting because we have major proposals coming forward from several gold minus Ontario right now for major reinvestment as the Minister of northern development will tell you it's a very dynamic and very exciting time for mining in Ontario, Mr. Speaker .

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Minister. The coté gold project is reflective of this government's contempt for the north and their failure to get projects moving. Just look at the ring of fire. The press releases from 2012 were written as if the chromite mine was a done-deal. It touted thousands of jobs coming to northern Ontario and has quotes from five Minister s including the current Premier that the deal was done. Their release was followed with years of empty, empty promises and the failure to act on the ring of fire is an embarrassment for this government. So, Mr. Speaker, it's been years since the ring of fire hasn't moved forward at all. Now the coté gold project is exp Eriencing the same neglect, the same red tape. When will this government finally commit to making sure the incredible potential of the north is seized? We don't need any more delays. We don't need more red tape. We want this government to support. The northern mining opportunities. Can I have a justification from the Minister ?

>> Min. Murray: Mr. Speaker, we have a working committee in Cabinet LED by Minister of northern development and mines specifically working on this. But I find this passing strange, Mr. Speaker, coming

from a former federal member. When we were twinning northern highways, spending five times what that government did in the north, 500% more twinning highways, he never raised a -- he never even raised a peep, Mr. Speaker. We are -- we had no federal matching money.... of northern highways are paid for by the government of Ontario. Not a red cent or word from the member opposite. He sat back while money poured into Alberta for the oilsands. No investment in green energy. No investment in the ring of fire. Nothing. He was a member from Alberta for about as good he was to us in Ontario. And now he has the nerve. To criticize the government that --

MPP Singh to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Costs

>> MPP Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Keeping the fridge on, running a pump to get water from the well or running a baseboard heater aren't luxuries. These are necessities. These are basic. Does the acting Premier think it's ok that working people and seniors can't afford these basics because hydro bills are so high?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'm happy to rise to anticipate that question, because it is an important question. It is something that we recognize that there are families, there are seniors out there, Mr. Speaker, that are having a difficult time paying their electricity bills and that's why, Mr. Speaker, we've brought forward with the from the speech from the throne the 8% reduction, the 20% reduction, Mr. Speaker, for the 330,000 families that qualify for that, Mr. Speaker. We know that more needs to be done, Mr. Speaker. That's why we continue to talk about the programs that we have in place. The Ontario electricity support program, Mr. Speaker, for example. It can provide up to \$45 per month for those families that qualify, and for seniors, Mr. Speaker, and for those that actually need to plug in for example a piece of medical equipment, Mr. Speaker. They can actually get up to \$75 a month to help on their hydro bills, Mr. Speaker. We know that there's more to do. The Premier talked about that a few weeks ago. My ministry is working very hard on that, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to find ways to help families, help seniors, to help everyone across the province with their electricity.

>> MPP Singh: Mr. Speaker, I ask the government to listen very carefully to the story of BOB and Jeannine. BOB and Jeannine thought they'd be able to afford to retire. They budgeted to live on old age and C.P.P. But then their hydro bills started to climb. In spite of heating their home with wood, their hydro bills were almost as much as their rent. Now, after 80 years living in Sundridge, BOB had to move out of his own community. He had to leave his own community. Does the acting Premier think that BOB and Jeannine need an apology or they need to actually have lower hydro bills?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. BOB and Jeannine will be getting lower hydro bills come January 1st with the 8% reduction, Mr. Speaker. I don't know the specifics of their story, Mr. Speaker, but he did mention Sundridge. Sundridge is a community, Mr. Speaker, that does get services in some parts by Hydro One, Mr. Speaker, and that means they have potential for qualifying for that 20% reduction, Mr. Speaker. That's a significant savings for that type of family and for 330,000 families right across the province, Mr. Speaker, that will qualify for that 20% reduction. But on top of that, Mr. Speaker, there are other programs in place. There's the northern Ontario tax credit. There's the leap program if they need to access that if they're having difficulty paying their bills, Mr. Speaker. There's also the Ontario electricity support program in which they will qualify for, Mr. Speaker, because he did talk about what their income is, Mr. Speaker. They will qualify and get some benefit from the O.D. P. program. If they're also heating their home with electricity, Mr. Speaker, then they qualify for that higher benefit. I do hope that that family gets that information so they can qualify and reduce their bills, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Singh: Mr. Speaker, last week in question period Andrea Horwath brought stories of people who had their power cut off even though they've done everything they could to conserve. This is 2016. And noble in this province should be paying as much for their hydro bill as they're paying for their rent. And nobody with a job or a pension, good savings should find themselves in a position where they're living in the dark, where they can't afford to or they don't have electricity to keep their fridge on. Their food is going bad and they shouldn't be in a situation where mould is growing in their homes because they -- because their basement is flooded and they can't run a sump pump. These are real stories. These are tragic realities in this province because of the Liberal government's choices. Will the Premier ensure that no more people in this province face the reality of having their hydro cut off?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to electricity, it really is an important piece for us that vulnerable customers have the resources to help avoid disconnections, and that's why we've enhanced consumer protection rules, including requiring a ten-day advance notice of disconnection, Mr. Speaker, with accompanying resources to help customers with their arrears, Mr. Speaker. There is relief program that will help them. Many other programs in place will help these families that are struggling because we do agree, everyone in this House would agree, Mr. Speaker, that it is unacceptable for families to have to live that way, Mr. Speaker, and that's why we brought forward the programs that we did in the speech from the throne. That's why we have the programs that we have, Mr. Speaker, because we -
- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because we are it will proud of the system that we built. We have a clean, green reliable system, Mr. Speaker, in which we no longer have to send out warnings telling people to go outside. And worry about breathing, Mr. Speaker, because we've eliminated coal. We've actually saving billions on our health care system. We are very proud of the system that we've built but we understand we've got to make it affordable for as many as we can.

MPP Singh to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Costs/Hydro One

>> MPP Jagmeet Singh: My question again is to the acting Premier. It's not only people that are struggling. It's also small businesses. Last year a Liberal backbencher thought it would be a good idea to declare tomato day in Ontario and declare tomato was the official vegetable in Ontario. Now on Monday, we learned that mooshy farm which is has been growing tomatos in Kingsville, for 45 years, is opening their newest greenhouse in Ohio. Because the cost of electricity is so high. Meucci said and I quote -- we are paying one of the highest rates in north America. It's causing us to move out of Ontario right now, end quote. I think most farmers would agree that they would rather have affordable hydro so they can keep their greenhouses operating rather than tomato day. Will the acting Premier take the first step towards creating more affordable electricity in this province by stopping. Any further sale of Hydro One?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I got to meet with the Ontario association of greenhouse growers. Mr. Speaker, I know many of us had the opportunity to speak with them. Mr. Speaker, they're crowing and creating great work and great -- creating jobs in our province and that's under the great leadership of the Minister of agriculture I'd like to thank him for all of his great work, Mr. Speaker. It is concerning when you hear about one business moving out of our province because we are doing great things, Mr. Speaker. We now have the I.P.I. Program which they are thrilled with, Mr. Speaker. The greenhouse growers association is thrilled with the I.C.I. Program because they will actually save, Mr. Speaker, one third of their bill. They've actually talked about, Mr. Speaker, the natural gas expansion program that's being done by the Minister of infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. They're very excited about that. That's a \$200 million loan program. \$30 million grant program. We're going to continue to see this sector grow in this province, Mr. Speaker. Because we've got the programs that are helping. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Singh: Mr. Speaker, small businesses are at their wits' end. The Windsor- Essex chamber of

commerce says they're hearing more and more from businesses ready to relocate to Ohio or simply willing to go under because they can't afford the cost of hydro. Kabob and curry in Windsor is looking to closing because of their bills, their electricity costs. Ice cold treats is stuck because they can't afford to hire any staff. Just today we've heard from pork producers who are talking about how the cost of high hydro is impacting them. Admitting a mistake is a good step but it doesn't help any of these small businesses if it's just an apology. Will the acting Premier do something concrete and commit to stopping the sale of Hydro One in this province?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to small businesses, we actually have many programs in place to help them, Mr. Speaker. The save on energy program for example, Mr. Speaker, is saving many, many businesses thousands of dollars and conserving energy, Mr. Speaker, ensuring that we're actually saving the system costs as well. We've got the I.C.I. Program that I mention under my previous answer, Mr. Speaker. We also have the 8% reduction that is coming January 1st that's going to help many small businesses, Mr. Speaker. But don't take my word for that. How about Alan Odette the C.E.O. Of the Ontario chamber of commerce -- we are happy about this. This is the right thing to do, particularly so that medium size enterprises can remain competitive relative to our largest competitor, which is just across the lake. This announcement today is very significant for residents of small industry, but the most important group that would benefit will be medium sized companies like manufacturing, Mr. Speaker. We've got business after business recognizing that the programs. That we are putting in place will help them continue to grow. We'll continue to do that, Mr. Speaker, because we know that building Ontario up is the right thing to do.

>> MPP Singh: Millimetre over and over we see Liberal Minister s standing up in question period and patting themselves on the back about how great a job they're doing on hydro. The more and more they do that, the more and more they show the people of this province just how disconnected they are, how out of touch they are with the people of this province who are struggling to pay their hydro bills, who are struggling to pay their bills. Listen, Mr. Speaker. Life is unaffordable. People are being squeezed. People at the top are doing better and better and everyone else is paying the price. Nobody, nobody in this province voted for that. Will the government stop just apologizing for their mistakes and instead do something concrete to actually fix them?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The concrete actions we have taken as 8% reduction for 5 million businesses and families right across the province, Mr. Speaker, effective January 1st. 20% reduction for 330,000 families, Mr. Speaker. 145,000 families qualified for the oesp program, Mr. Speaker. We're asking more families to apply to qualify. We've got five more programs, Mr. Speaker, that are helping families and businesses make sure that they stay competitive and actually lower their hydro rates but it's not just me that's saying this, Mr. Speaker. I talked about the Alan Odette from the Ontario chamber of commerce. The ... officer says our electricity prices are some of the lowest in the country, Mr. Speaker, and when it cops to our energy prices we're right in the middle of the pack. And you know who also endorse Thad, Mr. Speaker ? The environment commissioner, another officer of the House, who also said our prices. Are right in the middle of the pack, Mr. Speaker. We're making sure that we're building Ontario up, creating jobs, building infrastructure.

MPP Fedeli to Minister Sousa Re: Budget

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Speaker, every time this Minister stands here to tell us something, the financial accountability officer is compelled to release a report refuting what he just said. The Minister tells us he'll balance by 2017/18. The F.A.O. Releases a fiscal outlook that tells us they won't. Then the Minister puts out a fall economic statement telling us he'll balance, but the F.A.O. Releases a commentary saying that's not so. Contrary to the government's fantasy numbers the F.A.O. Says we'll have a deficit of 2.6 billion and a, quote, significant risk of structural deficits going forward. It's time the Premier and the Minister come clean with Ontario taxpayers. Mr. Speaker -- Will the Minister be raising more taxes or cutting more

services to fill the multibillion-dollar holes in his budget?

>> Min. Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And again I appreciate the work done by the F.A.O.. And as we all recognize he's -- about in the of the challenges that are face under our economy, has done so in the past and we've exceeded those targets. We recalibrated to do what's necessary -- So, Mr. Speaker, we have taken the measures necessary to grow our economy. Last quarter, Ontario outpaced the United States, the G-7 and Canada. And as a result we are taking those efforts into play. We're taking efforts to control our spending and we've done so being the lowest cost government anywhere in Canada as a result. As those revenues grow and as we control our spending we're balancing our books. The F.A.O. References in his commentary that his assumptions are actually less aggressive than others. We have a less aggressive approach in responding to the auditor general for example in order for us to take the necessary steps to come to balance next year and the year after that.

>> MPP Fedeli: Thank you. Back to the Minister. The people of Ontario cannot trust anything this Liberal government has to say. Yesterday the financial accountability officer confirmed the Minister's ... plan is a complete fantasy. Rather than own up to their years of waste, mismanagement and scandals, they continue to punish Ontario taxpayers. This means more onetime fire sales such as Hydro One. Higher taxes and fees like the 500 million more in driver's licences, and more cuts to frontline services. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister just come clean with the Ontario taxpayers and explain -Whether he's raising more taxes or cutting more services to fill the multibillion-dollar hole in his budget?

>> Min. Sousa: So, Mr. Speaker, let's come clean, because the member opposite always sort of miss interprets what's happening right now and always makes comparisons of some decisions that were never made in the past. We are outpacing Canada growth. We have the highest growth as identified by independent economists and we take those assumptions and pare it down even more in order to do our projections going forward. We have the lowest unemployment in eight years in the province of Ontario. We have -- actually had 621,000 net new jobs since the recession, Mr. Speaker. We have taken every step to manage our spending and control our debt by ensuring that we lock in our terms over longer periods of time. It's why our interest on debt is the lowest today than it's been since our time in office as well as the NDP. And our accumulated deficit as a percentage of G.D.P. is the same today as it was 25 years ago, Mr. Speaker. We're taking the necessary steps. We're investing --

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Smart Meters

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of energy. In her 2014 report, the auditor general found that the government had forced smart meters onto Ontarians without doing a business case analysis for cost benefit analysis. The cost of the program doubled to \$2 billion just as the NDP Predicted it would. And last week we learned the time of use pricing has shifted less than 1% of peak demand, even though peak pricing is double that of off-peak pricing. Many Ontarians are unable to change their pattern of energy use because they need to use the power when they need to use it. Will the government stop forcing time of use pricing onto Ontarians?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and talk about some of the things that I talked about yesterday that will relate to smart meters yesterday. Yesterday I spoke to the empire club. 300 business and energy leaders there listening to what we were having to say and what we were talking about, Mr. Speaker, is utilizing some customer choice options, right? Right now, Mr. Speaker, we're doing the long-term energy plan consultations right across the province. And improving customer choice allowing custom Tories look at choice, Mr. Speaker, is something that, you know, we need to look

at. And I think that's what we're going to see come from the long-term energy plan. Smart meters will allow that to happen, Mr. Speaker, because right now it is an interesting thing when we have condo dwellers in downtown Toronto for example on the same price plan as seniors who are living in a bungalow, for example in my great riding of Sudbury or in Sault Ste. Marie or St. Catharines, Mr. Speaker. So looking at some of those options would be important. And that was the foresight this government had by bringing forward the smart meters, Mr. Speaker, and making sure we implemented that. So that we can actually continue to move forward.

>> MPP Tabuns: I've never called that foresight before -- heard that called foresight before. Extraordinary. Time of use pricing punishes new moms, like seniors, like low-income families who can conserve energy but don't necessarily have the option of using it at another time. They have to use it when they need to use it. When will the Minister stop punishing Ontarians by forcing them to use time of use pricing? When will you stop punishing them?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know he hasn't heard the word foresight before because it's actually called planning and it's something they don't have when it comes to the energy sector, Mr. Speaker. But we do have a plan, Mr. Speaker. Our long-term energy plan is actually look at many things that we can do to actually help downward pressure on rates. We've talked about that. The 8% reduction, Mr. Speaker. The 20% reduction we've talked about those quite often, Mr. Speaker. Those are great, great options and great plans for people who actually see downward pressure on rates. But we continue to find ways and look at the technology that is coming forward, Mr. Speaker. We've got storage. We've got great jobs coming in the storage sector and great ways of actually reducing our energy costs. Let's look and challenge the sector, Mr. Speaker, to be more efficient when it comes to our great supply mix that we have. There are many things we can do, Mr. Speaker, and that's because we've built a clean, reliable power system, one that we can all be proud of and one that we can continue to enhance.

MPP Colle to Minister Leal Re: Pork Industry

>> MPP Mike Colle: Question to the Minister of agriculture. With the pork producers here, Minister, today, I have raised this before with the pork producers and as you know with many new Canadians there's been a real increase in the demand for safe, reliable, respected Canadian Ontario pork. And that is coming from the new Canadians. I know in the Chinese community there's a huge consumption of pork. They love their pork. They love their Ontario pork. Can you tell me what the pork producers are doing to essentially market their wonderful safe Ontario pork to new Canadians who are calling Ontario home?

>> Min. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my Colleague from Eglinton- Lawrence who asked me a question today about Ontario pork. Ontario pork of course this morning sponsored a breakfast for all MPP S. To take the opportunity to uptake them -- update them on what Ontario pork is doing. Mr. Speaker, there's no question about that. I've had the opportunity now on two occasions to travel with my Colleague and the Honourable Michael CHAN the Minister of international trade. We were in China in April 2015 and just seven days ago we just finished an extensive agriculture trade mission to India. One thing that everybody in this House should know that if the Ontario brand is known internationally around the world. It is known for safety and quality, and we're looking at ways for Ontario pork to increase their exports. To every corner of the world, because, Mr. Speaker, you and I both know that good things always grow in Ontario.

>> MPP Colle: Thank you, Minister. As you know, the price of beef has gone up in Ontario in the last year. And I know when I got shopping at lady York and Zito's in my riding, they talk about the price of beef. But I

notice a lot of them are switching over to pork because people tell me that a good pork chop is just as good as a good steak. So what can we do to market all these wonderful by-products of pork whereby, again, people in Ontario finally appreciate the safety, the quality and the integrity of Ontario pork? What else can we do to further market this wonderful locally grown Ontario product?

>> Min. Leal: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member from Eglinton- Lawrence for his supplementary. Mr. Speaker, I can assure the members of this House that I enjoy a good steak. I enjoy a good pork chop and I enjoy a lot of good chicken. Let me tell you what we've done over the last number of years working with Ontario pork. They've been so innovative and now they produce a product that's very, very lean and it's being consumed on a worldwide basis. Not only here in Ontario but other provinces in Canada and around the world. It goes back to the fundamental thing that we have. Agriculture and agri-food contributes \$36 billion to Ontario's G.D.P., and Ontario pork is -- Around the world for quality each and every time.

MPP McDonell to Minister Orazietti Re: Bill 47, Protecting Rewards Points Act

>> MPP Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker. To the acting Premier. This government has utterly failed to consult with reward -- providers before bringing forward bill 47 to the table and to committee. Reward points have to be accounted for as a liability on providers' balance sheets. Were this bill to go ahead and have this government micromanage the industry, programmes such as aeroplan, air miles and others could leave this province all together. Consumers access to reward points programs. Speaker, consumers have valued their points but does this government know what it's actually doing?

>> Min. David Orazietti: Thank you. Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate the question from the member opposite. First of all I want to take a second and I want to commend the good member from Beaches- East York for his leadership on this. Absolutely. His leadership brought forward bill 47, protecting rewards points act so I want to thank him for his leadership and for being in tune obviously with consumer on this particular issue. As you know, Speaker, loyalty rewards points have value which is why our government is taking steps to protect them. If passed, the proposed amendments to the consumer protection act would ensure that these rewards points cannot be cancelled or diluted in any way. Speaker, I want all Ontarians to know that they don't need to worry if they have points that are about to expire because we are committed to taking action on this issue. I'll have more to say in the supplementary.

>> MPP McDonell: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, the amendment to bill 47 filed by this government will give the Minister the power to regulate the entire rewards point industry from our office. Without any industry or consumer consultation. Speaker, without any industry or consumer consultation and despite the fact the reward point account is completely a voluntary agreement -- agreement where the consumer's rewarded for pre products and services for just be a loyal customer. This is just the government trying to clutch its straws to shore up its popularity. Has this government considered the impact of legislation will have on Ontarians' ability to access -- Points programs and their ability to redeem these points in the future? Again, can the Minister explain how -- Programs out of the province is actually helping?

>> Min. Orazietti: You know, Speaker, someone may want to stand up for big business but we're standing up for consumer on this province. That's exactly what the member from Beaches- East York was showing leadership on. In fact, as everyone knows, this particular bill will be discussed in the standing committee on regulations and private bills today at 4:00 where we'll have clause-by-clause and public hearings on this particular matter. So I'm really pleased with the steps that we're taking to protect consumers in Ontario. And you know, Speaker, on bill 59, putting consumers first act, that helps to ban

door-to-door sales and stop those aggressive tactics at the doors, set up rules for home inspectors and also take stronger action on aggressive payday loans type establishments that are very predatory to consumers and make it very difficult for consumers to get out of that cycle. Speaker, on this side of the House we're taking strong action to protect consumers.

MPP Natyshak to Minister Thibeault (Leal) Re: Agricultural Sector Energy Supports

>> MPP Taras Natyshak: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the acting Premier. Speaker, back in 2014 the Windsor Essex county chamber of commerce identified strong potential for growth in the agri-food sector in my riding. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, my region boasts the highest concentration of year round vegetable production anywhere in Canada. Yesterday Meucci farms in Kingsville announced that it was expanding its operations, in Ohio. They cited the already high and rising costs of electricity in Ontario as their primary reason for leaving. Can the Premier -- can the acting Premier tell the people of my region how their hopes and businesses can be powered by Liberal apologies?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and talk about the great things that we're doing to help small and medium size enterprises and the greenhouse growers of the province as well, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity to meet with them just last week, Mr. Speaker. They were here talking to all of us on the hill and they were very pleased, Mr. Speaker, to see all of the programs that we're bringing forward to actually help them and many other businesses right across the province. The I.C.I. Program, Mr. Speaker, will be a direct benefit to the greenhouse growers association but it will also be a direct benefit to 1,000 other small and medium size enterprises right -- right across the province, Mr. Speaker. They'll be able to reduce their electricity bills by one third of their bill, Mr. Speaker. That's pretty exciting for many of these businesses. They'll also qualify for the 8% rebate for small businesses. Same as the homes, Mr. Speaker. And it's not just us saying this, Mr. Speaker. It's the Ontario chamber of commerce who also supports this program.

>> MPP Natyshak: Thank you, Speaker. I've heard the Premier stand in this House and out in the public and talk in glowing terms about the potential of the agri-food sector in Ontario. Meanwhile, after more than a decade of Liberal promises to expand highway 3, and to allow for improved access to markets for this critical sector, that promise remains unfilled, Speaker, after a decade. When will this Liberal government take its big red boot off the throats of rural Ontario and support affordability and prosperity for the people in rural Ontario?

>> Min. Jeff Leal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week I know the greenhouse growers of Ontario were in to see my Colleague and the Minister of energy, and my Colleague certainly engaged with them in a very positive dialogue at how our changes to the I.C.I. Will be very, very helpful for the greenhouse sector in the province of Ontario. We do know it's growing. Over the last two years, in the agri-food sector alone, we have generated 42,000 new jobs in the province of Ontario. \$2.2 billion in additional G.D.P., and we've partnered to bring in the new gray parkway in Windsor, Ontario to make sure that Ontario products can get to the border to achieve those exports because Ontario food is demanded around the world, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Rinaldi to Minister Damerla Re: Seniors Supports

>> MPP Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Speaker. My question to the Minister responsible and for seniors affairs. Minister, last Friday you were in London to announce the 2017 round of funding for the seniors community grant program. It's my understanding this program provides funding to the nonprofit community seniors group for projects that encourage greater social inclusion, volunteerism and community engagement. This is a great program that provides grants opportunities for small grassroots community organizations in the order to benefit srns especially in rural areas. Can the Minister please provide more details in this great program?

>> Min. Dipika Damerla: Thank you, Speaker I want to begin by thanking the great member from Northumberland-quinte west for asking this important question about seniors community grant program. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I was very excited to have been in London, joined by the Deputy Premier, the Honourable member of London north centre, for this announcement, an announcement that we are looking to invest another \$2 million, Mr. Speaker, in the seniors community grant. Might I add I think it's among the best \$2 million this government is spending, Mr. Speaker. In the 2016 round of funding, Mr. Speaker, this program benefitted the lives of approximately 142,000 seniors through 308 projects and near -- 308 projects. Nearly half organized by small local groups to serve the unique needs. Since 2015 we have invested 5 million and we look forward to investing another 2 million.

>> MPP Rinaldi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Minister for her answer. Supporting over a quarter million seniors is truly an accomplishment you and this government should be proud of. In my riding this program's helped many different agencies and programs such as bridge office in warkworth, saint John ambulance, elder abuse network, Bruce Clark activity centre in port hope and campbellford Curling programs, Speaker. I am glad that we are acknowledging the important role seniors have and continue to play in our communities. I've heard that keeping seniors connected, active, engaged contributes to their overall health and well-being. As I'm sure we all know seniors in our communities are not looking to slow down any time soon. But we all know that the needs of different communities are often unique from those around them. Could the Minister responsible for senior affairs provide an example of these House s of the -- this House and the delivery of programs that seniors community events support?

>> Min. Damerla: Thank you, Speaker. Again I want to thank the member from Northumberland-quinte west for the question and for himself giving a number of great examples. He rattled off a long list of examples of this program in action. For me, Mr. Speaker, the program that is jump into my mind are three from the 2016 recipients, A.T.M. Access for example base under London has provided opportunities for individuals with disabilities to gain access to employment, reach their educational goals and improve the quality of life. The F.C. -- S.C.G., seniors community grant assistance is helping youth unlimited again in London and youth opportunities unlimited has launched a pilot project that offers unique volunteer opportunities to seniors to engage with youth. Finally Mr. Speaker -- A third example, meals on wheels in London has used their funding to create a workshop. Continues to educate seniors on common --

MPP Scott to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Costs & Municipalities

>> MPP Laurie Scott: Mr. Speaker, my question's to the minister of energy. Yesterday the Ontario association of food banks released its annual report on hunger, put ago spotlight on the growing crisis of energy poverty in our province. The report shares stories of low-income individuals, especially in rural areas, who can no longer afford constantly increasing hydro costs. Too many residents in my riding are suffering and their pleas of desperation I hear at every event. My constituency office is flooded with requests for help with their hydro bills, and contrary to what the minister of energy says, we do help them access existing programs, but the food bank report confirms what we've been saying all along, that they're only a drop in the bucket. While the premier has taken responsibility for the energy poverty crisis, her words do nothing to help those in my riding who go out of their way to cut back on electricity use but still

see their hydro bills rise. When will the government listen to our food banks. And fix the problem rather than offering band aid solutions?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that some ontarians in particular struggle with their electricity bills. We've been aware of that, Mr. Speaker, since we've -- since I've taken over this ministry, Mr. Speaker, but that's because, Mr. Speaker, we had to build the system back up from the ground that they left decimated, Mr. Speaker. They actually left it decimated, Mr. Speaker. They actually relied on cheap coal, Mr. Speaker. We no longer do that. We've invested in the system. We've made sure, Mr. Speaker, that people have a system that they can rely on. But that came with a cost and the premier recognizes that, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that as a government, Mr. Speaker, and that's why we brought forward the 8% reduction for all families and businesses right across the province, Mr. Speaker, and a 20% reduction as well. We also have six programs in place, Mr. Speaker. To help many of these families but all of this, Mr. Speaker, I know there needs more to be done and that's why we're moving forward with our plan, ... they don't have, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Scott: Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the minister. Well, not only are individual paying the price for government's misguided policies but so are our municipalities. In my riding the city of kawartha Lakes now spend over 5 million a year for hydro. They are frustrated that delivery charges are very expensive compared to urban areas and there seems to be no remedy. In August alone, their bill for 5 street lights was \$86 for electricity use yet the total bill was \$41,000 global adjustment over 15,000, delivery charges over 16,000, regulatory charges, debt retirement charges and on and on. This is outrageous, and residents will ultimately have to pay for this. So they're going to have to pay twice, first on their hydro bills and again on their tax bill. So my question to the minister. Is when will your government act to help our municipalities deal with the mess that the premier admits she created?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to be able to rise and answer this question because you know, Mr. Speaker, they're talking about the debt retirement charge. That's something that we eliminated, Mr. Speaker, for all families but that's their legacy, Mr. Speaker. They left a debt retirement charge that businesses are still paying to this day, but it's the leadership of this government that's going to eliminate that, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to municipality, Mr. Speaker, our government has worked hard over the last 13 years to improve the provincial and municipal relationship that was abandoned by them. They've downloaded everything onto the municipalities, Mr. Speaker. You can ask of our M.P.P.s who are actually in the municipality sector before, Mr. Speaker. Everything was downloaded on. We are no longer doing that, Mr. Speaker. We're seeing \$4 billion given to our municipalities and that will be done by 2017, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to making sure that our municipalities are saving energy, they're actually doing it --

MPP P. Miller to Minister Ballard Re: Combatting Homelessness

>> MPP Paul Miller: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. The hydro rate crisis caused by this government is now putting hundreds of Hamiltonians at risk of losing the roof over their heads. The city's homelessness prevention program has run out of money because so many struggling people have needed help with their hydro bills. The government says it will increase the funding next year maybe but the program is facing a \$2.5 million deficit right now caused by Liberal hydro failures. What will this government do today to ensure hundreds of people in my community can stay in their homes and keep the lights on and the heat on?

>> Min. Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. I know that it goes without saying, Speaker, that Ontarians

should never have to choose between paying for food or their hydro bill. And the Minister of energy has outlined a number of key things that his ministry is putting into place, you know, an 8% rebate, 20% for rural, suspending large renewal procurement but I can say that when it comes to Hamilton, Speaker, since 2003, this government has invested over \$166 million for affordable housing but what does that mean in Hamilton, Mr. Speaker? In Hamilton it means 872 affordable housing units have been created in Hamilton, Mr. Speaker. 470 affordable housing units have been repaired in Hamilton, Mr. Speaker. 2494 Households receive down payment assistance.

>> MPP P. Miller: Speaker, the Premier likes to call herself the social justice Premier. Fair enough. Yet as housing Minister, Kathleen Wynne cut and capped funding for municipal homelessness prevention programs, leaving thousands of vulnerable Ontarians at risk. Previously, the province used to fund homelessness prevention based on need, and hydro in this province used to be affordable for all. Well, Speaker, an apology isn't quite enough anymore. What real concrete steps will this Premier take to actually bring down hydro bills and keep people in their homes?

>> Min. Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. I'm glad the member opposite mentioned the community homelessness prevention initiative. Last year, Mr. Speaker, that program called cipi helped almost 40,000 families across Ontario. Because of cipi, Mr. Speaker, 115,000 families and individuals remain in their homes. Mr. Speaker, now this government doesn't need to take a lesson from the opposite side. Their platform, the NDP Platform, didn't even mention the word poverty in the last election, Mr. Speaker. Come on. And now they're concerned, you know? The NDP, Mr. Speaker, has said no to higher wages for P.S.W.S. They've said no to an increase for families who depend on the Ontario child benefit. Mr. Speaker, the list goes on about everything. The NDP Said no about.

MPP Kiwala to Minister Leal Re: Farmers Compensation

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the awesome Minister of agriculture, food and rural affairs. Minister, support for Ontario's agriculture producers is crucial to ensuring that the province's \$36.4 billion agri-food sector continues to thrive. Ontario farmers work hard to deliver top quality Ontario produce and Ontario beef to thousands of people across the province every single day. This year we doubled the feeder cattle loan program from \$130 million to \$260 million to promote the growth of Ontario's cattle industry and retain jobs within the province. We also introduced production insurance for tender fruit growers who lose their trees as a result of specific risks covered by the plan, providing accessible, efficient support for farmers. Is part of our government's plan. Minister, can you please provide further information -- Can you provide further information regarding what we're doing to support farmers and grow the economy?

>> Min. Jeff Leal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from Kingston and the Islands for the question this morning. I know how hard she works particularly with the farm community on Wolfe Island in the Kingston area. We did a short time ago, Mr. Speaker, we did double the feeder cattle loan program and we also expanded production insurance to include tender fruit growers in in the province of Ontario. Our government continues to have a strong commitment to address the challenges facing Ontario farmers. But, Mr. Speaker, nothing brings more tears to my eyes than when I've been in a farmer's field to see a leftover carcass of a cow or sheep or a pig and it's been ravaged by a predator, a coyote or a wolf. I take the opportunity on numerous occasions, Mr. Speaker, to see what is a very tragic situation for a farmer. So we spent some time over the last number of months to look at ways to improve the wildlife compensation. Program in the province of Ontario to make sure working with our municipalities and that telling farmers are -- Justly Ken said for their animals that are --

>> MPP Kiwala: The Ontario wildlife damage compensation owdcp, has been updated to provide Ontario's farmers with the support that they need when their animals are killed or injured by predatory wildlife. I'm sure the farmers in my riding of Kingston and the Islands know just how crucial this support is to protecting their live stock during these difficult situations. Just last night I attended the Ontario agricultural sustainability coalition reception and had the opportunity to speak with representatives from Ontario pork, Ontario beef and Ontario sheep who shared the importance of protecting their live stock in every possible way with me. We all know that supporting our farmers is important for their livelihood and will help them continue to produce some of the best products that land on our tables. It is wonderful to see the work our government is doing to support farmers so they can continue to flourish within the province of Ontario. Minister, can you please share with the House how the sector has reacted following the announcement that the owdcp will be updated?

>> Min Leal: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Kingston and the Islands for the questions. Indeed effective on January 21st, 2017, compensation rates for animals will be standardized right across the province of Ontario. The updated program will clearly define the requirements of farmers' needs and to meet and receive compensation. Mr. Speaker, one of the things that concerned me about our previous program was the amount of red tape that was embedded in the program. I take the opportunity to take a chain saw to that red tape. So now we have a new single stage appeal process that will provide a straightforward approach for farmers and will help to provide them with compensation even quicker. Mr. Speaker -- The chair of the Ontario beef market agency had this to say -- osma appreciates -- That Ontario gives the industry to provide input on the predation program preview -- accreditation. Their willingness to work with the community speaks to their commitment to ensure that the program works for all farmers.

MPP Jones to Minister Hoskins Re: Kuvan Drug Coverage

>> MPP Sylvia Jones: Thank you. My question is to the Minister of health. Since 2015 I've been working with a family in Dufferin Caledon whose daughter has P.K.U., a rare and threatening metabolic disorder. Did you know people with P.K.U. Need treatment for life? My constituent has been taking kuvan as part after sickkids hospital drug trial for the past 7 years but now the trial is set to end and they simply cannot afford the staggering cost of kuvan, which is \$70,000 per year. On October 26th, the common drug review recommended the government pay for kuvan. When will the ministry of health act and cover kuvan for people with P.K.U.?

>> Min. Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. I know that the member opposite also appreciates that we've taken the politics out of drug funding and deciding which drugs should be made available to Ontarians. So the decision to fund all drugs, including a drug like kuvan, which for some time has been available to Ontarians on an exceptional basis through our exceptional access program but we base our funding decisions and the availability of drugs on the best scientific evidence. And now we have a system which is a pan-canadian system, which allows for review at that -- on that national basis and I know that there have been ongoing discussions with the drug review nationally as well. Further submissions by the drug company. I know the ministry is reviewing that to see if in fact we should make further changes. To what is already a drug that's available for exceptional circumstances. And I expect a decision shortly.

>> MPP Jones: Families and patients have been waiting too long for the Minister of health to act. Kuvan is on the exceptional health access program but the criteria's so restrictive that not a single application has been approved. It's been six years since Health Canada approved kuvan. It's been over a month since the common drug review recommended the Minister of health cover kuvan. When will the Minister of health make an announcement that Kuvan will finally be covered for people who have P.K.U.?

>> Min. Hoskins: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, Canada the Canadian drug review rejected in 2013 and made a negative funding recommendation for kivan on that time based that there was an absence of scientific evidence as to its benefit over existing measures. Notwithstanding that we made a decision in the province to make it available for exceptional reasons. That is our current policy. Of course additional evidence, should it come forward, to demonstrate efficacy and scientific evidence of its benefit and of course in consideration of the national process if there's a decision made by the common drug review, I earlier said Canadian common drug review, to fund this drug in broader circumstances, we of course will look at that. We make our decisions -- in fact I'm not involved. I can't be involved in decisions. The Minister, the experts within the ministry make the decisions and the best scientific evidence available, Mr. Speaker.