

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Monday, April 9, 2018

From: "Stinson, Jeffrey (CAB)" <jeffrey.stinson@ontario.ca>
To: "@CAB-ProvLegQP" <provlegqp@msgov.gov.on.ca>
Date: Mon, 09 Apr 2018 11:50:19 -0400
Attachments: 20180409 - Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript.doc (123.39 kB)

Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 3rd Session
Monday, April 9, 2018

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

Table of Contents

MPP Fedeli to Minister Thibeault
Re: Hydro Executive Salaries

MPP Fedeli to Premier Wynne
Re: 2018 Budget

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne
Re: Dental Services

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

MPP Coe to Minister Naidoo-Harris
Re: Donation to Catholic Teacher's Association

MPP Gelinas to Minister Jaczek
Re: Hospital Overcrowding

MPP Martins to Minister Vernile
Re: Libraries

MPP Hillier to Minister Sousa
Re: Doug Ford

MPP Vanthof to Minister Jaczek
Re: Dental Services

MPP Kiwala to Minister Chiarelli (Leal)
Re: Broadband Internet Expansion

MPP Pettapiece to Minister Lalonde
Re: Ray and Walter Act

MPP Tabuns to Minister Des Rosiers
Re: Wetlands Protection

MPP Potts to Minister Naidoo-Harris (Zimmer)
Re: First Nations Child Care

MPP Oosterhoff to Minister Jaczek
Re: Hospital Overcrowding

MPP Gates to Minister MacCharles
Re: Payday Loans

MPP Fedeli to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Executive Salaries

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you and good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Premier, one of these C.E.O. Salaries is not like the others. Manitoba hydro, 466,000. Saskatchewan power, 4 - 481,000. B.C. Hydro, \$489,000. Québec hydro, \$543,000. Hydro One, \$6.2 million Mr. Speaker, how does the Premier justify her \$6 million man?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is very important that we acknowledge and recognize, Mr. Speaker, that executive salaries are high compared to the vast majority of Ontario salaries, and, Mr. Speaker, we remain committed to Hydro One's regulation, accountability and transparency through our government's involvement as a majority shareholder. That said, Mr. Speaker, Hydro One is now a publicly traded company, not a government entity and Hydro One, Mr. Speaker, also reports that 80%, 80% of the company's C.E.O. Compensation is paid out only if aggressive performance targets are met, targets that lead to more affordable bills for customers, Mr. Speaker. So since broadening ownership of Hydro One, the company's leadership has already made \$114 million in savings for their customers, Mr. Speaker. These significant savings have been realized through enhancement. To customer service, Mr. Speaker, and the company's commitment to lowering costs for the ratepayers, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Fedeli: Well, back to the Premier. Last year was a windfall for Hydro One execs. The millionaires club is a sight to behold. The president and C.E.O. Mayo Schmidt, \$6.2 million and, Speaker, that's an after an increase just this year alone. The increase is \$1.7 million. The former C.F.O., 1.2 million. The senior vice-president and acting C.F.O., just under a million. The C.O.O. Made 1.2 million. One executive vice-president made 2 million and another 1.9 million. This is outrageous, Speaker. They all make more money than the C.A.O.S of any other hydro company. Mr. Speaker, while the average family struggles to make ends meet, how does the Premier justify paying her millionaires club?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, Hydro One's rates continue to be set by the oario energy board, Mr. Speaker, and, when taking this into considerations the board is the energy sector's independent regulator with a mandate to protect the province's electricity consumers, and it continues to deliver on its mandate. So for instance last fall the board capped a portion of executive compensation at Hydro One for electricity customers and they're required to fund that at 10% of base salarys saving ratepayers \$30 million over this year and next, Mr. Speaker. And we understand, we understand that that affordability is critical for families and businesses, which is why we launched the fair hydro plan, which reduced rates by 25% on average for all residential customers and as many as a half a million small businesses and farms, Mr. Speaker. Once again it is important to emphasize that this salary is only paid if aggive performance targets are met, targets that lead to more affordable bills for rate payers.

>> MPP Fedeli: Back to the Premier. I can't believe, Speaker, that this government is defending this. The Premier once said, quote, any decision of that magnitude would require a two-thirds majority of the Hydro One board of directors, which means that having 40% ownership protects us. She added, with 40% ownership of the board, that would require that the people of Ontario have a say. She went on, one step further, Speaker, and said, quote -- will there be the ability of the government to retain control over major decisions because of that 40% ownership? Yes. So that means, Speaker, the Premier is responsible for these outrageous salaries, Mr. Speaker. How account Premier be trusted when she is signing off on the \$6 million salary?

>> Minister Thibeault: Once again we recognize, Mr. Speaker, that these executive salaries are high compared to the vast majority of Ontario salaries and we remain committed to Hydro One's

regulation and accountability and transparency through our government's involvement as majority shareholder, Mr. Speaker. But let's look at what the opposition is claiming. They're claiming that they're concerned about the lowering electricity bills but when it came for them to take action, Mr. Speaker, what did they do? They voted against a fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker. And now because they don't support fighting climate change, they'll have to cut billions in programs that Ontarians count on every single day. They'll have to cut programs like free child care, like ohip plus, like free tuition or dental and prescription coverage, Mr. Speaker. Unlike their half-baked scheme, Ontarians know that we have a plan to increase fairness and create more opportunity, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to do that for the people of Ontario, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to act to make sure that we've got their best interests at heart.

MPP Fedeli to Premier Wynne Re: 2018 Budget

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. The member from mississauga-streetsville is proud of this government's debt. He specifically said, quote -- we have tripled -- referring to the debt -- and we're proud of it. The people of Ontario want to know if the Premier shares the sentiments. Mr. Speaker, is the Premier proud that she has saddled our grandchildren with her debt?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Speaker, let me just talk about the plan that we have been implementing, Mr. Speaker, and we are going to continue to build on as we brought our budget forward, Mr. Speaker. You know, what we know is that there are people across this province, whether it's family with a teenager who's looking for mental health challenges and I know that the girls government group is going to be talking about mental health today, Mr. Speaker. Whether it's a young mom who can't find child care, wants to get back into work but can't find child care that she can afford, Mr. Speaker. Or whether it's someone working in a minimum wage job, Mr. Speaker, who today has more money in his pocket -- Because minimum wage is now \$14 an hour and will go to \$15 an hour. Those are the people who we are fighting for, Mr. Speaker. That is the care we know is need under this province and what we are proud of.

>> MPP Fedeli: Well, back to the Premier. What we do know is that this government has put our province's future in doubt, Speaker. In no way, in no way at all is tripling the debt a responsible thing to do. Ontario has the highest debt of any province or state on the entire planet, Speaker. This is crowding out the services we all depend on, like health care and education, which is why this Premier fired 1,600 nurses and closed 600 schools, Speaker. More than any other government in the history of our province. This debt is putting an unfair burden on our children and grandchildren. Mr. Speaker, E government's debt is the reason they cut services instefd caring about families Instead of caring about families.

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I know that the member opposite knows that we've built 800 schools. I know he knows that. Another 780. But, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that if we do not make these investments in people, then we will be in a situation where our economy will not continue to grow. We have balanced the budget this year, Mr. Speaker. We've made investments in infrastructure across the province, Mr. Speaker, and we know that at this moment what is needed in Ontario is an investment in people, an investment in their care, an investment in giving them the tools so that they can care for themselves and they can care for their families. Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is standing up for a party that has promised that they will cut billions out of education, billions out of health care and billions out of serverss to people in this province, Mr. Speaker. That's not our plan.

>> MPP Fedeli: The people are disappointed that making up stories for political gain seems to be the new approach of the Premier, Speaker. Quite frankly we are shocked that this Premier is defending the member from mississauga-streetsville. What else does she defend from this member? He has advocated for higher taxes on hard working families. On his website the member from mississauga-streetsville called on the federal government to raise the G.S.T. By 1%. He wrote, quote -- the feds

should restore one percentage point of the G.S.T. Removed during the previous decade, raising it to 6%. Mr. Speaker, does the Premier support the member's statement on new taxes as well? Is she going to be calling on Prime Minister Trudeau to raise the G.S.T.?

>> Premier Wynne: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I invite Veit the member opposite to read our budget, Mr. Speaker. I vine invite the member opposite to look at the policies we're putting in place. I invite the member opposite to talk to people in his community who are looking for child care, who are looking for mental health services, Mr. Speaker. Who are working on minimum wage, Mr. Speaker. I invite the member opposite to talk to those people and ask them their thoughts on getting more support. Mr. Speaker, we know that this party is capable of cutting billions out of the public service, out of education, out of health care. They've done it before, Mr. Speaker, and they would do it again.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne Re: Dental Services

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question's for the Premier. The Premier seems to think that children's dental care costs \$50 a year, because that's how much is in her Liberal budget to look after kids' teeth. I haven't heard many dentists' offices myself, Speaker that, will clean a child's teeth, do an X ray acheckup, maybe fill a cavity for 50 bucks. If she has, I know a lot of parents will want that phone number. Does the Premier know any dentists who will actually look after a child's teeth for 50 bucks? And will she give out that telephone number to the parents of Ontario?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, you know, I actually have no quarrel with the leader of the third party that there needs to be support for families in this province for dental care and pharmacare, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that. We put in place ohip plus. And, Mr. Speaker, for years we've been working on a healthy smiles program, on expanding it, Mr. Speaker. There are 450,000 kids who accessed important dental services through the healthy smiles program, Mr. Speaker. So this for us is not -- this is not a new issue. This is something that we have been working on that we recognize needs more work, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy that the leader of the third party is now coming on, on side and is concerned about this, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to work with the dentists, with the community to find ways of supporting. But this money that is in our budget Mr. Speaker Will help families to access more support for their kids.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, Hamilton's medical officer of health says that 42% of grade 2 students in Hamilton have tooth decay. 50 bucks per child won't fix that, Speaker, and neither has this Liberal government's healthy smiles program. Promising to send voters a \$50 cheque isn't a dental plan, Speaker. It looks more like vote buying. The Liberals have ignored people –

>> The Speaker: The leader will withdraw.

>> Andrea Horwath: Withdraw, Speaker. Promising to send voters a \$50 cheque isn't a dental plan. The voters can decide for themselves exactly what it is. The Liberals have ignored people's dental care needs, Speaker, for 15 years. Is this Liberal Premier trying to get votes or trying to get kids to the dentist?

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And as I said, for a number of years, we have been putting more supports in place for healthy smiles, all of which improvements the leader and her party have voted against, Mr. Speaker. Let's just be clear about what this program is. There would be reimbursements of up to a maximum of \$400 per single person, Mr. Speaker, \$600 per couple and \$700 for a family of four with two children. Mr. Speaker, I know that it is not all that is needed. I know that there's more that needs to be done. We will continue to find ways to support folks, families as they look for care for their kids. But, Mr. Speaker, we're also putting in place free preschool child care, Mr. Speaker. We're expanding the free tuition program, Mr. Speaker. It is not in isolation that we are putting these programs in place, Mr. Speaker. We understand that people need

support. Putting some dental care and pharmacare in place is part of that. Part after much bigger practice of support we recognize families need across the province.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier doesn't actually have a plan to ensure children in Ontario can see a dentist. That's obvious. The Doug Ford and Conservatives could be even worse, quite frankly. The solution to a bad choice isn't picking something worse, Mr. Speaker. New Democrats will ensure that every child in Ontario can see a dentist no matter where they live or how much their parents earn. Why doesn't the Premier believe in universal access to dental care, Speaker?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I believe in universal access. The leader of the third party talks about universal access, and yet the small plan for pharmacare that she put forward would only have covered 110 prescription medications, Mr. Speaker. Our program, which is universal for all children from their birth until their 25th birthday and next year for seniors, will cover all 4,400 medications, Mr. Speaker. So we come at this from a different angle, Mr. Speaker. But I believe that we both understand that were we to build a medicare system today, pharmacare and dental care would be part of that, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately we can't roll the clock back to 1969 and so we are building in those supports but do I believe that they need to be broader and they need to be national? Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I will continue to fight for that.

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

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Mr. Speaker my next question's to the Premier. Maybe she should roll the clock back to 2003. We could have got started back then, Speaker. Understand what the word universality means. You know last week I met Gary in Oshawa who told me about having to pull his own tooth, Speaker, because he couldn't afford the dental work. He has a hole in his mouth now and can only chew on the left side of his mouth. Worse than pulling his own tooth was having to leave the dentist's office with his son, unable to afford the filling and knowing that his child would have to wait months in pain until he could afford the dental filling, a delay that made the cavity worse, made the pain worse and made the work more expensive. This should not be happening in Ontario. For 15 years the Liberals didn't help Gary or his son or many, many families like them and their dental scheme. Still wouldn't. Why not?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is going to want to comment but, Mr. Speaker, we have not waited until now to address this issue, Speaker. The leader of the third party would perpetuate that but that is not true, Mr. Speaker. We have been building the healthy smiles program. We recognize that there is a huge challenge for families across the province. This budget introduces a benefit, a new Ontario drug and dental plan program, Mr. Speaker. It will reimburse families up to \$700 for a family, a couple with two children, Mr. Speaker. And we've also committed to extending public dental programs to low income adults by 2025. We recognize that there is a problem, Mr. Speaker. We have been working to solve it. We will continue to work to solve it. This is not a new issue even though the leader of the third party has come to this issue of late, Mr. Speaker. We have been working to find solutions. We've been working with the dental community. We will continue to do that, Mr. Speaker. In the interim we are putting this program in place.

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, I guess the Premier forgot about the other question when I talked about the 42% of grade 2 students with dental decay. That shows you how ineffective their healthy smiles program has been, Speaker. Jordan Vitory is studying to be a social worker in Sarnia and she wants to make Ontario a better place for people. She's lucky to have some dental coverage at school but it's only \$500 that she splits between her care and the care of her son. Last week she found out that she's going to need \$1,200 worth of work to fix an abscessed tooth. Even with her insurance and with the Premier's plan, Jordan would be out of pocket. And so she can't afford to get her abscess done. Jordan needs full dental coverage, Speaker. Jordan's son needs full dental coverage. Why doesn't the Premier get that?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly our government recognizes the importance of good oral health care for the people in this province. And that's precisely why we have, through the years that we've been in government, been expanding our programs in this regard. The Premier has mentioned the healthy smiles program. This has expanded coverage and now covers some 470,000 children across this province for important dental services. It includes free, preventive, routine and emergency dental services for children and youth from low-income households across the province. And there is no limit to our funding for the healthy smiles program. We work with dentists to ensure that every single eligible child has the necessary services available, and of course with our budget we have extended this coverage to vulnerable people -- in the case where they do not have any extended health benefits themselves. Thank you.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I believe in universal health care. The Premier and her government has spent 15 years overcrowding hospitals. I believe in pharmacare for everyone. The Premier's picking and choosing who she thinks will help her win an election. I believe everyone should be able to see a dentist. The Premier wants to pay for only half of a child's filling. Why doesn't the Premier believe in health and dental care for everyone, Speaker?

>> Minister Jaczek: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course we didn't pick and choose which drugs to cover in our OHIP plus coverage. We cover all the drugs under the Ontario drug benefit plan, those that are deemed eligible for that plan. And of course we have been providing dental care in many different ways to vulnerable people in Ontario. Our government does provide dental benefits for individuals receiving income support under the Ontario disability support program. For those who are on Ontario works, they also may receive dental coverage when they're in need of emergency dental care or to help them get back on their feet and participate in employment assistance activities. We have taken many steps to improve dental care in this province, and our budget takes it to the next level, Mr. Speaker. People will be receiving up to 80% of eligible expenditures to a certain limit.

MPP Coe to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Donation to Catholic Teacher's Association

>> MPP Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. The Liberal government just made a \$31 million payout to the English Catholic Teachers Association a month before the election. Army Bishop, president of the Ontario secondary school teachers' federation, describes the settlement on Friday, quote, as a dirty deal that clearly wasn't done dirt cheap. Sam Hammond, president of the elementary teachers' federation of Ontario called the payment, quote, outrageous. Speaker, he went on to say, quote -- is this a way for the Liberals to reward their political allies and retaliate against the elementary teachers' federation of Ontario and others for successfully challenging the government's violation of our charter rights? Speaker, does the Liberal government share the concerns of Ontario's major teachers' unions?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'm pleased to rise and speak about this very important issue and to find all parties to work together to reach a resolution on remedy. And so they directed all of us to do that. And I'm pleased to say we have reached agreements with the OSSTF, with OPSEU, with CUPE and with UNIFOR. In addition to this, this is about also mitigating further risks and further constitutional challenges. And so we are moving forward by ensuring, Mr. Speaker, that our school system continues to run smoothly without disruptions. And so what we're doing is proactively moving forward with further settlements and agreements with associations. To ensure that we are resolving any grievances that may be out there and ensuring that we are preparing for the future. I'm happy to answer more.

>> MPP Coe: Back to the Premier. Speaker, at \$31 million payout a month before the election is rightly raising some eyebrows and concerns. Whether it's school closures, violence in the classrooms or the mental health crisis in elementary and secondary schools, the Liberal government only seems to care about education when it helps their political self-interest. Speaker, is the Liberal government trying to buy support a month before the action?

>> The Speaker: The member will withdraw.

>> Withdraw, Speaker.

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, again I want to point out that the superior court directed all parties to work together to reach a resolution on remedy. And so we have moved forward with agreements with the osstf, with opseu, with chpe and with unifor and now we have ongoing discussion with five different groups, as you heard. We just settled with owe equity av. We're also looking at five different other groups -- owe equity 5. Including aifo, O.C.W. And principle just to name a few. Why? Because we want to mitigate the risk of further constitutional challenges. Mr. Speaker, this is called doing our due diligence, ensuring that the school system is there, is strong and is working for all parties and everyone there. So to ensure that our children do get the best quality education they can. The parties are at the various bargaining table versus different priorities in their negotiations. So it takes time to ensure we're doing everything we can to reach agreements with all of these various pieces and all of these various associations. But we are doing our best to ensure that we are doing what needs to get done. Thank you.

MPP Gelinas to Minister Jaczek Re: Hospital Overcrowding

>> MPP France Gelinas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Ask any nurse, health care professional or physician or any families who need health care and they will tell you there is a crisis of hallway medicine and overcrowding inside Ontario's hospitals. Under this Premier's watch, hospitals have been forced to cut beds, cut nurses, cut care year after year making wait times longer for people who need that care. But instead of fixing the problem with a plan to end hallway medicine and fund hospitals properly every year, the Premier is disappointing people once again. New Democrats have a plan to end hallway medicine. Why doesn't this government?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek -Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And of course this is -- really goes to the heart of our budget proposal, which I'm sure the member opposite is aware of. We have invested each and every year in our hospitals, and in this year in particular, we are making -- if the opposition parties might actually read our budget and perhaps pass it with us. We are proposing an additional investment of \$822 million for Ontario's publicly funded hospitals. So this is a 4.6% overall increase. It will increase capacity. It will decrease wait times and it will improve access to care for families across Ontario. It means 26,000 additional M.R.I. Operating hours, 14,000 more surgical and medical procedures, and 3,000 more cardiac procedures. And of course in many other areas also. Our capacity will be increased through this major investment.

>> MPP Gelinas: Thank you, Speaker. For four straight years, the Premier froze hospital budgets, meaning deep cuts to the care that people count on. Now patients are being treated in hallways. Emergency room wait times have hit record highs. In hospitals from London to Toronto, Ottawa to Sudbury, Thunder Bay and beyond are all dangerously overcrowded. But instead of fixing the problem, this Premier is leaving the hospital sector in the dark, without a long-term plan to end hallway medicine once and for all. Why is this government letting people down and refusing to fix the crisis inside our hospitals that this Liberal government's cuts created?

>> Minister Jaczek: Well, notice last week I've had the opportunity to visit many hospitals across this province. And I have been hearing from hospital C.E.O.s, from board members what is exactly are investments going to mean? And they are receiving it extremely positively. They know perfectly well that we have made investments each and every year of additional capacity to our hospitals. Last year it was some \$500 million to hospitals, and then of course in the fall, because of the poor flu season and some particular circumstances, we added capacity across the continuum of care by adding 1,200 hospital beds and another 800 spaces in the community for patient care across province. That was equivalent to six new medium sized hospitals. And I'd be really curious to know if the third party's plan coming up when we finally hear it. Would again cut the 9,645 beds as they did in the past? Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Martins to Minister Vernile Re: Libraries

>> MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Speaker. My question this morning is to the Minister of tourism, culture and sport. Speaker, library support children learn provides resources for students and newcomers and helps small businesses and entrepreneurs. They play a valuable role in communities across the province, whether they are urban, rural or indigenous and I know how important the Bloor/lanne and Dufferin St. Clair libraries are in my riding of Davenport. In 2016, 1,141 library service points across Ontario received over \$71 million in-person visits, 104 million electronic and 26 million social media visits. Along with many Ontarians, I was thrilled to see in this year's budget additional funding allocated towards libraries across the province. This includes support for both operating and digital public library funding. Through to you you to the Minister, can you tell members of this House more about how important libraries are in our communities?

>> Minister Daiene Vernile: I want to thank the member for Davenport port for that important question. Under this government's culture strategy, we made a pledge to continue to support services like libraries and boost the quality of life in all our communities. More funding is going to ensure that libraries across the province can continue to respond to the needs of residents. Speaker, on this side of the House we're always looking for ways to ensure that libraries have the supports in place that they need to thrive. By way of comparison, Speaker, the party opposite does not mention the word culture even once in its election platform. And more troubling, the leader of the opposition vowed to close libraries during his time as a Toronto councillor. He said that he would close a liable rather in his riding in, quote, a heartbeat and even went so far as to suggest that there are more libraries than Tim hortons in his riding. Which is an exaggeration that proved to be false. Speaker, our government remains committed to supporting essential hubs like libraries. That do connect people –

>> MPP Martins: Thank you to the Minister for that response. Libraries are indeed the pillars of knowledge in our city's towns and local communities. Not only are they a resource to grab your favourite literary titles but they are an integral tool when it comes to supporting our educational institutions. And as a mom of two young boys I know first hand how important libraries are to support school projects. The services that libraries provide help to expand the knowledge and insight of the communities that they service and are meant to connect people to the resources in a way that is easily accessible and efficient. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister please elaborate on the funding available to libraries announced in this year's budget?

>> Minister Vernile: Thank you to the member for that question. I too as a mother of three spent many hours in our local public library. Speaker, the member noted that libraries are a vehicle to spread knowledge within our local communities and that's why I'm proud to say that our government is making the most significant investment in public libraries in a generation. We are investing 79 million more into public libraries, including 51 million over three years in annual increases and 28 million over three years to launch a provincewide digital public library. This investment is going to help public libraries reduce costs of accessing digital content such as e-books and films. Public library us across Ontario access to digital content. And, Speaker, this is especially important in rural and remote areas. I want to thank --The Ontario library association and the federation of Ontario public libraries for their strong advocacy for public librari right across the province of Ontario.

MPP Hillier to Minister Sousa Re: Doug Ford

>> MPP Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Yesterday morning the member from Ancaster- Dundas- Flamborough- westdale made a seer kbrus accusation. He

accused Doug Ford and I quote -- deliberately breaking the law. It was then retweeted by former journalist turned Liberal Ashley Chanati from the Premier's office. Not only is the accusation egregious and false, the law they are accusing the leader of the Progressive Conservative party of breaking does not even exist. Mr. Speaker, this is quite literally false news. It is reprehensible, yet unsurprising that a former Minister of this government, and Premier's office, would have such a distorted view of the laws in Ontario. Will the acting Premier apologize on behalf of the Premier's office and the member for spreading such willful misrepresentations?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the member makes reference to a situation. I believe it's the fact that the opposition haven't really presented their plan, and they have a plan but they haven't costed it. And what they have -- they had a plan that they then threw away. And I think the real question that's being asked by the people of Ontario is what's your plan? How is it going to be costed? And what are the effects on the people of Ontario? What are the cuts that they're making? People want to know, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Hillier: Again back to the acting Premier. Speaker, the member from Hamilton, from Ancaster Dundas, made a false statement. Ok? There was no response. I ask for an apology. Now maybe as a former Minister and in that role he became accustomed to engaging and spreading false news. However, the facts do matter, Speaker, and the facts clearly show that --

>> The Speaker: Stop the clock. I -- I was lenient for a certain amount of time but now you continue to repeat yourself under the premise of falsehood. So would you please withdraw and stay away from it?

>> MPP Hillier: Withdraw. In a time when so much information we read on the internet must be questioned and refused, the Premier's office should not be engaging in those sort of activities. It's unacceptable. It's inappropriate and it's intolerable that the former Minister is both ignorant of the laws and the facts. Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear an apology or an answer to my first question. Will this Liberal government apologize for spreading bull?

>> The Speaker: The member will withdraw.

>> MPP Hillier: Withdraw.

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite makes reference to the fact that their leader is making bumper sticker slogans and is not substantiating it with any real facts or determinations. They had a plan. They costed the plan. We know the plan is about \$16 billion in the red. Come forward and tell the people of Ontario what's in your plan.

MPP Vanthof to Minister Jaczek Re: Dental Services

>> MPP John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of health. Donna Quaid gave me a call in my constituency office last week and we've been dealing with Donna's issues since 2016. We wrote a letter to the previous Minister. She has T.M. Joint disorder. That has to do with the joint in your lower jaw. It's a really Grey area between OHIP and dental care. This lady's been fighting this for 20 years. It's got to the point where she needs to have her joints replaced. But why she called is because not so much for herself but for others, because if she could have had a dental care program, some of her problems would have been fixed. What is \$400 going to do for Donna Quaid?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, we understand that there are many dental conditions that can be very troublesome. The one the member alluded to is temporal mandibular. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because we do recognize that dental care is extremely important. It's an important aspect of people's overall health. And that's precisely why, in this budget, we have made a proposal. To improve coverage for those without a dental plan. There are other avenues for people to pursue. And in this particular case -- I will certainly take this case back.

>> MPP Vanthof: Speaker, thank you for the answer, Minister. But that doesn't help people like Donna who, if Donna had access to a dental program 15 years ago, would still be a functioning part of this society. Instead -- for everyone this might not be totally disabling, but in this case it was totally disabling. And coming from northern Ontario, a lot of times you don't even qualify for northern health travel grants. So, you know, we need -- people need dental coverage so their life isn't ruined. Why has this government refused to implement full dental coverage 15 years ago and does it continue to refuse to do so now?

>> Minister Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been here for ten years, and I don't remember the third party ever raising this issue. Over those years until extremely recently. And of course precisely this is why we have introduced our new Ontario drug and dental program. I'm hoping the parties opposite will support it, because we are taking the next step to ensure everyone in Ontario has access to the help that they need. So no matter how old they are, what they do for a living or even where they live. Obviously we care deeply about the health status of northern Ontarians. And this is part of our plan to support care and opportunity and make life more affordable for Ontarians. And so as the member opposite is very clear, I'm sure, we are offering the \$400 for a single individual, \$600 for a couple. And 750 for a family of four. This is an excellent step forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Kiwala to Minister Chiarelli (Leal) Re: Broadband Internet Expansion

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of infrastructure. This year's budget outlined bold, Progressive plan for care and opportunity in Ontario. It includes investments in the services people need and deserve, like pharmacare, child care and mental health. But it also includes historic investments in the infrastructure that people need to live the best life possible and fully participate in our economy, no matter what part of Ontario they call home. I'm particularly excited about the government's latest commitment to broadband infrastructure which was featured in our budget. Providing access to fast, reliable internet isn't just good for the economy. It enhances the quality of life. It means students can complete their homework online. Small businesses can make their goods available to a wider audience, and people can connect with loved ones. Distant communities. Mr. Speaker, account minister please tell us about the broadband investment announced in the budget?

>> Minister Bob Chiarelli: Speaker, thanks to the member from Kingston and the islands for the question. Speaker, infrastructure is much more than bricks and mortar. It is also fibre optic cable connecting our rural and northern communities to high-speed internet. To participate in the changing global economy, speaker, people need fast, reliable internet as an essential service. That is why our government has already invested \$530 million in digital infrastructure since 2007. And this includes \$90 million for the southwest, over \$62 million for northern first nation communities, and \$130 -million for r&d for new 5g networking. On top of that, speaker, our budget includes an additional \$500 million for improved broadband, bringing our total commitment to over \$1 billion. Speaker, if the conservatives actually care for rural and northern Ontario, they will vote for these budget measures.

>> MPP Kiwala: Thank you to the minister for sharing some of the details on these essential investments. These projects referenced by the minister of infrastructure highlight the importance of expanding broadband in Ontario and will further complement previous investments in broadband made by this government. I'm excited to hear these projects have a particular focus on improving access to those living and working in rural, northern and indigenous communities in Ontario. In addition to allowing rural Ontarians to fully participate in the 21st century economy and access these basic services, accessible and affordable broadband is essential to the work that they do. Mr. Speaker, as you know, fast and reliable broadband access is a key ingredient to unlocking enormous economic potential in our rural communities. Mr. Speaker, account minister please tell us about how broadband investments benefit rural Ontario?

>> Minister Jeff Leal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the investment. It will certainly help the wonderful residents every Kingston and the islands. It helps families to stay in touch, connect small businesses, connect the world and allows rural communities to participate and compete in this economy. Our government is very serious about getting Ontarians connected. That's why we're putting \$71 million towards a million-dollar broadband expansion particularly to my good friends that run the eastern Ontario regional network. Projects like these of course are going to help businesses. Just last week along with my colleague the honourable Steven Del Duca, we were at the Canada candy operation in beautiful Cobourg, Ontario. At the same time of day we announced announcement in the city of Kawartha Lakes access to broadband position to retain high skilled jobs. Promote innovation. It's necessary for all industries to grow in the province of Ontario. This is an important corporate investment not corporate welfare.

MPP Pettapiece to Minister Lalonde Re: Ray and Walter Act

>> MPP Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of community safety and correctional services. Last spring, I introduced a private member's bill the Ray and Walter Act. It's named in honour of two north Perth fire service members Ken Ray and Ray Wilder who died battling a fire in March of 2011. The bill would require buildings with truss and lightweight construction to display a decal that alerts firefighters ahead of time -- construction. This information is absolutely essential. The Ray and Walter Act passed unanimously a second reading but the bill died when this government, for political reasons, decided to prorogue the legislature. To the Minister. Now that I've mentioned the Ray and Walter Act, will she agree to fast track it?

>> Minister Marie-France Lalonde: Well, first of all I want to say thank you very much for the question and for the advocacy on this issue to the member opposite. We had a conversation actually once he introduced this private member's bill, and certainly as a member, he is always welcome to reintroduce that bill again in this session, Mr. Speaker. You know, the safety of all of our first responders, our firefighters is paramount. And when I look at, you know, issues that have arisen over the years, the inquests, we have moved forward on creating a fire table, an expert fire table. THA actually has reviewed the private member's bill at that table. Because what we want is to create a safer Ontario, Mr. Speaker. And certainly for us, moving forward is definitely -- continuing to work for that safety. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Pettapiece: Back to the Minister, Speaker. Speaker, the Ray and Walter Act responds to a real gap in firefighter safety. It could save lives as soon as it's passed. I was grateful for the strong support I received from local fire chiefs, the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs and from all parties in this legislature. I know the government recently issued a bunch of regulatory changes under the fire protection and prevention Act but they ignored the obvious, truss and lightweight identification. It's time to take action. If the government doesn't agree, why do they support the Ray and Walter Act at second reading? And when will they finally act on it?

>> Minister Lalonde: So again, Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the question. Certainly I know that many members in this House have worked hard, and I was a member that brought forward private member's bill. Certainly it is our hope that their work will not be lost, Mr. Speaker. We have proposed a comprehensive deal with the opposition party to carry over all private members' bills. But under the new management, Mr. Speaker, Conservatives have actually refused this agreement and I want to share that in the House, Mr. Speaker, because certainly that means that only -- the only way that those bills can go forward is for them to be reintroduced. Certainly if a deal could have been reached, Mr. Speaker. We value all the efforts of our members to introduce. So again I'm very sorry. That a deal could not be reached under your new leadership.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Des Rosiers Re: Wetlands Protection

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question to the acting Premier. In March, the lake Simcoe region conservation authority illegally approved a massive development that would pave over the paradise beach island grove provincially significant wetlands. I say illegally because this development clearly violates the provincial policy statements, which strictly prohibit such development. Will the Premier direct this rogue conservation authority to follow the law, stop this development and prevent the loss of this -- the loss of this provincially significant wet land?

>> Minister Nathalie Des Rosiers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. Indeed I think while the ministry -- Minister of the conservation authorities act and its regulation does really oversee the operational decisions of a conservation authority. However, we are looking into this particular file to see whether there are anything that was -- that's not been done properly. So notable approvals are required from mnr the ministry for this proposal. We've already ascertained that. We know the authority under their -- with wet land and appropriation that's appropriate. We are actually looking whether there are things that can be done to see what has happened here. But up to now we know that it's not -- we cannot interfere. In operational decisions of the conservation authority.

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the acting Premier. This isn't the first time that a rogue conservation authority has run roughshod over the province's laws to protect wetlands and natural heritage. My, the member for rel -- welland, has warned how the niagara region conservation authority appears to be have been captured by private interests. The NDP Tabled amendments when the government updated the conservation authorities act. The government members voted those amendments down. Why is the Premier allowing conservation authorities and developers to ignore her government's own laws to protect wetlands and natural heritage?

>> Minister Des Rosiers: Thank you. And thank you for the question. We're continuing to look at whether the avenue's possible. But as of now we have ascertained it's an operational decision that they have made and that we are continuing to look at to see whether the possible appeals that can be taken from that decision. So that's where we are as of now. I think wetlands protection are immensely important for this government. We've continued to put forward a really strong protection for wetlands. That's what allows us to continue to preserve the natural heritage and we will continue to do so.

MPP Potts to Minister Naidoo-Harris (Zimmer) Re: First Nations Child Care

>> MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister responsible for early years and child care. Speaker, I am very proud our government is committed to ensuring families have access to quality and affordable child care all across our province. And our government has taken and been a proud champion for Ontario families, taking strong action to transform the way child care is delivered in our province. In my riding of Beaches- East York, I represent the diverse range every people including a large number who identify as first nations and métis. Speaker as you know, the parties opposite have yet to mention anything in their platforms about child care for those living on on-reserve communities. But creating cultural, diverse and relevant child care in early learning spaces positively impacts our youngest learner's sense of self and will lead to better outcomes. So, ser, will the Minister responsible for early years and child care tell us what this government has been og doing to meet the needs every indigenous families and children living on reserve?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thanks to the hardworking member from Beaches- East York for this very important question. Mr. Speaker, Ontario recognizes the value of culturally appropriate early years and child care programs in first nation, métis and inuit communities. In fact our government is committed to working closely with ibb dij -- indigenous partners to support a strong early years and child care system for these communities. In our recent budget, Mr. Speaker, we announced an investment of \$40 million over three years to support the

expansion of licensed child care in first nations communities. I think it's amazing news. This funding will help build valuable supports for young first nations kids to help them get a strong start in life. In addition new capital funding will also be available. To support the construction or retrofit of new and existing child care facilities. This will help create valuable spaces.

>> MPP Potts: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the Minister for her response and that great announcement and the amazing transformational work that she is doing to reform day care in the province. Speaker -- and I know that indigenous youth are among the fastest growing population groups in Ontario and that they face significant outcome and achievement gaps. This commitment of over \$40 million towards child care, improving this child care on on-reserve, is a very significant program for children, families and communities. Child care is an integral part of parents' economic empowerment and research shows that children benefit significantly from access to high-quality child care, including improved education, health and employment outcomes. So, Speaker, account Minister please tell us about how much more our government has been doing and the kind of incredible transformational work that we have been doing With indigenous partners to support a better, brighter and more prosperous future for our indigenous youth?

>> Minister David Zimmer: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, this is a landmark commitment to expanding and improving child care on reserve. It's another demonstration of our government's commitment to help indigenous children and youth grow up healthy and reach their full potential. Our reconciliation action plan the journey together provides \$250 million towards initiatives, including recreation based on life promotion programming for indigenous youth and other anti-racism projects. Our \$45 million osap overhaul -- and this is very important -- has driven up a 35% increase. In indigenous people receiving osap grants. Those people are now off to Colleges and universities and can look forward to rewarding lives in this province. And to our \$222 million first nation health action plan, we are including food security and mental health for indigenous youth

MPP Oosterhoff to Minister Jaczek Re: Hospital Overcrowding

>> MPP Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Families in my riding of niagara west-glanbrook are horrified by the hallway medicine of this government. After 15 years, families face longer wait times, more service cuts and less frontline workers. I recently heard from lane and Melissa patson of Smithville. Their family has been plunged into a very dark time since September when their son was diagnosed with pandas. Melissa says we have essentially been denied treatment in Ontario despite living adjacent to one of the largest city centres in Canada and have been forced to fly out of province to Alberta to access treatment. Why is this government showing this lack of care to lane, Melissa and their sick son?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly would like to hear directly from the member opposite about this particular case. Because in some cases there are potential solutions, and of course our heart goes out to this family that's having some difficulty. But this is precisely why, Mr. Speaker, we have made the deliberate choice to continue to invest in care for the people of Ontario and so we're investing more in health care, in hospitals, in particular having visited a number in the last week or so and seeing the improvements that we're making, the reduction in wait times that people are facing and really encouraged that our investment is exactly what we need to do. And of course hospitals are just one part of the entire puzzle. We need more home care, mental health care, long-term care, all part of our health care system. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Oosterhoff: My question is back to the acting Premier. I also spoke recently with Dr. Julian Owen, a physician from grimsby. And he said that he and Colleagues are frustrated with this Liberal government's approach to health care. He and physicians across the province feel like they are being treated unfairly. Throwing money at the problem doesn't work when the government has created 15 years of structural issues. Julian said frontline care providers don't actually feel like their voices are heard. We aren't being listened to and we can't trust any of the Liberals' promises. Speaker, why won't the Liberals actually listen to doctors like Julian and stop forcing them to practice hallway

medicine?

>> Minister Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, I'm surprised the member opposite from that the particular ride something raising the question of his local hospital. I understand that the Harris government was prepared to close that hospital. And so of course I'm really pleased that our government have continued to invest in health care across the spectrum, and of course we value our health care professionals, including our physicians, but also all those hard working nurses, the personal support workers. Each and every one of our health care professionals -- So this is precisely why we're increasing our health care spending by 5% to improve the capacity. In our world-class health care system.

MPP Gates to Minister MacCharles Re: Payday Loans

>> MPP Wayne Gates: Speaker, my question is to the acting Premier. Across this province, people are struggling to make ends meet. Some are forced to take on debt just to feed their families and keep a roof over their heads. This is where predatory payday loan stores find them and often take advantage. In some cases these outlets charge annual fees of 390% on loans. Despite repeatedly asking this government to intervene, they've done very little to address this issue. Cities like Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa are trying to curb payday lenders because they know that they prey on people who are experiencing hard times. Since this government's inaction is forcing cities to protect their residents themselves, payday lenders, why won't this government just step up and protect all Ontarians?

>> Minister Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. And thanks to the member for the question. He'll know that bill 59, putting consumer's first act 2017, amends a number of provincial statutes relating -- relating to alternative financial services. And it's all about protecting consumers, Speaker, who use payday loans, alternative financial services and through these amendments we've made the rules stronger. We've reduced risk for consumers accessing these services and we've reduced the cost of borrowing, Speaker. The ministry consulted heavily with stakeholders. All kind of groups that help inform the current direction we've taken. The regulations have been consulted on as well, Speaker. And new rules come into force July of this year. So we're very happy that we've taken this action to protect consumers and respect --