

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Monday, May 8, 2017

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
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MPP Jones to Minister Coteau Re: Government Procurement

>> MPP Jones: My question is to the president of treasury board. Friday your government was forced to defend the indefensible. Spending almost \$54,000 to purchase luxury Canada goose Jackets for ministry of children and youth services staff. At the same time the ministry was cutting funding to children with autism treatments. Speaker, does this government still support the purchase of thousand-dollar luxury winter Jackets?

>> Minister Coteau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First I want to talk a little bit about the statement that the member made opposite in regards to autism funding. Number one, the member knows clearly that this is the largest single investment into autism in the history of this country. Half a billion dollars. So when she goes around making -- when she goes around making comments that we've actually made cuts, that's not factual, number one. Number two, the member opposite knows that we run youth correctional facilities right across this province and we have youth facilities in northern Ontario, and it gets cold up there. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And as I was saying, it gets cold in northern Ontario. The members opposite would understand --

>> MPP Jones: Back to the president of treasury board, because the Minister 's just digging himself a bigger hole. Children with autism were looking for your government for help. Children in child protection look to the government to protect them from predators. Some of our province's most vulnerable needed our government to step up, and what did you do instead? They learned that you're buying high-end luxury Canada goose Jackets while they sit on waiting lists. Speaker, will the president of treasury put a stop to the purchasing of high-end luxury goods for their staff? Yes or no?

>> Minister Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, as I was saying, in northern Ontario, it sometimes dips below 40°, and -- 40 below. So, Mr. Speaker, there's uniforms that are required for our staff in these facilities. We have a simple procurement process here in the province of Ontario that not only this government has used but other governments have used. So what we do, if the members don't know how the process works, we put out a request. We ask for supplies and the quotes come in. We have a process that is arm's length that allows for nonpolitical interference, and we take the best offer made. And in this case it happened to be the best offer made. These are coats that have a 10-year guarantee. They're used as members and staff work within those facilities. They're transferred from staff to staff. The government of Ontario owns these.

>> MPP Jones: You know, if you were so proud of this purchase, why did it take almost six months and a freeze in information request, which by the way you blocked? If you're so willing to defend this, then why did it take six months? You were suggesting the only vendor who had any ability to provide these coats. Canada goose. Through the Speaker. Then table the tendering documents and prove to the families in Ontario that the money was well spent, because at this point, nobody believes you, Minister .

>> Minister Coteau: Mr. Speaker, first of all we get the best possible price based on the process we have in place. And in this case these coats were heavily discounted, the coats that we received. It's interesting that the leadoff question by the Progressive Conservative party around coats that are keeping staff warm. While we're focusing on -- Mr. Speaker, we put in place processes in government to ensure that there are no political interference when it comes to purchasing products. This process, this process is a government process that's put in place where bids come in, and there was a substantial discount. The member knows clearly opposite that, if you release all the tendering prices in any type of competitive process, then it puts the supplier at a disadvantage in the future. And you claim to be the party that knows business well? If you can't figure out a procurement process, how

could you figure out what's best for this province?

MPP Harris to Minister Del Duca Re: School Zone Driving Safety

>> MPP Harris: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Minister of transportation. Speaker, last week this government had an opportunity to make bill 65 truly about school safety. The Liberals had the opportunity to work with us, protect our children from school bus blow-bys. In vital initiative put forward by my Colleague Chatham-kent- Essex they chose instead to say no and place partisan politics over the safety of our children. Speaker, will the Minister explain why the Liberal government believes the safety of our children on school buses should wait?

>> Minister Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I will repeat this morning what I said last week regarding this both in this chamber and to media outside. We want to make sure at the ministry of transportation that, as we move forward and continue to bring in enhancements or improvements to help all users of our roads, including our most vulnerable, including students themselves, Speaker, we will want to make sure that fundamentally, particularly as it relates to technology, that we're going to find a way to get it right, Speaker. But again what I said last week in this chamber, in response to bill 65, is that that member and the Conservative caucus knows that they've had multiple opportunities at committee, and frankly, Speaker, during debates here at first and second reading, to be supportive generally speaking with the thrust of bill 65 and repeatedly, both here in the chamber. And at committee, Speaker, they have chosen instead to use administrative techniques to filibuster the legislation and to delay its implementation. That's unfortunate, but I certainly look forward to the follow-up and third question this morning.

>> MPP Harris: This is so disappointing, disappointing to students. Disappointing to parents. Disappointing for Ontario. Instead of choosing to take action against school bus blow-bys, this Liberal government chose partisan roadblocks and delays. And the typical Liberal call for study and review. Speaker, every day there are more than two blow-bys per bus in Mississauga alone. Will the Minister tell us why this isn't a priority for his government?

>> Minister Del Duca: So, Speaker, that member knows full well that currently there is nothing in any law that prevents the use of this particular technology on a school bus. In fact there are multiple municipalities that have spoken to us about launching pilots. In fact I believe some have, Speaker. But again fundamentally what this is, and we saw this start last week with this member and his leader Patrick Brown, Speaker, it is a tactical manoeuvre -- sorry. Thanks very much, Speaker. So as I was saying, this member and his leader, Mr. Brown, at the end of the day, Speaker, this is a tactical manoeuvre because they are embarrassed and rightly so, Speaker. Fundamentally at committee last week, we saw that this particular member and the Conservative caucus introduced hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of administrative anticipateds to the legislation. Designed specifically to block its passage. They're trying to make themselves look good, Speaker. It's not going to work.

>> MPP Harris: His answer was fake news, Speaker. While last week's opportunity has passed, we're going to give the Minister and his Liberal members one more chance. To do what's best for students' school bus safety today. Our leader, Patrick Brown, wrote all three House leaders today, reaffirming that there is no monopoly on a good idea. And with that we want to acknowledge the NDP for supporting us on this important safety initiative. Speaker, will the Minister direct his Liberal members to right this wrong at committee today? And vote to protect our children from school bus blow-bys today?

>> Minister Del Duca: Speaker, as I said repeatedly, the safe of schoolchildren, the safety of all of our vulnerable road users, is a top priority for the ministry. That's why we introduced bill 65 and literally at every turn, during debate and at committee that member and the leader of the official opposition have repeatedly sought ways to slow down the passage of the legislation. They realized it would be embarrassing situation for them for this to become public as it did last week that they literally had 300 plus amendments, only one of which dealt with this specific issue. But literally over 300 street by street, including, Speaker, avenue road just outside of allenby public school, where

representatives from that school came to committee to let that member and his leader know that it was important to move forward with bill 65. It was reprehensible behaviour, Speaker. The public is not fooled. We'll continue to get the job done right but they should help us pass bill 65. Thanks very much.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Matthews (Thibeault) Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question to the acting Premier. It's been 6 days since the Liberals announced they would refinance an increasingly privatized hydro system, adding billions of dollars in new debt for customers and leaving fat profits for already profitable multinational energy companies. New Democrats said it then and we'll say it now. The government can't expect to table legislation that will make massive changes to the hydro system that are bad for people and businesses and expect to ram it through this legislature with little or no opportunity for public input. With just 12 sitting days left, why haven't we seen a bill?

>> Minister Matthews: I will pass the supplementary onto the Minister of energy but I do want to take this opportunity to acknowledge that on Friday the Speaker announced he will not be seeking reelection in 2018, and I want to just say to you, Speaker, that I want to say thank you for the work you have done in this legislature and in your community. You've been a real inspiration for all of us.

>> MPP Tabuns: Speaker, again to the acting Premier. People deserve to see the Liberal plan in black and white so they can debate it and so legislature can debate it too. Don't hide the details. Don't delay. Don't come to the legislature just before it rises this summer with a last-minute bill, ultimatum and no time for committees, experts and the people of Ontario to take the time they need to examine the bill. That was NDP Leader Andrea Horwath almost two months ago. There is still no plan, no legislation, and the House is scheduled to rise in 12 sitting days. This is exactly what we warned about. Is the government going to try and ram through a hydro bill and shut out the politics with no time to hear from the people of Ontario?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleased to rise and talk about the fair hydro plan that we've been talking about for the last two months, Mr. Speaker, and letting people know that they're going to be saving, Mr. Speaker, up to on average 25% on their bills. Some will be higher, Mr. Speaker, and especially for those that live in the rural or remote parts of our province, northern Ontario, Mr. Speaker. They can see up to 40 and 50% coming off their bills. And, Mr. Speaker, the O.E.B., the Ontario energy board, recognized that in anticipation of us bringing forward this legislation, they brought forward on May 1st an additional 9% reduction, meaning we're seeing a 17% reduction on our bills compared to last year, Mr. Speaker, right now. And I know that's hard for the opposition to understand, Mr. Speaker, because one of them has no plan. And the other plan that they have doesn't make sense, Mr. Speaker. This is something that's active and working, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Tabuns: Speaker, the Liberal plan will add \$40 billion in debt. It will double down on private contracts. This is a big deal. And Ontarians want their voices to be heard. This bill should be debated. It should have committee hearings. The committee should travel, and people should get their say. Is the government -- Is the government getting ready to ram through their hydro bill without real debate, real examination and real public input?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So let's talk about real. 25% reduction is a real relief for families across the province, Mr. Speaker. 40 to 50% reduction on rural or remote rate protection plans. That's real relief coming to families in the rural parts of our province, Mr. Speaker. 500,000 businesses. That's 500,000 real small businesses and farms. They will also see the 25% reduction, Mr. Speaker. But let's talk about unreal, Mr. Speaker, not realistic, Mr. Speaker. That's their plan, Mr. Speaker, that they don't even talk about anymore. They forgot that they brought forward a plan. Probably, Mr. Speaker, because it's not a plan that will bring any real relief to families across this province. Our Ontario fair hydro plan. Will bring real relief for families.

MPP Gelinas to Minister Hoskins Re: Pharmacare

>> MPP Gelinas: **Merci, monsieur president.** My question is to the acting Premier. I would like to start by wishing all of the nurses out there happy nursing week. My question is quite simple. Does the Premier believe our hospitals should only be available to people under the age of 25 and over the age of 65?

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also want to recognize and congratulate and appreciate all of the more than -- well over 100,000 nurses that work throughout our health care system, in our hospitals, in our long-term care homes, in homes, in community organizations, throughout the public health system, our 25 nurse practitioner-led clinics. They are the bedrock of our health care system. I'm so appreciative of the hard work that they do every day. When it comes to the issue, I think the member opposite is alluding to our proposal that 4 million children and youth up to their 25th birthday will receive access absolutely free of charge to more than 4,000 medications. The entire drug formulary of this province. If that's what she's referring to. Yes, in fact it will be implemented January 1st of 2018.

>> MPP Gelinas: Thank you, Speaker. The seven Ontario drug plan I would say has to outline in the budget leave working people unable to afford the medication they need. We don't leave working people out of our hospitals. We don't leave working people out of getting an M.R.I. We don't leave working people out of getting surgery. We don't leave working people out of seeing a family physician. Why won't the Premier bring in a universal pharmacare program?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, so our drug plan will cover our pharmacare plan roughly 30 times as many medicines as their proposal or 4,275 more medicines to their 125. But, Mr. Speaker, Steve Morgan, who stood up with the leader of the third party when she made her proposal, had this to say in a two article last week, quote -- I'm sure when we write the history of pharmacare in Canada, this, our proposal he was referring to -- will be seen as the time when a clear principle was laid down by a provincial government. I'm proud of the -- this Premier has demonstrated on the leadership to deliver the beginnings an important -- Natalie Mara of the Ontario health coalition, this is an amazing announcement that will provide national leadership. This is a great first step in the right direction. I agree with her, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Gelinas: Thank you, Speaker. Well, the Minister would know essential medicine are just that. They are the medications that are essential. We have a plan, supported by the world health organization, that ensures that every single Ontarian has access to essential medicine. No matter how old you are, no matter where you live, no matter how much money you make. Why is the Minister -- why is the Premier refusing to support universal drug cover for all Ontarians?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I was at sickkids with the member from Trinity- Spadina on Friday making announcement of our 500 million additional dollars for operating costs to hospitals. But we had a chance to talk about pharmacare. There's a pediatric oncologist, a child cancer doctor, who spoke of just how critically important this pharmacare program is. He talks about their inability to discharge patients from home because they knew they couldn't afford their cancer medications for their child. He had a phone call from a parent who said this is remarkable news. They were going out -- the husband and wife, as a result of this decision, were going to plan a dinner together, the two of them to celebrate how many thousands of dollars this will save them, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Fedeli to Minister Sousa Re: Home Capital Group

>> MPP Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of finance. All last week we asked this government what they knew about the troubled mortgage lender home capital. We asked what the government's involvement was, what their intentions were, and quite frankly who was asleep at the switch. The government provided no answers, choosing instead to ramble all about the federal regulator. Well, it seems the government did know more than they admitted, and in fact they

have inserted one of their own, Alan Hibon, into home capital. Last week we asked the government home captain passed the smell test. What's the Liberal solution? Put another Liberal insider in there and stir the pot. I ask the Minister, does this pass his party's standards for accountability and ethics?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I find the line of questioning rather insulting given the fact that we have taken great pains to be transparent. These are operations and activities of independent agencies of government. They are not reported to the government in any way possible. And Mr. Hibon, to his credit, had sought advice to ensure the integrity commissioner that he act appropriate, given the fact he did advise our government and other matters. So it's appropriate that individual took that step. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, he's a man of great integrity and excellent credentials and I can appreciate now why an independent private organization is seeking his input as well. It is not a decision made by government, and the member opposite knows that full well and I frankly suggest, again, that he's being totally inappropriate in this questioning.

>> MPP Fedeli: Thank you very much. Back to the Minister, who I also think is very inappropriate in his answers, Speaker, because we're not getting any answers. We've got a very troubling situation in Ontario with home capital under siege, while the government denied any connection last week, we now learned that they've placed their own Liberal insider into this deal. Alan Hibon, a key player in the Premier's Hydro One sell-off scheme, has been put on home capital's board. He is also one of the Premier's five appointees on O.P. Trust, which is the Ontario public service employee pension plan. With this insider now in there, does the government plan on joining this game of I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine? Speaker, why is the Premier's inside guy now inside home capital?

>> Minister Sousa: So, Mr. Speaker, it's very troubling indeed that this individual, this member from the Progressive Conservative party suggests that the government should intervene on the practices of private businesses, Mr. Speaker? The member opposite believes private businesses should reveal and governments should not interfere. But we are protecting the interests of investors and consumers. That is why the role of fsco, the financial regulatory authority of Ontario, has intervened and provided enforcement. That is why the Ontario securities commission has acted accordingly and why osfi is involved, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is making accusations and he's also presuming some form of conflict and Al Hibon has taken the appropriate steps to insure that he's not doing so.

MPP French to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Wait Times

>> MPP French: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Steve \$boarders is a constituent of mine in Oshawa and he is a victim of the damage this Liberal government has done to our health care system. Steve tore his rotator cuff in December of 2016 and has been waiting for care ever since. He waited for an M.R.I. He waited to see a specialist and he's still waiting, five months later, to even confirm a date for his shoulder surgery. Steve has spent the past five months in relentless pain, unable to work and wondering when our health care system will be there to help him. Steve wrecked his shoulder five months ago and still doesn't even have a date for surgery. Is the Premier ok with this being the reality of our health care system in Ontario?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, regrettably, real-life stories like this do occur. But it certainly isn't the case in the province where for -- whether it's access to M.R.I.S or ultrasounds, where we are at the top or near the top in the country, or if it's access to -- from that -- from a family doctor to a specialist, where we are leading the country or whether it is access from the specialist to the procedure that may or may not be requiredment we are leading the country again. The wait times in this province are best or near the very best of all the provinces and territories across Canada. But, Mr. Speaker, it's these particular instances which drive us to continue despite being the best or near the best in the country. Inspires us to continue making the right investments and I'm happy to speak to those in supplementary.

>> MPP French: Thank you very much, Speaker. To talk about best -- or best wait times, should have different words to describe those wait types but back to the acting Premier. Hospitals are at capacity.

Patients are being treated in hallways. Wait times are out of control. Our health care system is frankly in a shambles and the Premier's offering us a band-aid. I'll tell you, Speaker, band-aids won't fix the shoulder. Steve's wife Donna told me, quote, Steve has not been able to pick up his granddaughter and play with her which is he all he wishes to do. He has been unable to do everyday stuff like shovel the driveway and sidewalk, put deodorant on or pull a t-shirt over his head, end quote. Speaker, this shouldn't be possible in Ontario but it is happening all over the province. What do you have to say to stevend anyone else in Ontario whose health care system has stopped supporting them?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud -- which will be relevant to the member's own riding, that we increased the operating budget, the base budget of lakeridge health, Mr. Speaker, by almost \$7 million this year. Mr. Speaker, we are -- as per my announcement that I made on Friday -- investing more than half a billion dollars in our hospitals and in -- Mr. Speaker we're also investing overt next three years importantly which speaks to this question, investing \$1.3 billion specifically aimed to further reduce those wait times. Those wait times, Mr. Speaker, as I referenced, are the best in the country already. That doesn't mean that they shouldn't be even shorter, but that's why we're making. Types of investments including \$1.3 billion over the next three years specifically for wait times.

MPP Des Rosiers to Minister Duguid Re: Investments in Ontario Economy

>> MPP Des Rosiers: Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of economic development and growth.

[End of Translation] Minister, last week this government took a great step and announced a balanced budget for 2017. And my riding of Ottawa- Vanier will benefit a lot from our vin es Ms in -- investment universal pharmacare for youth under 25 and the investment in our health care and hospitals. This budget was good news, but what are the additional benefits for Ontarians and for our economy? Minister, could you please enlighten this House about the state of our economy and what is going on with the balanced budget?

>> Minister Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no question that eliminating the deficit is going to help our economy and there's no question our strong economy made it possible for us to eliminate the deficit. We've created close to 700,000 net new jobs since the recession. That's 100,000 jobs in the last few months alone. We LED the country in growth. In fact we're leading the entire g-7 in growth over the last three years. Mr. Speaker, our unemployment rate last week reached a 16-year low. We have not had a lower unemployment rate since 2001. To put that in perspective, we haven't had a lower unemployment rate since Auston Matthews was in junior kindergarten. Tiger Woods was a good golfer. Wikipedia and iTunes were just coming online. Mr. Speaker, you were in year two of an illustrious 18-year career here at queen's park, and congratulations. And, Mr. Speaker, the member for niagara west I believe. Would be turning 3 years old. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Des Rosiers: Voice of Translator: Thank you Mr. Minister.

[End of Translation] Leadership in protecting jobs in Ontario. It's great to hear we've been creating all the necessary jobs for our economy to try, but the world is changing and so is our economy. So the region of Ottawa is part of this change. We are making new strides in the digital economy, including 5 network, cyber security and e-commerce where we have companies like shopify who are doing so well. So today I think it's crucially important that we take steps to lead the economy of the future. And many people are feeling a bit anxious about what this means for them. They want certainly a digital transformation. They know it's happening on a global scale, but they want to know. How Ontario is preparing for this. Minister, can you please tell us what the government is doing to ensure that we remain competitive.

>> Minister Duguid: While it's nice to have the lowest unemployment rate in 16 years and while it's nice to see the job growth happening in our economy, just because we're doing well today is no

guarantee in this fast-changing competitive global economy, that we're going to be doing well tomorrow. That's why I'm really proud that we're making significant investments in our business growth initiative. We're investing \$50 million in the vector institute for artificial intelligence, \$130 billion going towards 5 G technology next generation technology and much of it in the member's area of Ottawa. \$80 million going towards autonomous vehicle innovation network. Again much of it coming in Ottawa. Another \$75 million will be going towards our initiative to advance super computing in this province in such areas as genomics and neuroscience. 20 million for quantum computing, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that making Ontario a leader in today's economy requires these investments. We're very proud of building the economy for the next generation.

MPP N. Miller to Minister Mauro Re: Northern Mining

>> MPP N. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of northern development and mines. Minister, great Lakes graphite in Matheson has announced it is moving to Pennsylvania. Speaker, account Minister tell us why the company feels it is better to do business in Pennsylvania than in Ontario?

>> Minister Mauro: Speaker, thank you to the member for the question. I'm not familiar with the decision by the company. I don't believe our ministry has been contacted by the particular company, and given any reasons for their move. It could be in a variety of areas. I don't know. What I can tell you, Speaker, is that for a very long time, we have put programs in place that I would suggest are very supportive of the mining sector in the province of Ontario and the most obvious example would be the new gold mine that has just opened west of my home community of Thunder Bay. Speaker, there are obviously policies and programs and support mechanisms in place that are incenting mining investment in exploration and in extraction, Speaker. Or else a company as large as Newgold would not have recently opened their mine. 650 people or so on a construction site and about 450 that will be in place when the mine is open and operating. Clearly, Speaker, something is going on. Perhaps the member will in his supplementary explain some of the detail about why this particular company decided to move. Thank you.

>> MPP N. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm surprised by the Minister's response to that question. Just last July, the northern Ontario heritage fund announced an investment of \$412,000 in great Lakes graphite of Matheson. So this announced move to leave town comes less than 10 months after the government gave this company \$400,000. Speaker, did the government not attach any requirements to the funding that the company remain in Ontario for a number of years? Why was this company able to accept \$400,000 in taxpayers' money and then leave town?

>> Minister Mauro: Speaker, I'm happy to circle back on the N.O.H.S.T. piece and find out if there were any terms or conditions attached to the grant and/or loan I'm not sure which, sometime through nohst is a combination of both. I'm happy to circle back and find out the terms and conditions associated with that loan, Speaker. I would go back to the point to make simply in Ontario the mining sector is doing well. In fact as I've had the opportunity to say in this legislature, Speaker, on more than a couple of occasions. Activity in the province right now has seen an increase last year, saw an increase this year and by the end of the year it's expected to reach a very robust number. So in fact, Speaker, the mining sector is strong in the province. We're doing well. Investment is here. In fact on exploration alone, Ontario represents 25% of total exploration activity. In the entire country. So something is going well. People reinvesting in the province -- province and we look forward to more positive announcements in the weeks and months ahead.

MPP Fife to Minister Hoskins Re: Long-Term Care Home Spaces

>> MPP Fife: My question's to the acting Premier. My office has been working with Jim Brown and his family since March to reunite him with his wife. They were separated when Colleen Brown was admitted to Sunnyside long-term care in February due to Alzheimer's diagnosis. Jim remains on a waiting list separated from his partner of 40 years. The waiting list for long-term care beds in

Waterloo region alone is 2,600 people. And in order to get on the crisis list, Jim and his family have been told they have to apply to many care facilities. If Jim was placed in a different home, they might even take longer to reunite the couple. Speaker, the family says that to live with your loved one is to live with dignity. Why doesn't this government believe that seniors in Ontario should be able to live in dignity?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to speak with the member opposite about this specific individual, this couple, because I think if she were to look behind her and to the left, there's an example in her caucus of a very collaborative relationship where a couple were faced with a similar challenge of reunification with regards to long-term care homes. And we were successful in resolving that. Mr. Speaker, it is regrettable and unfortunate and often unnecessary that the couple should be split up when one of them is -- requires long-term care and there's an effort being made to reunify. I'd be happy to work with the member opposite to resolve it, as I have on several other occasions, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Fife: I think a Minister just said that I have to bring a question to the legislature in order to ensure that senior couples can actually spend time in a long-term care facility. Speaker, Jim's family -- Speaker, Jim's family has tried contacting the Minister of health and -- haven't received a response. The ccac response was downright confusing. Over the last 14 years of this Liberal government the waiting list for long-term beds in Ontario has grown to 25,000 people, and nothing in your budget will get those people into the care that they need. Today Jim is on a crisis waiting list in Waterloo-Wellington region, but he and Colleen remain separated and their family remains worried. They describe the situation as cruel. Speaker, can the Premier explain why this Liberal government doesn't have a plan to ensure that Ontario seniors get the long-term care that they need. And that they deserve?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, just to clarify I wasn't suggesting that the member opposite to get action needed to come to this legislature and talk about a situation. In fact, it was her decision to avoid speaking with me and to bring it here to the legislature and politicize it, Mr. Speaker. And many other people, many other people in this legislature, probably the majority, know that I work extremely hard, in a collaborative way. No partisanship involved. To try to solve problems. In this case I will try to solve this problem. Come here and make it political, that's her decision. But it doesn't distract, Mr. Speaker, from my efforts to try to resolve it. We've increased by the way in our long-term care budget in this budget that was delivered two weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, we're increasing the long-term care budget by 2% for the -- We've created more than 10,000 more beds since coming into office and we're redeveloping 30,000. I'm happy to work with her whether she wants to work with me or not.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Zimmer Re: Indigenous Education Investments

>> MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of reconciliation and indigenous relations. Our government is committed to improving the quality of life, developing partnerships and expanding opportunities in the indigenous communities. That's why we continue to work with the indigenous leadership in a spirit of collaboration and mutual respect to create prosperous, healthy and strong communities. Ontario's balanced 2017 budget is a reflection of this commitment. We want to improve outcomes by achieving real progress in developing strategic integrated investments and initiatives across government for the first nations, métis, inuit and urban indigenous peoples. Account Minister please elaborate how the provincial 2017 budget supports indigenous communities in Ontario?

>> Minister Zimmer: Thank you, Speaker. We remain committed to a strong relationship with indigenous communities in Ontario. And this is supported by the strategic funding we make as a government. And in the budget announcement last week, we announced that we are enhancing indigenous education in Ontario. Specifically we plan to spend over \$200 million over three years for more first nation, métis and inuit learners access to high-quality postsecondary education and training opportunities. Speaker, the indigenous community knows that education often guarantees

the future. So this government is committed to improving indigenous education in the province, to closing the achievement gap between indigenous and non-indigenous students. That's why we will continue to invest in indigenous higher education and learning opportunities. Thank you.

>> MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. I'm glad to hear that our government is investing in indigenous students and their futures. Through working in partnership, we can see that the real progress is beginning to happen. Although there is much work left to do, I'm encouraged to know that this government is taking the necessary steps to close the achievement gap. This is an accordance with the truth and reconciliation commission calls to action in regards to indigenous education. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister please elaborate on the details of how and where this funding will be used?

>> Minister Zimmer: Speaker, specifically \$26 million of this funding will be to enhance the capacity and sustainability of Ontario's nine publicly funded Aboriginal institutes. For instance the Aboriginal institute at six nations, six nations polytechnic, has its own problem but it also has bridging programs that enables the students to move from the polytechnic to community Colleges and to university. We remain committed until the education achievement gap between indigenous and non-indigenous students is no longer a reality. From the winnebago health authority to fort Williams first nations to Sudbury to Sault lookout Thunder Bay and North Bay, we remain committed to funding to help I think dij nus communities and the educational opportunities in Ontario. This budget goes beyond education to invest in health and well-being of Ontarians. It is. An excellent opportunity.

MPP McDonell (Walker) to Minister Hunter Re: School Closures

>> MPP McDonell: Thank you, Speaker. To the Minister of education. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister for coming out to merrickville educational review panel on Friday night. The constituents in my riding left disappointed. Simply too little too late. Here's just one of the quotes from a student who was affected by the closure. "I will now have to go to a school where I know nobody and I have to travel an extra 30 minutes by bus. I will lose most of my friends due to them changing school boards and I will lose great connections with my teachers." Speaker, in Alexandria we have five schools, all less than 50% capacity. Elementary and kindergarten students in my riding will spend over an hour on the bus and drive by all those five schools to get to theirs, another 20 minutes away. So is the answer to close them all and bus all the students out of the community? Or is it to impose a moratorium on school closures until a full comprehensive study on education is complete?

>> Minister Hunter: I want to thank the member opposite for the question and I want to thank all of the -- those who came out to the first set of consultations that were held on Friday. This is an engagement process, Mr. Speaker, that is designed so that we can listen to rural and remote Ontario, and the question we're asking is how do we support our students and make education even better, Mr. Speaker ? This is not about a moratorium, Mr. Speaker. We know that school boards have the opportunity that they can make decisions at the local level that is in the best interests of their students. If they feel that they need to take a pause on a particular project, they can do that. That's exactly what happened in markdale, Mr. Speaker, where they brought the community together to talk about how to design a community hub. And they're having those conversations, Mr. Speaker, so there's nothing stopping school boards and their communities from doing that. What this engagement process is about, how do we improve education outcomes? For students in rural Ontario? We heard some fantastic ideas, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to continue with these consultations.

>> MPP Walker: Mr. Speaker, my question is also to the education Minister. Two reports from the people for education and Ontario alliance against school closures show your government is hauling - hollowing out schools. Rock solid academic showing and strong roots in the community. Sad how you have no money to keep schools open but found money for two gas plants and health consultants 8 billion with nothing to show for it. You told Ontarians to trust you with their

education in their schools. Put your party back in power, you and your power turn your back presiding over the largest school closure. Ontarians have never felt more cheated on their behalf. Are you and your Premier ideologues or actually ready to change your mind about an issue, when it is the right thing to do which is to stop school closures across rural Ontario?

>> Minister Hunter: Mr. Speaker, in the member's own riding, there's a good example of a school board that has taken a pause, markdale, and is working with the local community to design a community hub. I'm sure he wants that initiative to go forward. Mr. Speaker, you know we understand that these are difficult decisions. I've spoken to students at Chesley, Mr. Speaker, because their school is moving the high school students out to three available high schools that are within 15 minutes around that local school. And turning that particular school into a "K" to 8 school for elementary students, Mr. Speaker. These are the local decisions that boards have to make. They're doing them very mindful of the outcomes that are beneficial for --

MPP Sattler to Minister Matthews Re: Post-Secondary Education Support

>> MPP Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. MARIA vand burstyn and her daughter Julia live in London. They are excited that Julia astraight "A" student will be starting university in the fall but they are also worried about the almost \$9,000 in fees and tuition that Julia will have to pay. Like many Ontarians, MARIA is a single mother who works contract to krot with an annual average income of less than \$45,000. This past year MARIA secured a contract that offered pay in lieu of benefits, pushing her income to just over \$50,000. When MARIA and Julia applied for the Liberal version of free tuition, they were shocked to learn that Julia was only eligible for a \$3,000 grant. In other words \$6,000 less than Julia's actual tuition costs. Speaker, can the acting Premier explain. Why her Liberal -- is telling MARIA and Julia and other Ontarians that tuition is free when in fact it is anything but?

>> Minister Matthews: Speaker, I'm very grateful for this question. I can't speak to that particular case but would be very happy to look into it, Speaker. What I can tell you, though, is over 200,000 students will be receiving grants that are greater than -- Any way you look at it, Speaker, that is free tuition. I urge people to look at the calculator online. We've made it very easy for people to estimate how much they will be able to get at Ontario.ca/osap. You answer a few questions and you learn how much aid there is to get, Speaker. I look forward to the supplementary because this is a very Progressive transformative initiative and people need to know about it.

>> MPP Sattler: Speaker, young people like Julia shouldn't have to take on a huge debt in order to get an education and build their future. Even though Julia will be living at home while she is at university, money is tight, making it difficult to cover tuition, mandatory student fees and textbooks. Osap has offered a \$9,000 loan but Julia is worried about having to repay a debt that could amount to \$36,000 after four years. Does the Premier think it is ok to saddle young people with Julia with such massive student loans?

>> Minister Matthews: Speaker, let me repeat, students can go online. Students in grade 7, grade 8, grade 12, Speaker. They can go online and see how much aid there is available. I'm not sure what the NDP Policy is, Speaker, but I can tell you ours is that we have removed financial Barriers so students across this province. It doesn't matter how old you r.it doesn't matter how many years out of high school you've been. We are there to help, Speaker. The new deal for students is you do the work, you get the marks. You get accepted and we will make sure that finances never stand in the way of your success.

MPP Rinaldi to Minister MacCharles Re: Accessibility and Employment

>> MPP Rinaldi: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question is for the Minister responsible for accessibility. Minister, during our constituency week a couple weeks ago, I met with a few groups

that shared with me some of the challenges and Barriers people with disabilities in my communities are facing. Despite being willing and able to work, people with disabilities continue to face multiple Barriers to employment. The employment rate for people with disabilities is less than 50%. And a quarter of those employed feel they are working in a role that did not reflect the breadth of their qualifications. By removing Barriers in Ontario, we foster a culture of inclusion, increasing participation in our communities and work force -- we foster -- and creating a society where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential. Speaker, could the Minister explain what our government's doing to remove Barriers to employment for people with disabilities?

>> Minister MacCharles: I thank the member from northumberland-quinte west for this very important question on accessibility and employment in Ontario. We know that improving employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities will help build Ontario up for everyone, and we remain committed to our goal of making Ontario accessible by 2025, and that's why we created the aoda employment standard. I was actually on that- standard committee years before became a politician, Speaker. Very important standard to help options meet their obligations and to proactively remove Barriers. We recognize, Speaker, that achieving accessibility means taking very concrete steps to support full participation of persons with disabilities and that's why in last year's budget, in addition to the standard. Our government made a commitment to create employment strategy people with disabilities. Happy to talk about that more in the supplementary.

>> MPP Rinaldi: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the Minister for her incredible work towards making an acceptable Ontario. People of all abilities deserve to reach their social and economic potential by contributing diverse skills and talent in the workplace. Unfortunately many Ontario employers are reluctant to hire people with disabilities, and yet nearly a third of Ontario's small and medium size businesses report having difficulty filling job vacancies. Despite this, studies show the workers with disabilities are more loyal, have better attendance and perform better than average on the job. As well, most workers with disabilities only require minor accommodation to work. A more diverse workforce includes people with disabilities, will help Ontario business increase their productivity, innovation and export making them more. Minister, what steps is your ministry taking to shift attitudes about a disability and increase the participation of persons with disabilities?

>> Minister MacCharles: Thanks again, Speaker. So the employment standard provides a baseline of accessibility and employment practices right from recruitment, getting that first step in the door, through career development. But we know there's more to do, Speaker. So our employment strategy will settle cohesive made-in Ontario vision to ensure Ontarians have access to a continuum of employment and transition and training services. It will streamline employment services to recognize unique needs, employment goals of each individual and working very closely with a number of partner ministries on this. And will engage employers to be active partners in breaking down Barriers, promoting inclusive work force by shifting attitudes, Speaker, and dispelling misconceptions. I'm very proud of the work that we are doing with accessibility. I'll continue to seek ways to break down Barriers could make Ontario accessible by 2025.

MPP Clark to Minister Hunter Re: School Closures

>> MPP Clark: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the Minister of education. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister for coming to merrickville in Leeds- Grenville on Friday. Parents, Mr. Speaker, Al leaders in my riding and the member for Stormont- Dundas and south Glengarry told her clearly why the school closure process they've just gone through is a disgrace. But they want to fix it and they have one request, that all the school closures be put on hold until an all party review develops a new process. One parent stated -- the only way we can have faith the Minister is listening is if she agrees to a moratorium. Speaker, will the Minister put a moratorium in place, that includes schools under the threat of closure? Yes or no?

>> Minister Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. And I too want to thank the member opposite for the question and also for attending the consultation that was held in merrickville on Friday evening. Mr. Speaker, the consultations and engagement processes that have begun in rural Ontario and remote

communities in Ontario are designed to ask the question, how do we improve education for rural and remote communities? Are there creative ideas and solutions that we need to consider to make those types of enhancements? And that is exactly the conversation that we're engaged in, Mr. Speaker. It does not mean that we can't move forward with decision that is school boards are making locally because they are doing that with the framework that they want to ensure the best outcomes for students in their communities, Mr. Speaker. And that is happening. We know very difficult conversations. They are difficult decisions but they are all being made with the view to improving education outcomes for students in rural communities.

>> MPP Clark: Thanks, Speaker. Back to the Minister. Unfortunately what we just heard sounded a lot like the Minister's words on Friday night. She said a lot but ignored the real issue that matters. The 12 upper Canada schools that this government wants to close starting next month. For these schools and these communities, there is no tomorrow. As one parent told the Minister and I quote -- we can't do better next time. We have to do better now. Doing better means giving these schools and communities a second chance to show why rural and small schools matter. Again, Speaker, parents and municipal leaders deserve an honest yes or no answer to the question that they asked repeatedly on Friday night. Will the Minister agree to a moratorium? And will she do it today?

>> Minister Hunter: Mr. Speaker, of course our schools matter, and every student deserves the best education possible in Ontario, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're engaged in these conversations so we can talk about the creative solution that is can improve situations for rural and remote communities. For instance, Mr. Speaker, having the opportunity for two school boards to come together and to talk about joint use. We're seeing where that's creating enormous benefits, improving facilities, broadening the programming options for students, having more extracurricular activities, Mr. Speaker. It is this coming together and the utilization of shared space that has that possibility for better programming. We're seeing that right across, Mr. Speaker, as boards come together, as communities and boards come together, and ensuring that the conversation that we're having is one about. What are the best possible outcomes for students? I would absolutely encourage that member opposite to continue to have that dialogue with local school board trustees because that's the question we're focused on here on this side of the House.

MPP Hatfield to Minister Ballard Re: Toronto Community Housing

>> MPP Hatfield: Speaker, my question is to the Deputy Premier. Good morning. Speaker b400 homes for low to moderate income families were closed -- will close this year because Toronto community housing doesn't have enough money to fix them. About 1,000 homes will have to be closed by next year. The city of Toronto has a plan to save these homes and the money to pay a third of the cost. Ottawa will put up another third. Toronto's mayor has asked the Premier to pay the remaining third. But, Speaker, the Premier said no. Why won't the Wynne Liberals give the city of Toronto what it needs to help save these homes?

>> Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. I just want to go on the record and say that, you know, over the text three years, Ontario will be investing \$2 billion in affordable and sustainable housing across Ontario. \$2 billion, Mr. Speaker. Having the federal government at the table is very important. Speaker, having the federal government at the table is very important. We certainly welcome their commitment of \$11 billion, over 11 years, divided among the 13 provinces and territories. Our government has increased funding, Speaker, year over year, showing our commitment to building a fair society where everyone benefits, and in the supplementary I'll be delighted to talk about that more.

>> MPP Hatfield: Well, social housing used to be a provincial responsibility. Mike Harris and the Conservatives downloaded it onto the municipal tax base. The Liberals have been in power for 14 years. And in 2013, the Premier cut \$12 million in annual funding to Toronto's social housing program. Speaker, it's cheaper to repair existing homes than build new ones. That's why we in the NDP Have pledged to pay the one third provincial share when we form government. Why won't the Liberals undo the damage that their cuts to social housing have done to Toronto's struggling

families?

>> Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. I'm very happy to highlight all of the amazing funding that this province has put into Toronto. I can tell you, we've made these investments, Speaker. \$340 million into Toronto for homelessness prevention to help Toronto's most vulnerable residents. \$130 million to expand affordable housing, Mr. Speaker, so that every Ontarian has an affordable place to call home. And provincial land as announced in the budget, Mr. Speaker. Provincial land in Toronto alone worth up to \$100 million to build new affordable rental units. The list goes on, Speaker. This year alone, Speaker, Ontario contributed \$43 million to the city of Toronto for repairs and retrofits to social housing. That expansion included an increased funding for Toronto. Reaching over \$117 million annual by 2019. As I said at the beginning --