

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Monday, May 29, 2017

From: "Stinson, Jeffrey (CAB)" <jeffrey.stinson@ontario.ca>
To: "@CAB-ProvLegQP" <provlegqp@msgov.gov.on.ca>
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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 Re: Hydro Rate Reduction

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The financial accountability officer's report on the Liberals' unfair hydro scheme wasn't shocking to the opposition. We have been saying all along that simply the boring plan that kicks the can down the road. At the lowest estimate, this plan will cost taxpayers \$21 billion, and at the highest, a staggering \$93 billion. This plan is not about sharing cost. It's about saving seats. Not only will this cost the next generation billions of dollars, but the generation after that, too. This is a shortsighted reelection scheme. Mr. Speaker, is this unfair hydro scheme really about burdening Ontario with another \$93 billion of debt? Or is it about helping the Liberal party?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our fair hydro plan is about helping people in this province. It's about helping mom-and-pop businesses on main streets, Mr. Speaker, and it's about helping farms, farmers, Mr. Speaker. It's about people who need relief on their electricity bill, getting that relief. Mr. Speaker, the member for Renfrew- Nipissing, in his- usual thoughtful way, is heckling about the last 14 years. Mr. Speaker, over the last 14 years we've invested in the electricity system in this province so that we have a clean renewable system, Mr. Speaker, that has been degraded by the very party that the member opposite is a member of. And, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly government after government have not made the investments that needed to be made. So electricity prices were kept artificially low, Mr. Speaker. The system was degraded. We had to make these investments and Mr. Speaker -- We're spreading the cost of those investments over a longer period of time. That's fair today and it's fair tomorrow, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. The Premier said she was investing in the electricity system over the last 14 years. Well, stop investing because, under your watch, you've raised hydro rates 400%. They've broken hydro in Ontario. Every time -- they've made it worse. So I've got a simple -- Mr. Speaker, I have a simple, simple multiple-choice question for the Premier. How many billions of taxpayer dollars is the Premier willing to spend on this hydro scheme for her reelection campaign? "A" 21 billion. B" 45 billion, or "C" 93 billion? Which is it, "A," "B" or "C"? How much taxpayer dollars are you going to waste for the self --

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very clear that the -- Very clear that the leader of the opposition has a very different philosophy of how to grow this province and make it strong, Mr. Speaker. He would stop investing apparently in the new hospital -- He would stop investing in the transit that makes bracebridge able to have a bus -- Investing in small-town infrastructure like bracebridge. If he would stop investing in a clean, renewable electricity grid, Mr. Speaker, and he would stop investing in the education and the health care resources that are allowing this province to thrive. He would stop investing, Mr. Speaker. That's not a plan. That's -- THA is a strategy -- That is a strategy for undermining the growth of this province. We're not going to go there, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: To the Premier. The Premier's absolutely correct for once. I will stop investing in bad Liberal contracts. According to the auditor general, we overpaid \$9.2 billion. That's our investment. Overpaid by 9.2 billion? The 30 companies that got the contracts, surprise, surprise, donated \$1.3 million to the Ontario Liberal party. That's the investment they're proud of? They have supported the Liberal party's bank account, not Ontario ratepayers. And everyone sees it. Everyone in the province sees t.just read the "Globe and mail" this weekend. In the "Globe and mail," I quote - - unless you're planning on living off the grid in algonquin park or moving out of the province by 2028, you will be materially worse off under this scheme than had the Liberals just left bad enough alone. This plan is going to hurt Ontario. Why won't the Premier just do the right thing and admit they have broken hydro in Ontario? Stop trying to make it worse.

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, we've invested in the electricity system in this province. It is clean, its renewable and it is reliable, Mr. Speaker. People need relief on their electricity bills because of the investments that have been made in order to get us there, and we're spreading the cost of those investments over a longer period of time. And happy, Mr. Speaker, to talk to the next generation about that, that they are going to be able to access an asset that we have invested and we fixed, Mr. Speaker, because previous governments were not able to or not willing to. Mr. Speaker, the investments that we have made in this province, let's look at what those investments have LED to. Ontario's created almost 700,000 new jobs since the recession, almost 300,000 since I became Premier, Mr. Speaker. Ontario's economic growth has LED all G-7 nations for the past three years. Our unemployment rate has dropped to 5.8%, Mr. Speaker. Its lowest level in 16 years. That's what investment in the province has been, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne Re: Partisan Advertising

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Another day, another Liberal partisan advertisement. This time it was the recent budget add. It's becoming quite repetitive around here these days. First the Liberals spend millions of taxpayer dollars on advertising. Second the auditor general says the ads are clearly partisan. Third the Liberals skew some nonsense about Ontario prohibiting partisan advertising. Rinse and repeat it is the same line.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier just come clean to the people of Ontario and admit these ads are wrong? They are partisan. The Premier's using taxpayer dollars to benefit the Ontario Liberal party. Do the right thing. Cancel these ads.

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Again, Mr. Speaker, I would say that, as the leader of the opposition knows, Ontario's the only province in the country that has advertising restrictions, Mr. Speaker, that are legislated. Mr. Speaker, we've made it very clear that partisan advertising is not allowed. Mr. Speaker, the benchmark that's used for partisan advertising is what that party did when it was in office, Mr. Speaker. It's quite clear, it's quite clear that because of our legislation, we have moved very far away from that partisan advertising. But, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to be in northeast Ontario, northeastern Ontario over the last week, and one stop that I made in Sudbury was at a unit in a hospital called neokids. And I had the opportunity to meet with families there, Mr. Speaker, who have kids who are chronically ill or they have very serious illness, Mr. Speaker, and many of them need regular medication every day every month, Mr. Speaker. They were very happy to know that ohip plus pharmacare is starting on January 1st, 2018.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker again to the Premier and back to the actual question. From Wawa to Petawawa, from Parry Sound to Owen Sound, to Kapuskasing to Nipissing, what do we have in common? These are towns that are opposition-held ridings, and as reported a Q.P. Briefing I quote the auditor general's office noted this could suggest that these areas were targeted for that reason. And I agree with the auditor general. Without a doubt the Liberal government is campaigning using taxpayer dollars in opposition ridings. It's unethical. It should be illegal and, Mr. Speaker, I will ask the Premier again, will the Premier do the right thing and stop abusing taxpayer dollars for the sole purpose of benefitting the Liberal party?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely understand why the leader of the opposition does not want us to talk about our budget. I absolutely understand that. He does not want -- especially, Mr. Speaker, especially -- Especially given what he said earlier today, Mr. Speaker, is that his strategy would be to stop investing in Ontario. So he doesn't want us to talk about the 100,000 child care spaces that we'll create, Mr. Speaker. He doesn't want us to talk about free tuition because that's an investment in the people and young people of this province. He doesn't want us to talk about ohip plus, Mr. Speaker, because that's investment of the children and the youth of this province who need medication, and it's an investment in their families to allow them to make end meet and support their children. He doesn't want us to talk about any of that, Mr. Speaker. Because his strategy is just to stop investing in the people of this province.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The word investing is all of a sudden code word for what is acceptable to use taxpayer dollars. Investing in partisan Liberal ads? You call that investment? People right now in Ontario are struggling to get by. They can't pay their hydro bills and yet you've got a government wasting millions on partisan ads. This isn't the opposition party's say. This is the auditor general, the independent legislative oversight saying this is wrong. This is unethical. We get the same spin, the same talking points. Abusing taxpayer dollars is not investing. It is wrong. When will this Liberal government learn? Stop abusing taxpayer dollars. Do what's right and cull these ads.

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I say to the leader of the opposition once again he knows full well that there's only one province in this country that has legislation that forbids partisan advertising that has standard, Mr. Speaker, and that is Ontario, and we are the government that's moved on that, Mr. Speaker. But I will go back to what the leader of the opposition does not want to see us talking about. He does not, Mr. Speaker, want us to talk about the capital investments that we are making in hospitals. He does not want us to talk about the fact that, in Moose Factory, there is a hospital that was built in 1950, Mr. Speaker. And he doesn't want us to talk about the fact that we're going to rebuild that hospital. We're going to replace that hospital, Mr. Speaker. He doesn't want us to talk about that because that's an investment in the province. It's an investment in the people of Moose Factory and the James Bay coast. He also doesn't want us to talk about the fact that we are put a 2% max -- minimum -- investment in every operating budget in the hospitals in this province and that, Mr. Speaker, is an investment in people in every corner of Ontario.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Hydro Advertising

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question's for the Premier. The Premier recently put forward a new law that will force all electricity companies to include her political messaging with hydro bills right up until the next election. In fact her regulation contains the exact messaging that she plans to force the companies to use. How can this Premier justify the shameless self promotion at the expense of everyday families in Ontario?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of energy is going to want to speak to the details of this. Mr. Speaker, I am quite sure that even the leader of the third party would like to see everyone who's eligible receive the reduction that they are -- that they're eligible for, that they're entitled to. That they're entitled to. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the leader of the third party knows, because she's been talking about it in this legislature for weeks, Mr. Speaker, she knows that people need that relief on their hydro bills. She knows, Mr. Speaker, people need that 25% reduction. She knows, Mr. Speaker, that, in rural and remote communities, that people need even more than that because distribution charges are so high. So, Mr. Speaker, I know that the leader of the third party supports a reduction, Mr. Speaker, and the Minister of energy will speak to the details in the bill.

>> Andrea Horwath: People are going to get it regardless of partisan advertising in their bills or not. So why is the Premier doing that? Electricity companies to do the Premier's dirty work by trying to sell the people of Ontario on her \$45 billion hydro borrowing scheme. This is a new low, Speaker, in political manipulation at the expense of Ontario families, who are already struggling to just keep up with their skyrocketing bills, Speaker. Is this Premier so desperate to save her political skin that she is going to force families to pay for her own partisan advertising?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to rise and talk about our fair hydro plan, because I find it interesting from the questioning from the leader of the third party. Just last week, Mr. Speaker, when I was in Sault Ste. Marie and when I spoke to Steve and Lucy, who own the m&ms and the other country style doughnuts that the leader of the opposition spoke to, I thought it very interesting that they didn't know about the fair hydro plan. They didn't know about the benefits that they were going to be getting when the fair hydro plan passes, Mr. Speaker. But it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the leader of the third party chose not to tell them about the plan. She

chose not to tell them about all of the things that will be coming, Mr. Speaker. So you know what we're doing, Mr. Speaker? We're going to ensure that we -- I know, Mr. Speaker, that we have one party that doesn't have a plan. We have a new party. We'd like to hear what that new party will have to say. And then from the third party, Mr. Speaker, they don't even talk about their plan any more. We will ensure. That we talk about our plan so everybody in this province knows that they'll be getting 25% off before summer.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, everybody in Ontario will be shocked when they see their bill. They'll be shocked to learn that they're now paying for the Liberals' advertising to be delivered right to their doorstep. By law, Speaker, because the Liberals are putting it in legislation, in regulation. To put the advertising for that party into people's bills. People expected so much better from this Premier. But time and time again, they have been let down. Instead of forcing electricity companies to advertise her borrowing scheme, had the Liberal Premier instead put her energy into coming up with a plan that helps people instead of helping her political party and herself?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. 800,000 families in this province will see a 40 to 50% reduction thank you to the Premier and this government bringing forward legislation, Mr. Speaker, that will help families. Every single House hold in this province, Mr. Speaker. 500,000 small businesses and farms. They will receive a 25% reduction on average, Mr. Speaker, come summer when we can get this legislation passed. But what really is bothersome, Mr. Speaker, is last week the NDP Confirmed that they would repeal the fair hydro plan. The admission courtesy of the candidate in Sault Ste. Marie and that comes as a shock to everyone. We talk about the need to help families with the cost of electricity. But when we could have supported the plan to cut bills by 25% for those low incomes between 40 and 50? You know what they said, Mr. Speaker? As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, you know what they said, Mr. Speaker? No.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My next question's also for the Premier. I have to say I look forward to forming a government and cleaning up the mess Liberals made in our electricity system. And it's gonna happen. In her political -- in her political insert, Speaker, the Premier isn't even telling the people of Ontario the whole story. Political insert, Speaker, the Premier isn't even telling the people of Ontario the whole story. Not even close. She's leaving out the part about her hydro borrowing plan, wiping out any savings for families and costing Ontarians much, much more in the long run. Why is the Premier ok with telling Ontarians only half the story?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, we've been very clear with the people of Ontario and we'll continue to be clear with the people of Ontario that we understand that the investments that we've made in the electricity system in this province had a cost associated with them, Mr. Speaker, and that that cost is being borne right now by this generation. And that this is an asset that is going to last for many, many years, Mr. Speaker, and that we are going to spread the costs over longer period. Like the mortgage, Mr. Speaker, there is a cost associated with doing that. We've been very clear from the moment we brought out this plan, Mr. Speaker. But this is a plan that is being implemented right now. People are going to see these reductions. They're already beginning to see these reductions and they will see full implementation by summer if the legislation passes, Mr. Speaker. Not in 2020, not somewhere down the line if the federal government agrees to do something maybe sometime, Mr. Speaker, as the NDP Strategy would have it. We're acting right now helping people right now with their electricity bills, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Well here's a news flash, Speaker. She's so clear that nobody believes her anymore. Nobody believes a word she says anymore. That's how clear she's been with the people of Ontario. In about four years, Speaker, in about four years, Ontarians will see the whole truth of this plan in black and white in the form of higher hydro bills that are going to continue to skyrocket for the next 30 years. By neglecting to include this fact in her political insert, the Premier is showing Ontarians once again where her priorities lie, with herself and her party. The Premier is willing to tell Ontario families and businesses a half-truth in hopes that it is going to bring her power or hang onto

her power for just a little bit longer, Speaker. That is the M.O. Of this Premier and her Liberal government. Will she show some leadership? Will she show some respect for the people of this province and withdraw that odious regulation immediately?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're making sure that 25% is coming off of everyone's bills, Mr. Speaker, right across the province. Small businesses, farms and families. And I hear they keep talking about four years, Mr. Speaker. For the next four years it is true we are holding the cost to the rate of inflation. That's good news in the short term and it's good news in the medium term, Mr. Speaker. And when it comes to the long term, it is this party, the only party that actually has a plan, Mr. Speaker, that is working now, is going to work in the medium term and it's going to work in the long term. Our long-term energy plan, Mr. Speaker, will continue to find ways to pull costs out of the system. Their pamphlet, their ideas is coming up with some type of pie in the sky committee. Oh, that we talk about things, Mr. Speaker. We're acting. We're making sure that we're reducing bills now, in the future and we'll continue to look after Ontarians in the long term as well, Mr. Speaker .

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Ontarians are smart and I think that they're going to see right through this Liberal hydro scheme, Speaker. They'll see through the Premier's \$45 billion hydro plan and they will see these political inserts for exactly what they are, a sneaky way for the Premier to try to save her own political skin leading up to the next election. Will this Premier stop the political games once and for all? Stop the political games and withdraw this regulation immediately?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So let's be clear. The L.B.C.S and the government advertised for price updates, Mr. Speaker, for rate hearings, for programs like the Ontario electricity support program which they've votings against, Mr. Speaker, the save on energy program which will help small businesses which they're voting against, Mr. Speaker. It seems, you know, they like to say "No" to everything. No to that expanded Ontario electricity support program, no to the new \$200 million affordability fund for families, and no to eliminating the delivery cost on on-reserve first nations, Mr. Speaker. I know regional chief day and achieve ava hill have talked about how this fair hydro plan is going to change the lives of many first nations peoples, Mr. Speaker. And that is something that this Premier and this government is%\$. It seems, Mr. Speaker, that the party opposite has been watching a little bit too much -- Kenney. All they're saying is it's a hard no.

MPP Fedeli to Minister Sousa Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. It's not just the financial accountability officers who weighed in on the government's hydro scheme. The auditor general attended the hydro committee hearings last week and exposed yet another secret. The government plans on borrowing all these billions and not declaring it on their books. Well, the Liberals got caught again. The auditor said, quote -- for obvious reasons, this is not allowed under Canadian public sector accounting standards. They tried to bury all these billions and not have the cost of their scheme show up anywhere. Did they think they were not going to get caught, Speaker ? I ask the Premier why does it always take the auditor general, the financial accountability officer or the OPP For the people of Ontario to get to the truth?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. Let's remind everyone in this House d that process that's being proposed is being endorsed by pricewaterhouse, by a number of accounting professionals in the system. It's being enabled to protect the interest of ratepayers and consumers, Mr. Speaker. It's enabling them to benefit from lower costs today and taking an asset that's registered and enabling it to be valued over a longer period of time and that is what's being established. It's being established to reduce rates today and enable us to provide for a good system and clean reliable system throughout the future, Mr. Speaker. And the member opposite may oppose that. He may wish not to provide for a lowering of rates. He may decide that it's not appropriate for an asset to be registered and extended over a period of time, but professionals in the accounting system has decided that that is appropriate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Fedeli: That's not what the auditor general decided. Two weeks ago we asked the

government why they co-opted O.P.G. as the financing arm of this financing scheme. We asked if it's because the billions this hide route scheme will add to O.P.G.'s debt won't show up on the province's books. Despite all their denials, the auditor general has confirmed that's exactly what this government was planning. They plan to spend billions now, bury that money on O.P.G.'s books and not have the province account for any of this debt. But the auditor general says no way. They got caught yet again. I ask the Premier, now that your scheme has been revealed, will you drop this charade with O.P.G. And properly account for these billions on the province's books?

>> Minister Sousa: So, Mr. Speaker, again I remind the member opposite that the process that's been delivered here has been done in consultations with numerous experts, over 1 jurisdictions in north America have provided and utilizing similar accounting practice within the system. We have been working with O.P.G., who by the way has the next expertise in assisting with the financing. They currently manage over \$18 billion in nuclear funds that can be used in infrastructure and proceed in this field to help administer long-term financing, Mr. Speaker. This is not a novel approach. This has been done in other jurisdictions, Duke Energy in North Carolina, Long Island Lighting. We are moving forward to help consumers to help our people in Ontario, to help our businesses to be more competitive. The member opposite obviously don't have a plan. They don't want to invest. They've made that clear and now they're going to vote down something that's going to help the people of Ontario and our businesses, and that, Mr. Speaker, is a shame.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. To the Premier. Last week the financial accountability officer confirmed what Ontarians already knew. The Premier's wrong-headed hydro borrowing scheme will end up costing families and businesses more in the long run. The borrowing scheme will add nearly \$45 billion to Ontario hydro bills after a few years of temporary relief. In light of this confirmation, now there can be no doubt about the effect of this politically motivated scheme. Does the Premier plan to present Ontarians with a better option?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We work very closely with the financial accountability officer to provide information and analysis on our proposed fair hydro plan and we welcome his final report, Mr. Speaker. The F.A.O. Report confirms the foundation of the fair hydro plan, a cut in electricity rates by 25% on average for all residential consumers and as many as a half a million small businesses and farms, Mr. Speaker. And what's more rate increases will be held to the rate of inflation for four years while low-income Ontarians and those living in eligible rural and northern communities would see savings of up to 40 to 50%. And it's important to remember, Mr. Speaker, that the F.A.O.'s projection of electricity costs reflect the point-in-time estimate that demonstrates how we can ensure greater affordability and fairness in the shorter term and medium term. For the long term we are focused on our long-term energy plan which will lay out our plan to continue to keep costs down. Families in the province, Mr. Speaker, have asked for real immediate relief on their electricity bills. And that's why we are working to deliver the largest rate reduction in Ontario's history if this legislation is passed, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Tabuns: Speaker, again to the Premier. The F.A.O. is a nonpartisan, independent officer of the legislature whose sole job is to protect the people of Ontario. He told us, without doubt, that Ontario families and businesses will be worse off in ten years under the Premier's hydro scheme than they would be if there was no intervention at all. How can the Premier just ignore the F.A.O. And forge ahead when she knows, knows that her plan will end up doing more damage than good?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Speaker. Again a 25% reduction in the short term, holding the cost to inflation for the next four years and bringing forward the long-term energy plan will continue to keep the rates as low as possible for families, small businesses and farms right across our great province, Mr. Speaker. And as mentioned it's important to remember the F.A.O.'s projection of electricity costs. It reflects a point in time that estimates and demonstrates how we can ensure greater fairness and affordability in the short and the medium term, Mr. Speaker. The F.A.O. Report confirmed the foundation of the fair hydro plan, that we will be reducing rates by 25% on average

for families, small businesses and farms right across our province, Mr. Speaker. And for those that live in rural and northern parts of our province. They will see a 40 to 50% reduction thanks to us and the fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker. The opposition parties are voting against that.

MPP Qaadri (Des Rosiers) to Minister Lalonde Re: Franco-Ontario Community Support

>> MPP Shafiq Qaadri: Voice of Translator: I have a question for the Minister of francophone affairs. Recently I see that the francophonie has even more of an influence in the province, and I'm thrilled with this. In my community, they're very involved in Etobicoke north. I participated in the official opening of the notre-dame-de-grace catholic school. I would like to know what our government is doing for franco-ontarians over the past few years. Could the Minister talk to us about the government's commitment to support franco-ontarians?

>> Minister Marie-France Lalonde: Voice of Translator: Thank you very much but first I'd like to thank the member from Etobicoke North and for his constant support for franco-ontarians. I would like to remind you first that our government has always been strongly committed to franco-ontarian communities and all their diversity. Mr. Speaker, we have fought -- we fought for mont-royal hospital which was threatened being closed by the Conservatives. We have a commissioner for French services and this commissioner is independent. We officially recognize the 25th September as the day of franco-ontarians, and throughout the province we commemorated the 400th anniversary of the francophone presence in Ontario. Recently we made Ontario an observer member to the francophonie. Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of our plan and our vision for the future.

>>MPP Nathalie Des Rosiers: Voice of Translator:, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister for her response. It's important to have a government that continues to show its commitment to franco-ontarians. Through concrete action. Mr. Speaker, other initiatives could also support the francophone community today and tomorrow. The participation in franco-ontarians is seen throughout Ontario society, and I have seen it myself in Ottawa- Vanier and throughout Ontario from Timmins to Sudbury. Could the Minister explain to us how our government is working now to support francophones on a daily basis?

>> Minister Lalonde: Voice of Translator: Good question. Thank you. I'd like to thank the member from Ottawa- Vanier and mention that this member is also a great supporter of the francophonie in Ontario. For our government, concrete action which moves the francophonie forward is of concern to us. I would like to remind you of other concrete initiatives in our francophone community. Last year the Premier presented apologies in the House and our communities appreciated this. Very soon we're going to create a community fund for francophones, and we will continue to open new francophone schools throughout the province. We are working hard to improve access to the justice system, and we have 26 designated regions covering 80% of francophones in the province. Mr. Speaker, I've been working very hard with the Minister of health to improve services in French. Thank you. Thank you very much. I will continue with my next intervention

[End of translation]

MPP Nicholls to Minister McMahon Re: Toronto Waterfront Spending

>> MPP Rick Nicholls: The Premier. The government has wasted --Ed his fair share of taxpayer dollars. But we might just have a new gold standard, or should I say a big new yellow standard? New information shows that the Liberals have spent \$200,000 for a rubber duck to be parked in Toronto's waterfront. What does a rubber duck have to do with celebrating Canada's 150th birthday?, Mr. Speaker, was --&and I quote Kathleen's rubber ducky, and I quote, really worth \$200,000?

>> Minister Eleanor McMahon: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to thank the member opposite for his question, Speaker. And just note on this side of the House we're not ducking any of these

questions, Speaker. And the reason for that is this celebration is part of our 150th anniversary of our province and our country, Speaker, a fact of which on this side of the House we're enormously proud. This opportunity allows me to thank the member for his question because it allows me to clarify the number of fronts. Number one we're supporting the red path waterfront festival through 121,325 dollars. And celebrate Ontario fun day. Why is that important, Speaker? Because for every dollar that we spend, it triggers about \$20 worth of ancillary investment. And we know that that's important. It's also important to note that this festival's an annual summer event that provides people on land and on-water programming. People of all ages. We're looking forward to taking part in that celebration, Speaker. We know that this was an important investment to make. Thank you.

>> MPP Nicholls: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, again to the Premier. That answer was really quacking you up. One giant rubber ducky? \$200,000 out of taxpayers' pockets? It's absurd waste of taxpayers' dollars. It's an absolute cluster duck. Thank you, Speaker. People are already treading water trying to pay their bills, and you float this rubber ducky right in their face? Mr. Speaker, how out of touch is this Liberal government?

>> Minister McMahon: You know, Speaker, it's interesting when the member opposite raises an issue about investment in our society, because this is a classic case of, you know, pouring cold water on an important festival that brings jobs and investment not just to Toronto. But to cities across the province. Furthermore, Speaker, our investment in this festival, which does include this historic duck and who doesn't like ducks, Mr. Speaker? Again not ducking the question, Speaker. You know, I'm not against ducks. Perhaps the member opposite doesn't like ducks. I'm all about them. Perhaps we should ask the Minister of natural resources and forestry who also likes ducks that we like this kind of thing. It's important to note that people from across this province this summer are going to celebrate in hundred of thousands of ways. We're absolutely behind them. This particular festival -- by other funding the member should know that is also creating jobs and opportunities right across Ontario. So again, Speaker, we're not quacking about anything. We're going to have fun this summer and this is exactly the kind of investment we need to be making--

MPP Fife to Minister Flynn Re: Changing Workplaces Report

>> MPP Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the Premier. The changing workplaces review final report is out. There's no getting around it now. Hardworking Ontarians have waited 14 years for this Liberal government to acknowledge the struggles they face every day to balance work and families and bills that keep rising. Union jobs are good jobs and we believe that it should be easier for more Ontarians to join unions. New Democrats have long called for a return to card-based union certification and first contract arbitration. Will the Premier commit to implementing, without further delay, card-based union certification and first contact arbitration protection today?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the Honourable member for that question. Certainly is on a lot of people's mind these days the changing workplaces review is complete. It was released to the public last week, Speaker. And tomorrow you're going to see a response from the government to that report, Speaker. The advisors in my opinion have done an incredible job canvassing the variety of opinions that are out there on things like scheduling, unionize nation, card based certification, remedial certification, hours of work, Speaker, all the things that have changed over the years, Speaker, in the last 25 to 30 years since we -- 20 to 25 years since we looked at these acts, Speaker. The world of work has changed. It's shifted between our -- underneath our feet and what we need to do is ensure the legislation that we put in place mirrors the realities of the workplace today, Speaker. There's a number of people out there. Struggling that need to be assisted by some changes. I'm hoping when we see the response from the government tomorrow. It's going to move us forward, Speaker.

>> MPP Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Days off without reprisals is a start, but there is no ban on replacement workers in these recommendations. There is no automatic access to first contract arbitration and millions of part-time temporary, even full time and multiple-job holders are struggling to support their families. 58% of whom are women, according to a unitedway study. They

deserve the benefit of paid sick days and a \$15 minimum wage. Will the Premier commit today, will Thi W government commit today because they might not have a chance after the next election to do so. Will she commit to implementing paid sick days for every Ontario worker? And will the Premier, without delay, even after 14 years, commit to bringing in a \$15 minimum wage for the workers in the province of Ontario?

>> Minister Flynn: Speaker, clearly action is needed, Speaker, in order to make sure that the benefits of the incredible growing economy have right now in the province of Ontario, Speaker. We're leading the G-7. Unemployment is at the lowest it's been in a number of years, Speaker. The economy is growing. It's doing well. We need to make sure that every Ontarian has the ability to share in that prosperity, Speaker. The response that will be coming forward tomorrow is going to ensure that hardworking Ontarians get treated with decency and respect in the workplace, Speaker. There's a number of recommendations certainly around wages, around scheduling. Speaker, you'll have a full response from the government tomorrow. I suspect, Speaker, you're going to see that it meets the needs of the province of Ontario and those people, Speaker, that are feeling a little insecure these days. I think once they see the response from this Premier, this government, Speaker, will feel a lot more confident at work.

MPP Kiwala to Minister Sandals Re: Ontario Economic Growth

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the president of the treasury board. Our government committed to balancing the budget in 2017/2018, and we delivered that balanced budget, Speaker. In 2009, when the recession hit, we said that our government would take a fair and balanced approach that focused on growing the economy and delivering the best possible value for every single dollar spent. For eight years in a row our government met deficit targets, while improving the services that mattered most to Ontarians. We created over 700,000 jobs since the recession, and now the unemployment rate has dropped to 5.8%. That's the lowest unemployment rate in 16 years, Mr. Speaker. Canada's big banks are forecasting that Ontario will lead -- let me repeat, will lead the country in economic growth this year. While economic success -- across all sectors including manufacturing, real estate, finance and technology.

>> Minister Liz Sandals: Well, thank you very much, Speaker. And thank you to the member for Kingston and the Islands. Balance the budget we've been very diligently managing the growth in program spending. Over the past four years, we've held the annual growth in spending to 1.4%, while continuing to invest in priority programs and services like health care and education. You know, Speaker, in fiscal 2014/15 treasury board identified \$250 million in efficiencies and reduced administrative overhead without affecting frontline services. In fiscal 2015/16 we identified a number of major initiatives to modernize public services and we met our \$500 million savings target. And we continue to -- Realize savings by undergoing changes supported by the establishment of our centre of excellence for evidence-based decision making.

>> MPP Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The P.C.S. voted against our budget. Instead of investing in Ontarians the P.C.S. are desperately trying to not talk about our recent budget and all the important things that we're doing. All the important investments that we're making for Ontarians in their everyday lives. They keep repeating claims that our budget isn't balanced, flying in the face of facts. We're helping seniors cover the cost of public transit by introducing Ontario public tax credit for seniors. We're increasing support for the most vulnerable by investing \$480 million more in the program. And we're launching a basic income pilot and see if there's a better way to provide income security for people. The P.C.S. vote against every single one of these items. Minister, can you please tell us more about what this program -- what this budget does for Ontarians?

>> Minister Sandals: Thank you, Speaker. It was indeed very disappointing to see the P.C.S. vote against the budget. Because we're making medicine free for children and youth 24 and under so that no child in this province faces financial barriers to getting healthy. We're lowering electricity bills on average by 25% to make people's electricity bills fairer. Through the fair housing plan, we're making it easier to buy and rent a home. We're providing free tuition for 210,000 low and middle income

students. We're creating 100,000 more affordable quality child care spaces to help families in their everyday lives. So, Speaker, I ask the members opposite, which of these initiatives do you not support? Which ones would you not invest in? Which ones would you cut?

MPP N. Miller to Minister McGarry Re: Ontario Lumber Industry

>> MPP Norm Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of natural resources and for the purpose rest tri. Earlier this month in Ottawa the federal Minister of natural resources was asked a simple question. What is your government doing to support lumber remanufacturers? His answer, what is a lumber remanufacturer? Mr. Speaker, I know what a lumber remanufacturer is. I visited their facilities and heard their grave concerns for the future of their businesses. Does this Minister know what a lumber remanufacturer is?

>> Minister Kathryn McGarry: Well, it's interesting. Thank you very much, Speaker, that I also met with the lumber remanufacturers in Ontario and heard their concerns very clearly. On this side of the House we've been taking stern action to make sure in a our -- that our industry is protected here in the government of Ontario. We have increased our funding to be able to keep our workers working on roads in the far north. For the lumber remanufacturers themselves, they were able to outline their concerns. They know that we have hired chief negotiator Jim Peterson to be able to continue those conversations in the US And on this side of the House all options are on the table. We sent a letter to Minister Carr months ago to be able to advocate for ensuring that we have -- Sorry. That we have a guaranteed loan program. We continue to keep that conversation going, especially with our lumber remanufacturer. Thank you.

>> MPP N. Miller: Again to the Minister of natural resources. Speaker, the lumber remanufacturing sector is responsible for more than 4,400 full-time permanent Ontario jobs. They're concerned with softwood lumber tariffs. Northern Ontario yans have been asking for support from the Premier and their Minister of natural resources and they're hearing nothing but silence. The government is failing them. They need their government to support them while they continue to create jobs and stimulate the economy. Speaker, will the Minister explain why she's not doing her job and advocating to her counterpart in Ottawa for good Ontario jobs? Will the Minister pledge her support to this small but vital softwood lumber sector today?

>> Minister McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker. Thank you for the supplementary. It is the federal government negotiation that goes on south of the border. I'm not sure if the Minister opposite knows that -- the member opposite. But we on this side of the House are continuing to advocate. We have had continual dialogue with our federal and provincial Colleagues. We all have chief negotiators who are down doing their business across the states. We have made sure our business sectors speaking to business sectors across the border. We have ensured that we have people at the table talking union to union. We know exactly what these lumber manufacturers are underneath. We have not taken anything off the table yet. We are continuing to support our industry. We are continuing to look at all options on the table, and we continue those dialogues. To ensure that we have a strong softwood lumber sector in this province and we continue to support those lumber remanufacturers.

MPP Horwath to Minister Del Duca Re: Rural Transportation Development

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the Premier. Last week in Sault Ste. Marie I announced that an NDP Government would fund the province's fair share to keep the Huron central railway line to Sudbury open for business. This rail line is essential for protecting and creating good jobs in the Sault. Does the Premier plan to keep this rail line operating, Speaker ?

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. Of course as I've said many times in this chamber and every corner of the province, we are a province absolutely committed to continuing to

make the right kind of strategic investments we need in every corner of Ontario. Whether we're talking about northern Ontario, whether we're talking about the south, highways, transit, transportation. All forms of transportation, Speaker. That's why in this year's budget we literally added billions of dollars to our infrastructure plan so that over the next I believe it's 12 years, Speaker, we're talking about 130 plus billion dollars that will flow through this program out to the 444 communities across the province. I would be happy to provide a bit more extensive answer on the follow-up question to the leader of the third party. Thanks very much.

>> Andrea Horwath: I look forward to the details from the Minister of transportation or the Premier, because the fact of the matter is this rail line is the rail line that 65% of the goods that are produced at S.R. Steel travel. 65% of the goods that are on that rail line are from S.R. Steel. So we need some detail, Speaker. Beuse without a firm commitment from this Premier and her Liberal government to help fund the improvement to keep this line open, people in the Sault will continue to be devastated by job losses. Too many young people have already left the Sault because of the lack of jobs and the uncertainty that this Premier's policies have created in that part of northern Ontario. So will the Premier actually step up and undo some of the damage that her Liberals have already done by agreeing to fund the province's fair share. Hdry rail line.

>> Minister Del Duca: Speaker, thanks very much. Happy to take the follow-up question from the leader of the NDP And also happy from the ministry of transportation's perspective to have a conversation here on this side with my Colleague the Minister of northern development and mines around this specific request, Speaker. So there will be an opportunity I'm sure to provide additional details with respect to the specific questions being asked today. But I will say, Speaker, in my time here in this legislature not only is the Minister of transportation but as an MPP For Vaughan, year after year this government, our Premier, our finance Minister have literally come forward with budgets on an annual basis that have contained billions of dollars to support whether we're talking about goods movement of transportation or commuter transportation, Speaker, and almost every year, almost every year without exception, Speaker -- Thanks, Speaker. As I was saying, almost without exception the leader of the third party and members of her caucus have consistently voted against budgets that contain funding to support the transportation network that we are working hard to build across the province of Ontario. And now shockingly, Speaker, on the eve of a by-election in Sault Ste. Marie this question comes across the floor to me. The timing is certainly curious. Thanks very much, Speaker. -

MPP Potts to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Sexual Assault Prevention

>> MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of the status of women. Speaker, this month is sexual assault prevention month, and during this month, we must address the causes of sexual assault and violence that affects the lives of one in three women and we look ahead to the work that needs to be done to create an inclusive and safer Ontario. And I know that the work we do in the province that we have done extraordinary work to prevent sexual assaults by focusing on ways raise awareness in the provincial sexual violence and harassment action plan. Now, Speaker, I remember almost 25 years ago getting my first white ribbon from then councillor Jack Layton to help raise awareness amongst men against sexual assault against women. And so, Speaker, through you to the Minister, can she please update the House on the initial tiffs that are taking place across the province to raise awareness about consent and sexual violence and harassment against women?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the member for Beaches- East York for this very important question. Mr. Speaker, all Ontarians should feel safe from sexual violence and harassment in their communities, workplaces and homes. But the reality is, Mr. Speaker, that many women and girls just aren't safe in their communities. Women are 11 times more likely to be sexually vic mized and this is absolutely unacceptable. That's why it's important for us to recognize sexual assault prevention month and the work being done provincewide to end sexual violence and harassment. Mr. Speaker, earlier this month I attended the regional sexual violence conference in Mississauga hosted by the Peel committee against women abuse. I heard about some

incredible work happening on the ground to combat sexual violence and harassment and to keep women safe. Organizations like the Amelia rising sexual assault centre are working hard to combat sexual violence. They are holding healing workshops and exhibits for survivors.

>> MPP Potts: Thank the Minister for the very important work that she's doing on this very pressing file. Now I'm very please today hear about the events that are taking place across the province. It's important that we raise awareness and keep the discussion going. Without organizations such as the ones the Minister has now mentioned and our frontline service providers, survivors would not be getting the kind of supports that they need. But, Speaker, we all know we have an important role to play and that we need organizations to work with us to further raise awareness. As part of our new "It's never ok" action plan to the stop sexual violence and harassment we created the creative engagement fund. Organizations such as --]Through its project entitled "Rights first" is creating a social change in preventing violence and sexual harassment. By creating and presenting a s Eries of three short films. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister please inform us about this important work and successful recipients on the engagement fund?

>>Minister Naidoo-Harris-: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member again for this important question and for his advocacy on this vital issue. Mr. Speaker, in order to eliminate sexual violence and harassment we know we need to raise awareness and build supports for this issue not the just during the month of may. And, Mr. Speaker, recently I had the honour to do just that by announcing the new recipients of the creative engagement fund. Speaker, art speaks in a language everyone understands and can have incredible healing powers. So I'm proud that our three-year commitment to this initiative has expanded to fund 20 projects across the province. These projects are important. They spark meaningful dialogue in communities and help eliminate sexual violence and harassment in homes, workplaces and society. Mr. Speaker, in addition to the four new Toronto projects, we have added probably equities throughout Ontario in mississauga, Peterborough, Hamilton, Woodbridge and London. Doing our best to build support --

MPP Coe to Minister Hunter Re: School Violence Prevention

>> MPP Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker. To the minute ser of education. Workplace violence against Ontario's teachers in our classrooms continues to grow. 30% of teachers have said that they've received no training related to workplace violence. Most alarmingly, Speaker, 55% of teachers say that they've been pressured by their employer not to report violent incidents. Is it the policy of the ministry of education that violent incidents which occur between a teacher and their student in a classroom should go unreported?

>> Minister Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for the question. I know that this is a very serious issue that we take very seriously. And we want to ensure that our schools and our school boards are safe places for all students and our education workers, Mr. Speaker. And that is why we are -- we partner with and we work together with all of our education partnersIn this issue of violence in schools because we want to ensure that there are real solutions that are put forward. You raised the question of training. This is an area that we are focused on. In fact we have done training with the elementary teachers' federation of Ontario for professional development training for teachers. Our two-year curriculum for all new teachers. Includes aspects of classroom management to ensure that we are -- that our schools are safe places for all education workers and all stmdents.

>> MPP Coe: Speaker, back to the Minister of education. A recent global news TV report highlighted the violence students and teachers exp Erience in classrooms at the Durham District School Board schools. Speaker, teachers should be able to teach. Students should not be afraid to go to school, and parents should be confident in their children's safety. When will this Liberal government address violence in classrooms and protect Ontario students and teachers?

>> Minister Hunter: So, Mr. Speaker, you know, that's why we're investing in our schools here in Ontario.nt we want to ensure that we create the best opportunity possible for a students to receive

an education. And we have a policy of equitable inclusive classrooms in our schools. We want to ensure that all students of all abilities are welcome in classrooms across Ontario. And even if you look at the investments that we're making in the member opposite's own school board in the Durham school board, which I have had the opportunity to visit. I went to Notre Dame secondary school. And what a great school with richness attached. It's a community hub school, and what a fabulous campus. You see the learning that is happening in those schools. \$98 million in more funding for special education for Durham school boards.

MPP Gates to Premier Wynne Re: Fort Erie Racetrack Closure

>> MPP Wayne Gates: Mr. Speaker, my question's to the Premier. A few years ago the Fort Erie racetrack was facing closure. The residents of the town rallied. Came together to ensure the track survived. Premier, yourself is committed to rural Ontario. Also said you're committed to ensuring the Fort Erie racetrack stays open. The new statement policy put forward by Woodbine Entertainment will put the Fort Erie racetrack out of business. Premier, the mayor of Fort Erie, the C.E.O. of Fort Erie racetrack have both written you regarding this stabling policy. The stabling policy and introduction of \$500 claimers, \$6,200 claimers is designed to put the Fort Erie racetrack out of business, pure and simple. Premier, we're going to lose 1,000 jobs in that town. Premier, will you step in today. Stand up for small horse racing tracks in Ontario and thousands of livelihoods that depend on you stepping in and stopping –

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate the member for Niagara Falls. I've got the letter that he delivered to me. Thank you very much for that, and for bringing this to my attention. Mr. Speaker, I know that the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is going to be meeting with the member. The member has asked whether there could be a broader meeting with the mayor of Fort Erie and the C.E.O. of Fort Erie racetrack. We're prepared to do that, Mr. Speaker. I think that it would also be a good idea for the Minister of Finance to be part of that conversation. Mr. Speaker, I -- I did stand up for racing in this province, Mr. Speaker. We changed course, if I can say, and we made sure that there was a strategy that would allow small racetracks to survive. I want to continue on that track, Mr. Speaker. And I will absolutely commit to work with the member, with our colleagues to make sure that happens, Mr. Speaker.