

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Monday, May 1, 2017

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
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The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Sousa) Re: Debt 2017 Budget

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The government still claims they balanced the books. Cyclical Liberal mess. Mr. Speaker, something doesn't -- Patrick Brown: All the typical Liberal math, something doesn't add up. What do you get when you add in \$1.8 billion from double counted cap and trade money? You get 500 million in pension assets despite the auditor general's advice not to count it. \$1.5 billion in double counted federal transfer fund. \$450 million in land transfer taxes and lastly \$1 billion from the fire sale of Hydro One. What do you get, Mr. Speaker, when you add that all together? It's a \$5 billion operational deficit funded through cash grabs -- Mr. Speaker, it is a \$5 billion operational deficit through cash grabs, pension assets and onetime and unusual revenue. Will the Premier come clean and admit to the House. The budget is not balanced?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to say that this is the first balanced budget in Ontario for nearly a decade, Mr. Speaker. And we worked very hard to eliminate the deficit, Mr. Speaker. We knew that that was critical, and our economy is in a very strong position in Ontario. We are leading the country, Mr. Speaker, in economic growth. But the reality is that people are still anxious, and so the foundation of a balanced budget actually gives us the opportunity to make investments that are needed in the province. So, Mr. Speaker, a prime example of that is ohip plus, which allows us to invest in the people of this province and allows children and youth in this province as of January 2018 to have free medication, Mr. Speaker, because we know -- we know that if we can make that investment and kids -- answer. And young people can get access to the medication they need, will be healthier in the long term, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. You know what else doesn't add up? The fact that the Wynne Liberals are adding another \$10 billion of debt. They say they have a balanced budget. But another reason the Liberals claim they have a balanced budget because they're simply hiding debt elsewhere. If this budget was -- Truly balanced, we wouldn't be adding debt left, right and centre. But the Wynne Liberals are adding \$10 billion worth of debt to the most indebted province in the world. We owe more than any province or state and it's about to get worse. So, Mr. Speaker, can the Premier explain why we're adding so much debt this year, \$10 billion, if it's actually a balanced budget?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, well, I absolutely understand that the leader of the opposition has no interest and no plan to make capital investment in this province, Mr. Speaker. No interest in it and no apparent understanding that, without investment in capital, without investment in transit, Mr. Speaker, in roads and bridges across the province, you know, he was at the city of Toronto today, Mr. Speaker, talking about the city of Toronto. One commitment to invest one cent in transit in the city of Toronto, Mr. Speaker. We have billions of dollars that's being invested in Toronto, in Ottawa, in Kitchener- Waterloo, Mr. Speaker, in Hamilton around the province, because we know, we know that those investments are critical to the economic viability and growth of those communities and the province overall. We are proud of our balanced budget, Mr. Speaker. First one in a decade in Ontario, and it allows us. To have a foundation upon which to invest --

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. You know, this myth of a balanced budget didn't trick everyone, didn't confuse everyone. Just look what Kelly income Mcfarland had to say nat "National post." I quote, in this article the budget claims to be balanced even though debt will rise another \$26.4 billion this fiscal year. Debt servicing costs will again eat up 1 billion a month. He added, I quote -- billions of dollars for capital projects are kept off book. Billions more in borrowing shoved into the future. Onetime asset sales like Hydro One sell-offs are used to make the numbers look better than they are. That's from the "National post.", Mr. Speaker, clearly this budget is not

balanced. And my question, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier is playing with the numbers, is fudging the numbers really worth hurting the –

>>Minister Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To be clear, we balanced the budget this year, next year and the year after that. This is coming from a party who increased debt by 53% when they were in power as a province during the good times, and this member himself, he voted in the largest deficit in our country's history, \$55 billion, Mr. Speaker. And he doubled that during the time that he was there. Mr. Speaker, I'll read a quote from an independent source, a rating agency that says the following -- the government has, to its credit, outperformed its targets each year. Efforts to contain wages and limit spending growth in key program areas kept the plan on track initially while the province was benefitting from strong economic growth and more recently one-off measures. That's the debt. It goes on to say the next debt-to-g.d.p. Ratio is seen falling for the third straight at 37.5% in --

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Ballard) Re: Toronto Community Housing

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. This morning I sat down with mayor Tory to discuss the Liberal government's 2017 budget. We both agreed on one important fact. A Premier who got elected on the promise that they would fight for the city of Toronto has clearly turned her back on this great city. The Liberals have ignored almost every promise that the Premier made to the city of Toronto. Instead they've September down a Minister to say John Tory has crossed the line. Standing up for the city of Toronto isn't crossing the line. It's honouring the promises they made, which they have broken to the city of Toronto. So my question, Mr. Speaker, is when is this Premier going to actually honour the commitments she made and make sure we actually support the city of Toronto?

>> Premier Wynne: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well -- Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me first say, Mr. Speaker, that I have a very strong working relationship with mayors across this province, Mr. Speaker. I work with them. I go to their gatherings. I listen to their concerns. I believe that the municipal level of government is extremely important to the well-being of the whole province, Mr. Speaker. And I meet with mayor Tory on a regular basis. So let me just talk about the ways in which we have invested and supported Toronto, Mr. Speaker. I know there's no government in the history of this province that has invested more in housing and transit in the city of Toronto. So let me just -- also let me note that we have earmarked \$30 billion more for infrastructure in the project and a portion of that, a large proportion of that. Will go to the city of Toronto over the next decade for future projects, Mr. Speaker. I'll speak more in my supplementary.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. What happened ten years ago doesn't do much for the future. Listing off highlight reels doesn't help with the immediate infrastructure needs of the city of Toronto. One serious example mayor Tory raised was the stories about people living in Toronto community housing, who are -- when they get convicted of a crime, when these people are jailed, they're allowed to jump the queue. We have 82,000 people on the waiting list for Toronto community housing and someone who is a convicted criminal can jump the queue over those families. That is outrageous. And I don't understand how this government can continue to support allowing violent criminals and drug dealers to jump the queue over our most vulnerable in our city. Mr. Speaker, this is shameful. Mayor Tory and city council. Have made this request of the province. Yes or no, will you stop this practice? Will you allow the province to make sure convicted criminals don't get the to jump the queue for social housing?

>>Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you for that very interesting question, because it is factually incorrect. The province -- and I am so disappointed that the leader of the opposition wouldn't at least check his facts before he stood up and spread that falsehood. Speaker, this is how it works. Mr. Speaker, the only legislation, the only regulation that this province puts in place is that victims of domestic violence get priority, not what the leader of the opposition is saying. Absolutely wrong.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. And the Liberal government seems to be oblivious to the fact that the entire city council and mayor John Tory made this request and the wording is the provincial legislation needs to be changed. Right now, because the wording is disadvantaged, you're allowed to -- allowed to jump the queue, a convicted drug dealer or anyone who committed a violent offence. The entire Toronto city council has passed this request. Since I can't get an answer on the convicted criminals being allowed to jump the queue. That's the natural gas purchasing. Because the way the province is set up, Toronto pays \$6.3 million more. Mayor Tory has a legitimate question or a legitimate ask. Will the Premier at least --

>> Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. You know, I thought I gave a fairly clear answer, and I'll give it again. The province of Ontario gives the only -- The only pandemic the province of Ontario gives is that those people fleeing domestic violence get priority in this housing. So, you know, I can say that Ontario -- Ontario has a long-standing commitment to tackling -- Chronic homelessness. Speaker, I will -- I'll say that again. They're the only -- the only regulation that we have in place is people fleeing domestic violence get priority. So, Speaker, the -- with regards to natural gas --

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Hoskins) Re: Pharmacare

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, in the Premier's political response to the pharmacare issue, she left out 10 million Ontarians. Why?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, what ohip plus does -- and I -- you know, I said on -- I said last week that I'm very glad that the leader of the third party and her caucus are on the same page in terms of the need for pharmacare support, Mr. Speaker. I think that the more voices that we have leading the charge across the country, Mr. Speaker, joining with our Minister of health who has been talking about this and working with his Colleagues across the country. The more voices we have joining in that chorus, the better off we are, Mr. Speaker. We made a decision to cover, instead of 125 medications, to cover 4,400 medications, Mr. Speaker. Including cancer medications, including medications for rare diseases for all children and young people 24 years or younger, Mr. Speaker. It will make a huge difference in children's lives.

>> Andrea Horwath: One in three people in this province has no drug coverage through their work. This situation is getting worse today, not better, Speaker. Ontario needs a universal pharmacare plan that will ensure those people get the medication that they need. And yet in the Premier's political response to this issue, she chose to leave them out. Under the Premier's response, people will continue to max out their credit cards, being forced to split their pills in half or go without the medication that they need. Why?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I understand the frustration of the third party but I find it remarkable that I have yet to find another third-party stakeholder, patient interest group that actually shares their view. Because this pharmacare program has been lauded and celebrated and applauded across this country. In fact, Mr. Speaker, even the individuals that were involved in helping the NDP Create their income-tested pharmacare proposal have supported this. In fact -- So Steve Morgan, one of the experts in this country that was utilized -- in fact he stood right next to the leader of the third party, saying bravo. First dollar single payer pharmacare plan for children recognizing that this is critically important. That was his response, Mr. Speaker .

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, I'll give the Minister of health a little bit more time to read our plan because in fact he's got it wrong but that's ok. He would rather spin than be up front about what's in our plan. Let me say for the record, Speaker -- Let me say for the record, speak, I do agree that young people need their prescriptions filled. But maybe their parents do, too, Speaker. I believe that their parents need their prescriptions filled, too. So can the Premier tell the people who work hard but don't have workplace benefits why she thinks that they should have to continue to empty their wallets, reach for their credit cards to pay for their prescriptions or, worse, go without those prescriptions as they do right now?

>>Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that we can all celebrate this proposal that's in the budget. This is the biggest transformation in medicare in this province probably since the beginning of medicare, Mr. Speaker. It's a giant leap forward towards universal pharmacare for all Ontarians. It's providing I believe that national leadership that the Premier has worked so diligently on over the last number of years. And it means come January 1st, 4 million children and youth will be able to, with their parents, go into pharmacies, get absolutely free access to 4,400 medications including cancer drugs, including drugs for rare disease. At absolutely no cost to them. Mr. Speaker, I would hope that if a Progressive party like the NDP Would get up with us and celebrate this incredible visionary transformation of ohp, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Hoskins) Re: Pharmacare

>> Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My next question's also for the Premier. Nearly a quarter of Canadians between the ages of 30 and 60 are dealing with high blood pressure. The largest cohort of people living with H.I.V. And AIDS are aged 30 to 40, not under 24. The gathering of statistics for people -- Doesn't even start until age 40, Speaker. The NDP Plan for universal pharmacare would give all of those people coverage for the medications that they need. In factin Speaker -- in fact, it would cover every single Ontarian, because that's what's needed, Speaker. That's what's needed. Why pras the Premier decide today leave all of these people out of her plan?

>> Premier Wynne:, Mr. Speaker, well, as I said, the leader of the third party and I have come at this from a different direction, Mr. Speaker. What we have done is we have said, for young people 24 years or younger, we would cover all of the medications that they might need, Mr. Speaker. 4,400 medications. The leader of the third party chose to bring forward a proposal that would have been much, much narrower and I'm -- you know, we can try to stir up a fight between us on which plan is better, Mr. Speaker. The reality is we both know that a national pharmacare plan, that covers everyone in the country, is actually what is need under this country, Mr. Speaker. In the absence of that, we have taken a huge step forward so that all children and youth 24 years or younger will have all of their medications covered, Mr. Speaker. 4,400 right in January 2018. So as quickly as possible, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, what the Premier refuses to admit and the Minister refuses to acknowledge is that the vast majority of those 4,400 drugs will never be utilized by the vast majority of young people in the province of Ontario. However, a truly universal pharmacare plan will -- Speaker, a truly universal pharmacare plan will create savings that could range between 800 million and \$1.9 billion immediately, Speaker. These are real savings that are backed up by independent experts. Why has the Premier chosen a response to the pharmacare. That minimizing the benefits to Ontario's economy?

>>Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that I am profoundly disappointed at the NDP's position. And this shouldn't be about which program is of greater benefit. This should be about the important announcement that was made last week that is the biggest transformation of medicare in the history of this province. Mr. Speaker, I learned of a mother, of a family with a teenage daughter that has cancer, and she indicated that, from the time that this program comes into place, to when this young person becomes an adult and gets a prosperous life, Mr. Speaker, she estimates she's going to save \$20,000. And she said that \$20,000 represents her daughter's College education, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, I am profoundly disappointed that 10 million Ontarians are not going to have their prescription drugs covered here in this province. Profoundly, Mr. Speaker. Because prescription drugs are unaffordable, Speaker, for millions of Ontarians. Once again we are reminded that these Ontarians are just not the priority for this Premier. So let me be clear to all Ontarians. I don't agree and I am committed to bringing forward universal, comprehensive pharmacare for the people of this province. From age 1 to age 55, a plan that will cover all Ontarians, Speaker, from the outset. Will this Premier actually join me, Speaker, in supporting a plan. That does cover all Ontarians as Ontarians would expect the Premier to do?

>>Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, our Premier has been advocating for national pharmacare for years. And I know it's recently that that leader of the third party has joined our efforts for national pharmacare, Mr. Speaker. But -- from St. Mike's one of the leaders across this country on pharmacare on "Metro morning" last week said, quote -- this announcement is potentially historic. It indicates that the government is taking action to address the fact that millions of people who don't take medications because they can't afford them will, Mr. Speaker. Danielle Martin, another leader on this, said these are real people who are going to be significantly helped by this, Mr. Speaker. Maybe the member opposite doesn't think that children and youth are real people deserving of pharmacare, Mr. Speaker. And Natalie Mehra of the Ontario health coalition, an individual that the member opposite knows well says, quote, this is an amazing announcement that will provide national leadership. This is a great first step in the right direction.

MPP Fedeli to Minister Sousa Re: Homecapital Group Bailout

>> MPP Fedeli: Thank you. Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Home capital is one of the largest non-bank mortgage lenders in Ontario. The Premier would know them as being under investigation by the Ontario securities commission. They've seen is withdrawal of hundreds of millions of dollars from savings accounts and their shares tumbled 65%. Last week they received a \$2 billion bailout from the health care of Ontario pension plan or hoop. Seeing as one of the players is under provincial government regulators investigation and the other player manages the pension fund of Ontario's health workers, we have questions. I ask the Premier, was the government aware of this deal? And if so, when?

>>Minister Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our first priority is always consumers and investor protection. Much the Ontario securities commission is reviewing and assessing the circumstances around home capital. We understand that there's a case before it now. FSCO, our financial securities regulator as well, has engaged because of the mortgage component of it and then there's the investor component of it that the Ontario securities commission is involved with. We have actually been doing a review for over a year-and-a-half now referencing to increase consumer protection and ensure that full disclosure is made for those consumers to appreciate the risks that are involved in those circumstances, but it is before review and that's where it is, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Fedeli: Back to the Premier. The board chair of home capital is Kevin Smith. He earns \$357,000 a year and has some \$1.5 million in stock. But that's only his part-time job. The Premier would know him better as Kevin Smith, C.E.O. Of St. Joseph's health centre, his other part-time job where he's paid \$720,000 a year. And he was also a board member of hoop. Now hoop's C.E.O. Was Jim Cooney to also happens to sit on the board of home capital. Speaker, you truly can't tell the players without a program. The apparent conflicts are beyond description. So after the bailout, which helped restore the share value. From the other's board. I ask the Premier, is it right for executives of a lender to also be making decisions of a borrower?

>>Minister Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So as the member may appreciate and know that home capital group is incorporated federally, is regulated by the federal financial institution FSCO, which is the province is confident the office of the superintendent of the financial institutions or OSFI is carefully monitoring the situation as well and we're monitoring any impact on mortgage availability in the marketplace. But again the transparency, the oversight consumer protection is paramount. It's why we've taken initiatives that we have to strengthen FSCO's regulation. Also moving more of that to OSC. To ensure our consumers and investors are protected and fully disclosed and is before review, Mr. Speaker, and we're trying to protect the interests of the consumers here.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne Re: TTC Funding

>> Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the Premier. Toronto set out some clear and reasonable priorities for the Ontario budget. People living in Toronto community housing need

help and the mayor asked that the province join with the city to provide that help. People relying on the TTC need an improved transit system and the mayor asked the province to join the city to help provide that system. Now I understand what the mayor's talking about and when we met I was clear. An NDP Government will be there for Toronto. The more ignored the people of Toronto in last week's budget. As the mayor told people living in community housing, quote -- the Ontario government is not helping to get your housing fixed, end quote. Why isn't the Premier doing what's needed to fix affordable housing in Ontario and communities around the province?

>> Premier Wynne: So, Mr. Speaker, let me just say once again that, you know, we are making billions of dollars of investments in Toronto. We have uploaded literally billions of dollars of costs from municipalities, including Toronto around the province. But let me just talk specifically, because I am concerned about social housing around the province. I am concerned about social housing in the city of Toronto, as a Toronto member, Mr. Speaker. I know firsthand the challenges of Toronto community housing. But those challenges are found in other parts of the province as well, Mr. Speaker. For Toronto, what this budget does is it provides \$130 million for social housing repair, Mr. Speaker, \$340 million for prevention of homelessness. Another \$130 million for affordable housing, Mr. Speaker, and a specific ask that the mayor had which was. Land. We have acquired provincial land worth up to \$100 million to build 2,000 new affordable rental housing units. Those are all supports for housing in the city of Toronto, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the mayor told Torontonians the city got a big goose egg when it came to housing -- social housing repairs. Social housing stock is crumbling and concern doesn't fix it, Speaker. Funding fixes it. But that wasn't all. To quote the mayor, the most crucial needs. People of the city of Toronto were not met by this budget. The Premier and her government had a chance to stand up for Toronto on transit. Instead they turned their backs. When I went with mayor Tory, we talked about the importance of the province supporting 50% of the TTC's operating costs. Why is the Premier saying no to immediate improvements to Toronto's transit -- Why is the Premier saying no to immediate improvements to Toronto's transit and transit systems across the province?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the chatter that you might have heard behind me, Mr. Speaker, is from members who are not from the city of Toronto, who have watched the funding that has flowed to the city of Toronto and to Hamilton, Mr. Speaker, and to Kitchener- Waterloo and to Ottawa. Let me just talk about the money that is going into the city of Toronto. \$5.3 billion for the Eglinton Crosstown. \$1.2 billion for the Finch West L.R.T. 3.7 billion for the GO R.E.R. Within Toronto. 870 million for the Toronto-York- Spadina subway. 1.48 billion for the Scarborough subway. And, Mr. Speaker, on future projects, which as I know what the mayor's been talking about, \$150 million for planning and design work on the Toronto relief line, a line and a project, Mr. Speaker, for which there is no committed city money at this point, Mr. Speaker, And 55 million for the same work on the Yonge North subway. No government has put more money into transit in the city of Toronto.

MPP Qaadri to Minister Sousa Re: Funding Toronto

>>MPP Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker. On behalf of my constituents of Etobicoke North, Speaker, -my question is to the Minister of finance, the Honourable Charles Sousa. Speaker I can tell you that all of my Colleagues on this side of the House are in fact quite proud of Premier Wynne and Minister of finance Sousa for the Ontario 2017/2018 budget. In fact our growth has outpaced Canada's and all other G-7 countries for the last three years. On the ground, that means, Speaker, the greatest expense for prescription health care in a generation, \$1 billion for transit just in my own riding. 400 million for Etobicoke General Hospital. 700,000 new jobs created since the recession and our unemployment -- unemployment rate has been below the national average for two straight years. When the global economic recession hit, we made a deliberate choice to invest in Ontarians and things that matter to them most. Will the finance Minister please itemize more of what we're doing for Ontarians in the 2017/2018 Ontario budget?

>>Minister Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the member from Etobicoke North for the question and his advocacy in this regard. I'm happy to reaffirm that the 2017 budget is a

balanced budget and it's the first one since the global recession. Mr. Speaker, I would also like to add again that not only have we balanced this year but we're on track to do so again next year and the year after that. A balanced budget means that the government will not be borrowing to pay for operating costs because all of it now goes directly to invest in capital. Long-term capital assets. The result is more money and more available for things that matter to the people of Ontario, like free prescriptions for children under 24 and under or free tuition. When the global recession hit, Mr. Speaker, we set out a realistic and responsible approach to return to balance in 17/18&last week we delivered on that commitment.

>>MPP Qaadri: Speaker, ohip plus, new schools, new hospitals or hospital expansions, free tuition for modest-income Ontarians, 25% cut in hydro rates. More child care. Eight stops at the finch L.R.T. In my riding alone. Minister, on behalf of the people of Etobicoke North -- mucho obrigado. Families in Toronto will benefit from these important investments. Speaker, we are already making our largest infrastructure investment in our province's history and that Toronto is in fact receiving a very significant funding support not only for the items that I've listed but of course for affordable housing as well as transit. Speaker, could the Minister of finance please comment on how we continue to build up the city of Toronto?

>>Minister Sousa: Again I would like to thank the member from Etobicoke North for his question and his language skills. Mr. Speaker, it's important to remember that no provincial government in Ontario's history has invested more in the city of Toronto. We've increased provincial uploads the city of Toronto will save \$530 million this year alone. In fact since 2003 we contributed over \$10 billion in transit projects like Eglinton crosstown and the downtown relief line that we're supporting. And this year, this year's budget includes another \$130 million for social housing repair, \$340 million for homelessness prevention and 130 million for affordable housing. We're using provincial land to put up to 100 million to build 2,000 new affordable housing units. The city has asked us for new revenue tools and we've responded, Mr. Speaker. Our budget will give the city -- In fact no -- to ensure the people of Toronto benefit from predictable ongoing funding, we've also doubled the share of gas revenue to the city. On this side of the House we support Toronto and --

MPP Yurek to Minister Coteau (Hoskins) Re: Mental Health Services

>>MPP Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Minister of finance. Speaker, children and youth are exp Eriencing mental health crisis because they can't get the treatment they need when and where they need it. The Canadian institute for health information released new data this morning that indicates that children, youth and families facing a mental health crisis are ending up in hospital E. R. -- E.R.S at disturbing rates. Since television, a staggering 67% increase in hospitalizations for children and youth seeking treatment for mental health and auditions. The new statistics are trending in the wrong direction compared to 2015 and this government is failing our children. My question to the Minister of finance -- did the Minister of children and youth services request funding in this year's budget to deal with the eroding capacity in community-based children's mental health centres?

>>Minister Couteau: Well, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for the question. I also, again, want to recognize all of the advocates, parents and family members and staff who are working across this province to make sure that our children are positioned for success here in the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, -- when I first became the Minister responsible for this file, I was given a mandate by the Premier to work with providers to transform the child and youth mental health system here in the province. And we recognize without a question that there's more work that needs to be done to improve the services that young people receive. We are facing challenges with wait times. We're facing challenges with service delivery. We're facing challenges with our funding model and, Mr. Speaker, our agencies have said this. The auditor general has said this, and we've accepted this. This is exactly why we're seizing the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to give Ontarians a community-based mental health system for today and into the future.

>>MPP Yurek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll take that as no, I did not ask the Minister for any funding.

Speaker, the data shows how the erosion of community services not only leaves children and youth unable to obtain the help they need but also strains our hospital resources. The data shows that the government's inaction endanger lives and cost the system \$175 million a year. Children's mental health Ontario estimates that \$118 million the system needs annually could save \$1 billion in the long run while ensuring children and youth receive the services and treatment they need. Speaker, will the Minister of finance explain why none of the new federal health transfer money for mental health initiatives was allotted to children and youth?

>>Minister Hoskins: The importance of this issue is part of the reason why we announced \$140 million towards mental health services, including access to cognitive behavioural therapy, supportive housing as well, why we announced in Barrie 10 inpatient beds, beds for children and youth, mental health as well as a set of outpatient services, Mr. Speaker. But this is precisely why ohip plus is so important. We know that 70% of mental illness emerges during childhood, Mr. Speaker. And for the first time in this province. Those children and youth are going to have free access to the medicines that they need to deal with their mental illness.

MPP Vanthof to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Funding

>>MPP Vanthof: Thank you. My question's to the Premier. Ontario hospitals have been driven to the breaking point by your government and this uj budget won't undo the damage. Operating funding for hospitals is \$300 million short of what the hospitals say they needed. That means our community hospitals will continue to be squeezed. Patients will be continued to be treated in hallways and northern and rural hospitals will continue to be forced to cut the services that people count on. Why is this government continuing to refuse the damage they've caused in our hospitals?

>>Minister Hoskins: A billion in Ontario's hospitals. This past week in our budget we announced more than \$500 million or 3.1% increase to the bottom line base funding the occupational cost of hospitals right across this province. And that means that all Ontario hospitals are going to get a minimum increase of at least 2% and we reserve that extra part specifically so we could address those challenges that are faced by a number of hospitals across this province, whether that's in their E.R.S, whether that's bed capacity, facing a high level of population growth in their regions. And, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the member opposite perhaps might want to speak to the Ontario health association -- sorry the Ontario hospital association, the O.H.A.. With regards to their response to what is outlined in the budget, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Vanthof: Speaker, once again back to the Premier. Hospital budgets have been frozen for years, and a 2% increase, a 2% increase is basically inflation. Like that's nothing to crow about. Giving inflationary costs to the base budget isn't exactly a huge gift. So the people who are in hallways and the surg Eries that are being cancelled are not going to be corrected by simpler inflationary increase. Why is this government refusing to acknowledge its problems?

>>Minister Hoskins: So, Mr. Speaker, Anthony Dale, the president and C.E.O. Of the Ontario hospital association, had this to say about our budgets -- budget. The government's significant investments in hospital capital -- because we added \$9 million to the 11 million that's already there for a total of \$20 billion, sorry billion dollars over the next decade -- will help to support a sustainable health care system for the future. With regards to the operational investments, today's investment in the health care sector is an acknowledgement of the capacity challenges hospitals have been facing. It also signals a renewed commitment from government to expand and enhance access to care across the continuum. Mr. Speaker, today's budget announcement he goes on to say is an investment in patient care and will help maintain system stability and strengthen access to frontline services. A 3.1% more than half a billion addition to the half billion that we increased by last year. That's more than \$1 billion.

MPP Martins to Minister Hoskins Re: Pharmacare

>>MPP Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Last week our government introduced a budget, which includes significant investments in health care. In fact the 2017 budget includes an additional \$7 billion for the health care sector over the next three years to reduce wait times, provide access to care and enhance the patient experience. But most importantly, Mr. Speaker, this budget includes funding for priority health care services that will have a real impact for Ontario families. Mr. Speaker, this budget invests in our hospitals nlong-term care homes, in mental health and in our world-class health care professionals. Mr. Speaker, there's one piece of this budget that stands out for me as the member from Davenport more than anything else. Youth and parents in my community are particularly excited about the new ohip plus program. Account Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please inform this House of the historic. Investment our government is making in Ontario's children and youth?

>>Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, it truly is historic and that's the way it's been described across this country, Mr. Speaker. Pharmacare for Ontarians and for Canadians is so vitally important. That issue of access to medicine. And come January 1st, not sometime deep into the future potentially. January the 1st of 2018, 4 million Ontarians, including the member from niagara west-glanbrook, Mr. Speaker. 4 million children and youth under the age of 25 are going to be able to go into pharmacies with their parents if they're under age, with a prescription from their health care provider, and receive absolutely free of charge. No co-payment, no annual deductible, access to 4,400 medications. Drugs for cancer, Mr. Speaker. Drugs for rare disease. Truly an historic moment in Ontario's history and indeed in Canada's history, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Martins: Thank you. Thank you, Minister, for that response. Thank you to the Minister and the Premier for all their hard work and dedication in ensuring access to prescription medications for Ontario's children and youth. As the mother of two young boys, I know how important this access is, and this new program will make a tremendous difference for those families who struggle with poverty and social inequality. It's going to give these families and their children in Davenport and across the whole province, Mr. Speaker, a better opportunity to grow strong and healthy and a chance at a brighter future. Most importantly it is going to impact all of Ontario's children and youth. No matter the circumstances, no matter the socioeconomic status of the child or their parents. All Ontarians under the age of 24 will benefit equally from this program. Speaker, account Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please share with this House the impact the program will have for Ontario families?

>>Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, this is such an important advancement to medicare in this province. It's the biggest transformation I would argue in the history of the 51 years that medicare has existed nationally. It provides that national leadership. The Premier making this decision and showing such courage is making that bold statement to the rest of the country, Mr. Speaker, that this can be done. This must be done, Mr. Speaker. Access to medicine is one of the most fundamental issues of health equity. I'm proud to be in a Cabinet and part of a caucus with a Premier that has such vision and churj -- This aspect of medicare. We're going to deliver it come January 1st. 4 million children and youth under the age of 25.

MPP Harris to Minister Del Duca Re: Driving Safety Laws

>>MPP Harris: Speaker, will the Premier explain why she's allowing a return of photo radar back on major expressways and roads in the province of Ontario?

>>Minister Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. The member opposite knows that in fact with bill 65 this government is moving forward. The safe school Zones act. We're moving forward to help protect our most vulnerable road users, because municipalities -- Asked us for the support, Speaker, in school Zones and in community safety Zones and only in those municipalities that want to take advantage of the power that this legislation, if passed, would provide them, Speaker. Thanks very much.

>>MPP Harris: Speaker, if only the Wynne Liberals were focused on protecting students with bill 65.

We supported enhanced student safety but as we know with this government, the devil is always in the details. Instead of student safety, they've chosen a sneaky route placing us on a slippery slope to allow photo radar on potentially any municipal parkway, expressway -- Rchltsd allow photo radar -- Parkway, expressway, road and highway right across the province. This Premier's quite literally bringing us back to the future and putting photo radar back to highways in Ontario. Bill 65, the photo radar act, is in committee today. Will the Premier bring the focus back to school safety and stop her green light. To speed trap cameras on municipal highways and road across the entire province?

>>Minister Del Duca: Thank you very much, Speaker. I think the more pertinent question for that member is why has his party and his leader brought forward 214 amendments, procedural delays, Speaker, that will help deny giving municipalities the power the opportunity to protect our most vulnerable road users, Mr. Speaker ? I've listened throughout all of the debates on bill 65 and I've heard that member and I've heard the member from Nipissing and I've heard other members on that side of the legislature literally stand up. On the one hand, Speaker, claim that they want to protect our most vulnerable road users, including those older pedestrians and school students, Speaker. And yet when they had the chance to work constructively with us on bill 65 again, Speaker, more than 200 amendments to slow down the process, Speaker. The question is why don't we do something, Speaker. The question is why won't they help us protect Ontario --

MPP Gelinas to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Funding

>>MPP Gelinas: Decade of Liberal cuts. The Premier's budget does nothing to undo the damage already done. The Ontario health' coalition says and I quote -- Overcrowding faced by hospitals across Ontario and patients will continue to wait on stretchers in hospital hallways. Why is this Premier ignoring the overcrowding in our hospitals and basically turning her back on patient care?

>>Minister Hoskins: We're doing the opposite of that, Mr. Speaker. We're doing the opposite of what the NDP Did when they were in government when they closed 24% of all acute beds in the province, when they closed 13% of all the mental health beds in this province. What we are doing is we added \$9 billion to the 11 billion that's already there. For 20 billion new dollars for capital improvements, new hospitals, redevelopments across this province. And we've named some of those, including the hospital in Windsor and elsewhere, Mr. Speaker. But on the operational side, more than half a billion dollars on top of last year's roughly half a billion dollars. This year's budget alone is a 3.1% increase to operating funding. It means that every single hospital across this province is going to benefit. And benefit substantially, Mr. Speaker. We continue to make these investments to make sure that we got the highest quality care.

>>MPP Gelinas: Thank you, Speaker. The Premier's budget failed our health care system. It fails our hospitals and lets the crisis of hallway medicine continue. It fails patients who need care and have to wait days to get it. Today's hospitals are operating 1,100 unfunded beds. More than 250 of those beds are in hallways and storage rooms that were never designed to provide patient care. Surg Eries are still bes cancelled today as we speak. Emergency room wait times are longer than they have been in eight decade -- in a decade. Why is this Premier ignoring the damage that she's done and refusing to stop the cuts to our hospitals?

>>Minister Hoskins: So, Mr. Speaker, here's what the NDP Apparently don't like about our budget. I already mentioned the extra \$9 billion on capital. They don't like the fact --, Mr. Speaker, they don't obviously like the fact that we're investing 11 billion more dollars over the next three years in our health care budget. We're investing \$500 million to support our hospitals, to reduce wait times and expand capacity. They don't like the fact that we're investing 140 million to expand access to mental health services over the next three years. Or \$101 million over the next three years to support our dementia strategy. They don't like the fact that we're adding \$100 million to support the creation and expansion. Of interprofessional teams over the next three years or \$80 million for long-term care, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Flynn Re: Mental Health Support for Employees

>>MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of labour. Today on may the 1st, we recognize the beginning of mental health week. An annual national event to encourage people from all walks of life to learn, talk, reflect and engage with others on all issues relating to mental health. People often associate the ministry of labour's health and safety initiatives with preventing and responding to physical injuries. However more and more I'm hearing from constituents about the importance of mental health. Ontarians want to know what mental health -- that mental health will be taken seriously in their workplaces. Account Minister please share with us what he is doing to ensure that our government is taking action to promote mental health in the workplace?

>>Minister Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you for that excellent question. Speaker, this week we're going to recognize mental health week. It remind us how mental health affects us all, Mr. Speaker. Affects us at home. It affect us at work as well. In fact today, Speaker, in Canada as I speak today, about a half a million Canadians are unable to go to work today because of either mental health concerns or illnesses. Now smart employers know if they look after their workers as well as their bottom line, they become even more successful. So I'm excited to announce this week two new initiatives that the ministry of labour are going to help promote the importance of mental health at the workplace. The first is the webinar. It's fry allowing -- any organization in oontario can avail itself of it. I'm also proud to let now we're launching a new portal later this month to one-stop shop. Contains free workplace mentality health resources for all employers in this province, Speaker.

>>MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for his answer. I'm happy to hear how committed tower government is in promoting mental health in the workplace. We've come a long way on this issue of mental health. Everyone has a continued role to play much it's clear that we've made tremendous strides in advancing workplace mental health in Ontario. Last Thursday, as part of the budget, further plans were announced to support workers across Ontario. Account Minister please give us further details on the recent plans that were unvailted?

>>Minister Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member for that, lent question again. Speaker, in the proposed budget we have before us, Speaker, is going to ensure finally that workers who develop chronic mental stress will be entitled to benefits that are provided by the wsib. Benefits for injured workers in this province, Speaker, have long been a priority of this government but we know that workers don't just suffer physical injuries. There's invisible injuries as well, Speaker, the ones we can't see, and although they're unseen, they're still equally as significant. Chronic mental stress, Speaker, has become a reality for far too many workers in this province. Those workers, they deserve the benefits. They deserve the supports we're already providing to workers who suffer traumatic injuries and stress. This is one important step in our efforts, Speaker, to make this province the most psychologically safe place to work in the world. We all need to do our part. We're kplited to make sure Ontarians are protected from chronic mental stress.

MPP Yakabuski to Minister Mauro Re: Flooding in Ontario

>> MPP Yakabuski: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the member for municipal affairs. Bona sheer has exp Erienced flooding at levels we've never seen before. Golden lake and around the river have been engage under a man versus nature battle for the last few weeks. The amount of damage to the homes and properties is extensive. The disaster recovery program now allows for individuals to be compensated for some of their losses. But that program can only be triggered by the Minister and his officials. I'm sending over a most recent copy of the "Eganville leader" and provide a thumb drive later a photo so the Minister can see for himself the damage. This spring flooding event qualifies this and I would ask the Minister to make that call as, pe dishesly as possible so that people can get on with their lives.

>> Minister Mauro: I want to thank the member for the question. I want to begin by saying I'm aware clearly of what's going on in Renfrew county. On the weekend, I want the member to know I did reach out to the mayor wisnesky from Richards. Grundale, mayor law. Mayor Farr, Al gone wilburforce. Mayor Murphy from bonnechere valley. From Pembroke. At least five of them to ensure as best I was able to discern from our conversations that those municipalities and mayors were receiving the assistance and information that they needed to convey back to their constituents as they all deal with this tragedy, this major environmental issue that's going on. It sound to me like they're getting the benefit of the information out of the Kingston office. They're well prepared to speak to their constituents. In the supplementary I'm happy to provide a bit more information for the member in terms of the program, how it works. And when, if ever, it gets activated. Thank you.

>>MPP Yakabuski: Minister, I recognize there is a process and I appreciate you reaching out to local officials, and officials from your ministry who were in the riding yesterday. But people can't wait. They need to know that their government will be there when disaster strikes. It rained heavily over the weekend and another downpour's expected today. With heavy rains later in the week. This is only going to increase, not only the financial losses but the level of frustration that people are feeling as well. I firmly believe once the Minister has the opportunity to review the data, he will agree with me and local municipal leaders that this spring flooding warrants the enacting of the disaster recovery program. I emphasize once again, this is an event of historical proportions along the bonnechere river and I ask the Minister to recognize this as a disaster as quickly as possible. Can we have that commitment?

>>MPP Mauro: Speaker, let me first of all thank the member for his advocacy on behalf of his constituents. The way the program will work is that the ministry folks on the ground make the assessment. They cannot do that assessment, Speaker, until the waters have receded so they're able to see and determine exactly what has occurred. Once they've been able to gather that data, to make that assessment, they will then make a recommendation back to me as the Minister of municipal affairs based upon what they provide back to me, we will then go forward and make a recommendation on whether or not to activate that program. Unfortunately until the water has receded, it's not possible for the ministry staff to do their work. There is a possibility there, Speaker, for people on the private side to get assistance, possibly. Again that requires the work of the people on the ground. There's a second component to the program that deals with municipal infrastructure. But again, Speaker, the best I can do for the member in terms of his advocacy for his constituents. Is to let him know the water has to recede before ministry can do its work, make a recommendation back to me. Once we receive that we'll, pe indict the process as quickly as we did.

MPP Fife to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Wait Times

>> MPP Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Mr. Stillat is a retired senior from Waterloo who is living in pain. He survived cancer and now he needs two surg Eries, a knee replacement and back surgery. Mr. Stillat first met with the surgeon 15 months ago. He doesn't even know when his first surgical consult on his knee will be but as of December 2016 it is a 413-day wait between consultation and surgery in Waterloo region. He continues to wait to find out how long he'll be waiting for surgery, Mr. Speaker. While he waits his situation gets work. Mr. Stillat is trying to lose weight to qualify for back surgery but because of his knee issues he has reduced mobility which affects his entire health. Mr. Fillat is in pain. After nine years of Liberal cuts to hospital funding and four years of freezes, why does this Liberal government believe it is acceptable. To give hospitals \$300 million less than what they need to help people like Mr. Fillat in the province of Ontario?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're contributing more than \$500 million to our hospitals this year. That is a 3.1% increase. And it allows us in fact to target specific challenges that are being faced. It allows for a substantial new increase in cataract surg Eries. It allows for a substantial increase in hip and knee surgery, Mr. Speaker. But what I would encourage the member opposite to do, if she hasn't already, she should remind that individual wait lists do vary from place to place, from surgeon to surgeon. She should encourage that individual's family physician to -- to see what

the wait times are and to see if there might be another provider that can perform it nearby sooner. Work with the lhins, because this is precisely what the lhin is there for. I've talked with the lhin and there are many examples of where they work directly with patients. To help them with this.