

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Thursday, March 22, 2018

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 3rd Session
Thursday, March 22, 2018

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP MacLeod to Minister Naqvi (Del Duca) Re: 2018 Budget

>>MPP Lisa MacLeod: I just want to point out I wasn't in the House this morning so there's no carryover for me. My question is for the acting Premier. On May 2nd, 2017, a wise man once said -- but the first way to address debt is to balance the budget. We're balancing this year and next year and the year after that and we're lowering debt to G.D.P. Over the long term. Guess who said that, Speaker? The Minister of finance. Mr. Speaker, what happened? Why is the government backtracking breaking their promises? Are they really that desperate the lead-up to this election?

>>Minister Yasir Naqvi: Well, Speaker, thank you very much. Speaker, I'm very pleased to answer on behalf of the Minister of finance, because I know, if he was here, he will say that we're really proud to balance the budget this year. In fact we will be bringing forward a budget that will show a surplus, Speaker. That has happened, Speaker, because of the hard work this government has done in making sure that we are spending our money wisely in important services like health care and education. Because, Speaker, our economy is growing, creating more jobs. It is one of the most booming and hottest in Canada and North America, Speaker. Speaker -- That is because Ontarians are seeing unprecedented employment rates, Speaker

>>MPP MacLeod: If you believe what you just said, I've got a gas plant in Mississauga to sell him. Another member across the aisle said this -- there was not an issue that resonated more with constituents than the foolish spending of their hard-earned money. I remember being at a doorstep. It was a modest home. The people worked hard for what they had, and they asked me to remember then if I got elected and then governed. They said "Please remember us." Please remember that you're spending our money and you're spending our money. That was the former Deputy Premier and the ticket of that Liberal government. Mr. Speaker, she didn't remember them. None of them remembered them and now we have at minimum an \$8 billion deficit inherit. So when did they forget they were spending that family's money and every other Ontarian's money?

>>Minister Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. You know it's an interesting question coming from the member from Nepean. I think the most salient point in her question was the notion of how important it is for us to remember. Speaker, I think everybody in this legislature and frankly all 13 million people right across this province clearly remember the kind of devastation that was levelled on health care and on education, and the havoc that was wreaked on municipal governments in their local decision-making economies. The fact that subway lines were literally killed and filled in, Speaker. The fact that significant public assets like the highway 407 was tolled and then sold, and sold to a foreign consortium, Speaker. Everybody in this province has a very clear understanding and a very clear memory for exactly what it meant the last time reckless decisions were made by Conservatives when unfortunately -- They had power, Speaker. Our government is different. We do not believe in cutting. We believe in building. We believe in caring and we believe in supporting the people that we're proud to represent.

>>MPP MacLeod: The member opposite, the Minister is bankrupting this province and we want to talk about memories of the last 15 years. We can talk about hallway health care. We can talk about the highest power rates in North America. We can talk about closing schools if that's where he wants to go. The former Deputy's words. Governments spend money on what are in essence political pieces. I'm proud to be part of a government that will address the situation. Let us remember that the taxes they are paying, the money we are taking from them to spend wisely for them and not for us. Wow, how times have changed over the last 15 years. They have forgotten who they are. They don't care about the people of Ontario anymore. They have, Mr. Speaker, clearly left us with at least an \$8 billion deficit. They are not spending the money wisely for the people. Isn't this spending just for your own political priorities and not for the people of Ontario?

>>Minister Del Duca: Wow, Mr. Speaker, what a short memory they have on that side. Let's talk

about how times have changed over just the last couple of months,, Speaker. So unclear to those of us on this side. I would tell you it's unclear to the people of Ontario. Where do Ontario's Conservatives stand on really key issues? We know that over the last number of months they've talked about perhaps they would run a deficit. Perhaps they would balance. Their newly minted leader, I think he took all of three minutes to reverse himself four times on the question of whether or not he would balance his books, Speaker. Just yesterday the member who's asking this question was unclear about whether, under their new platform heading into the election campaign, whether they continue to support investments in for example mental health, Speaker. We have no clue at this point in time what they balance, what they would invest in but we do know because past practice does indicate future behaviour, Speaker. We know what Conservatives do when they get the chance. They cut. They cause havoc. They destroy lives and they do not build, Speaker. We will not let that ham on our watch. Thank you very much

MPP MacLeod to Minister Naqvi (Del Duca) Re: Hydro-Rate Reduction Plan

>>MPP Lisa MacLeod: Thanks very much, Speaker. My question is again to the acting Premier but I wanted to address that last point. The Ontario Progressive Conservative party built this province. The Ontario Liberal party has --Under Kathleen Wynne and the Liberals hydro rates have tripled. In fact families pay 1,000 more dollars per year than they did in 2003, when they took office. This government simply does not care about the people. And they certainly haven't been fair to the people of this province, who are struggling between heating their home and eating food. There are still families that are making that difficult choice in this province. So, Mr. Speaker, is this the legacy the government of Ontario wants to leave, the fact that they are forcing people between heating and eating?

>>Minister Yasir Naqvi: Well, Speaker, it's quite a recollection of events that the party opposite have when they were in government, because if they called shutting down schools all across the province and building province up -- if they call shutting down --If they call shutting hospitals all across the province and building the province up, if they call cutting welfare rates by 22% as building province up, that's quite a legacy, Speaker. And then, on top of that, they left a \$5.6 billion deficit, Speaker, on top of all that. So is that Building up? No thank you. We do not want to go back there again. We've seen that movie before.

>>MPP MacLeod: You want to talk about a movie? This is a nightmare watching you guys with the tiller. I'm telling you something, Speaker. That's why 2,000 people showed up to see Doug Ford on Monday night. Because they want fairness. Premier Wynne and the Liberals have accepted \$1.3 million in donations from companies who received energy contracts. That meant these insiders resulted in families overpaying \$9.2 billion on their hydro bills. To make matters worse, when Liberals sold off Hydro One, it was a fire sale that rewarded their donors, insiders and fat-cat friends and that's why this government cannot be trusted any more to do anything that is right or fair for the people of Ontario. Doug Ford has said he will reduce hydro rates even further. Why won't this government do what Doug Ford wants?

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>>Minister Steven Del Duca: It's adorable to watch the member across talk about Doug Ford and the crowd that showed up to see him, Speaker. I'm guessing those individuals that showed up fully expected, as they should given that party's track record and their new leader's track record, that they were heading out for a night to wash a slasher flick, Speaker. Because that is exactly what that party and that particular new leader, a leader I would suggest notwithstanding the bluster that we hear in that question leader that that party is just a little bit nervous about because we know fully that most on that side didn't support his leadership campaign, Speaker. And in particular as our Minister of energy mentioned just the other day, I think it's really important back on March the 5th, a leading member of Ontario's Conservative caucus said what every single Ontarian fully understands with his -- and I'm quoting here, Speaker, with his erratic and out-of-control behaviour, I worry that if Doug Ford was to lead our party, he would lead us to certain defeat. That would be the member from Prince Edward- Hastings. I would say to proud Ontarians, if Doug Ford ever takes over the leadership of this province, we are doomed, Speaker .

>>MPP MacLeod:

>> Speaker, I just want to address something. Would the Minister call one of his male Colleagues adorable? And does he think that's appropriate? And will he apologize to me? The government's own internal documents and the auditor general have confirmed that if the Liberals are reelected Ontario's electricity rates will skyrocket to the highest that they have ever been. They can't be trusted. They don't care. They are too glib to continue governing this province. Mr. Speaker, the question is simple. Why doesn't this government support long-lasting and real relief for hydro customers across Ontario? Or are they still only concerned with trying to eke out an election win in less than 78 days?>.Minister Del Duca: Speaker, I would first say to the member asking the question, if I said anything that was taken the wrong way or that was offensive, my apologies. It wasn't intended to be delivered that way so I apologize for that. What I would say, Speaker -- and I want to echo what I did say in the House the other day about this. I think it's perfectly appropriate for leaders of political parties and for political parties to have very strong views about what they should do with the future of the province, if they aspire to become the Premier. But I think in 2018, there is a core responsibility that aspiring Premiers have, and that responsibility is to have the courage of their convictions and to level with the people of Ontario. And I think it's clear --As I was saying, I think it's abundantly clear that as we've seen so far neither member or their newly minted leader Doug Ford has the courage of their convictions to level with the people of Ontario and freely admit what kind of damage you would do, who you would hurt, who you would harm and what public services you would eviscerate if you have the chance to form government. And I don't think it's too much to ask for you to have the courage to admit. Exactly what kind of damage you will do should you form --

[Applause] Thank you very much.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Naqvi Re: Dental Care

>>MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. My question to the acting Premier. Mohamed akbar is a 27-year-old Torontonion who is currently working on a three-month contract. He has no health care benefits, no dental plan at all. His wisdom teeth are bothering him and he knows they need to come out. But he can't afford to pay out of pocket for the procedure. Dental care is one of the basics. Why has the Premier or her Liberal government done anything in their 15 years in power to help people like Mohamed?

>>Minister Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I thank the member for the question. I want to say, Speaker, that our government recognizes that to ensure fairness and opportunity for all Ontarians, there's an important role for the government to play in supporting access to oral health care for people. Speaker, that is why over the years we have been working hard to -- in strengthening the healthy smiles program, Speaker. That program has been expanded, that provides free preventative routine and emergency dental services for children and youth from low-income House holds across the province. In fact, Speaker, this program is helping more than 470,000 kids access important dental services, and this number continues to grow. Speaker, we started with children and youth, as evidence suggests that oral health problems --Are move prevalent among low-income families and children being most vulnerable. We know, Speaker, there's more to be done and I look forward to more in the supplementary.

>>MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the acting Premier. Mohamed grew up in a low-income House hold. He started working young to help out his family and to save for school. When he was 18, he had an accident on a construction job. He broke one of his front teeth. Mohamed wasn't able to get his tooth repaired properly for eight years. Why has the Premier left people like Mohamed to struggle, in pain, with no dental care for so long?

>>Minister Naqvi: Speaker, as we reaffirmed in the speech from the throne, our government will be making investments to ensure that more people without a drug or dental benefit plan will have access to more affordable prescription drugs and dental care. Speaker, we recognize and we have heard those stories from people like Mohamed as well, that it's important that they have access to

prescription medication and that they have access to dental -- good dental care. And that is why we are -- we appreciate the ideas brought forward by the third party. Are looking at ways to make those types of programs available. That is why we have been working with the same advocates in our community.

>>MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again back to the acting Premier. Mohamed says that he suffered terrible self-esteem problem as a result of his front tooth being damaged for so long. He said the NDP Dental plan will mean a significant improvement in his health and well-being. The plan will ease his anxiety. Why has the Premier done nothing, in her time in office, to ensure that young people like Mohamed don't suffer lasting emotional and physical pain because they can't afford to go to a dentist?

>>Minister Naqvi: Speaker, our government has been focused in strengthening and building our health care system, making sure that it is available to people, that it is a publicly funded system that is available universally across our province. Speaker, that is why we have continued to invest in good primary health care so that more and more Ontarians have access to a family doctor or nurse practitioner or through their local community health centres to get good health care, Speaker. That is why, Speaker, just like was announced today, we continue to invest in our hospitals, Speaker, so that there is good capacity and good care available through our hospitals. That is why, Speaker, we are expanding ohip plus program program the first of its kind in North America, that is making sure that children and youth 'til the age of 25, have access to free medication and will expand to include our seniors 65 and above in age as well. These are important building blocks, Speaker. These are important investments to create a health care system. Truly universal in nature. This government under the leadership of our Premier has been working hard accomplishing that.

MPP Sattler to Minister Naqvi Re: Pharmacare and Dental Services

>>MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Jason Miller and holly Lumley live in London West with their 5-year-old daughter. Shortly after their daughter was born, Jason and holly were in a serious car accident, leaving them unable to work. Their total family income is just over \$2,000 a month, which makes them ineligible for odsp, but their combined prescription drug costs are approximately \$3,500 a month. This means they do not fill most of their prescriptions because they simply cannot afford to. Speaker, why does this Liberal government not care about the high cost of prescription drugs for families like Jason and holly?

>>Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker. I thank the member opposite for the question because I think she's making the point exactly why our government has chosen to develop ohip plus. That is why exactly, Speaker, that our Premier is absolutely has been a champion -- Speaker, our Premier has been a champion on the national front in urging the federal government and all provinces and territories that we need truly a national pharmacare program. But, Speaker, we didn't want to stop there. We wanted to start on that work right here in our province. Speaker, on this side of the House, we are really proud to introduce ohip plus, a first of its kind program that provides free medication, no co-payment, no deductible to all our children and youth through the age of 25. That is 4,400 prescription medication available. Just by showing your ohip card. That is first of its kind program and we're expanding the program to include our seniors as well.

>>MPP Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. Not only are Jason and holly going without the prescriptions they need. They are also going without dental care. Since cleanings and checkups must be paid out of pocket, they don't go to the dentist. A couple of years ago, Jason required emergency dental care for infected canines. He had to wait, in dire pain, in the dental office waiting room while his family and friends scraped together the money so he could pay for his treatments. Speaker, why has this Liberal government done nothing for 15 years to enable families like Jason and holly to afford the medications and the dental care they need?

>>Minister Naqvi: Speaker, as I was saying earlier, our government is very much committed to making sure that people have the care they need. That is why, Speaker, our government under our Premier's leadership has been steadfastly focused on strengthening our health care system by making investments in our hospital like the new announcement today of \$822 million of new

investment. That's a 4.6% increase in base operating funding for our hospitals to allow for more capacity all across the province. The announcement, Speaker, recently made investing \$2.1 billion over four years in mental health and addiction. Speaker, I cannot tell you what kind of impact that kind of coordinated care is going to make in the lives of young people and people -- Of all age background in Ontario who are suffering from mental health or addiction challenges. These are all important steps in making sure that we have got a strong universal medical health care system.

>>MPP Sattler: Speaker, almost 2.2 million Ontarians go without the medication they are prescribed by their doctor because they can't afford it. 4.5 million Ontarians go without dental care because they can't afford it. Jason and Holly are not alone in their struggle to pay for their family's basic medical and dental needs. Instead of trying to close the gaps in Ontario's health care system over the last 15 years, we've seen a Liberal government that has doubled down on Conservative style cuts and budgets leaving families on their own. Speaker, after 15 years of inaction, does this Liberal government seriously think that Ontarians will believe the promises they are offering now, only 77 days before an election?

>>Minister Naqvi: We are actually delivering on these very important commitments such as ohip plus, Speaker, that came into effect starting January 1st that covers free medication for all children and youth through the age of 25 absolutely for free. It's a first-of-its-kind program, Speaker ncanada. In fact in all of north America, Speaker. That is something all members of this House should be very proud of, Speaker. Unlike the New Democratic Party, which put -- put forward a plan, Speaker, that I think barely covers about 120 most popular medications. Speaker, that's not sufficient. That is not universal whatsoever, Speaker. So, Speaker, our program covers all 4,400 medications that are on the list. And as we have said Trying to -- we plan to expand that. Speaker, all these things are going to be in the budget and we hope that the NDP Will support such a program that is for the betterment of the people of Ontario.

MPP MacLeod to Minister Sousa Re: Budget 2018

>>MPP Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Minister of finance. Last may, in 2017, you said -- but the first way to address debt is to balance the books. We're balancing this year, next year and year after that. We're lowering debt to G.D.P. Over the long term. That promise didn't even last a year. Not only are you running an \$8 billion at least deficit, you doubled down on Monday, and I want to know, because I think I've known the Minister well enough to understand he would probably prefer to balance the books. So I want to know what was his reaction when the Premier forced him to run a deficit? Was he upset?

>>Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, let me remind the member opposite, we in fact have slayed the deficit. We have balanced the budget, and now we have a surplus position. And third step in managing debt is to balance the books as we have. Now going forward, Mr. Speaker, there are some uncertainties. There is trade negotiations that are uncertain. There's degree of interest rate and other matters of course. We have 2% growth year over year coming forward. That's ahead of Canada ahead of the g-7. Ontario's economy is strong. Strength and enabling us to look at other opportunities to stimulate even further growth. The member opposite may want to make those cuts. She may want to proceed to put people in harm's way in our economic recovery. We do -- Mr. Speaker. We're investing in health care, investing in schools, investing in mental health. We're investing in the growth of our economy to the benefit of people of Ontario.

>>MPP MacLeod: If the Minister 's so proud of having slayed the deficit, why is he going to run at least an \$8 billion deficit in the lead-up to this campaign? They have tripled the debt under his watch. They have lost 330,000 manufacturing jobs. They have the highest hydro rates in North America and they are boasting of an \$8 billion to come deficit. Is the Minister embarrass today walk down bay street and change his title from the Minister of finance to the Minister of debt. Withdrawn, Speaker .

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, let me remind the member again, the largest debt ever made in the history of Canada was under the Conservative government in the recent years. The largest deficit in history was \$16 billion by the Conservative government. In the last 40 years, they have only balanced

the books -- In the last 40 years, they've only balanced the books four times, one of them which was bogus, Mr. Speaker. We have a balanced budget. We are in a surplus position. We're going forward to make choices, deliberate choices to invest in our economy and more importantly balance the needs of the people of Ontario.

MPP Gretzky to Minister Jaczek Re: Healthcare and Dental Care

>>MPP Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. There are 4.5 million people in Ontario that do not have dental coverage. That's an astonishing number. What's more shocking is that every 3 minutes in Ontario, someone visits a doctor's office or emergency room for a dental problem. In Windsor, over 700 people visited the Windsor Regional Hospital's emergency department for dental issues last year at a cost of at least \$314 per visit to the emergency department, visiting the hospital for dental pain not only increases wait times and overcrowding, but it's a major financial burden as well. Only for the patient to be told that they need to see a dentist. Windsor's downtown mission is building a half million-dollar dental clinic, all from community donors, which will provide free as much as to address the overwhelming need. We know that dental care is good social policy, but it's good fiscal policy, too. In the last 15 years, why didn't this Liberal government tackle the issue of dental care in Ontario?

>>Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you so much. And certainly on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we agree that good dental care is most important for Ontarians and that's precisely why we have invested in this regard the expansion of the healthy smiles program. We alluded to several times in this House over this last week, and we certainly know that having good oral health and a healthy smile can have positive impacts on a child's overall health, self-esteem and ability to learn. And so we are absolutely committed. It sounds like we're very much on the same page in this regard. And of course those on social assistance, those most vulnerable also have access to dental benefits. So I'm very pleased that apparently the third party has come to see the light. I don't recall this in their platform in 2014. I don't remember any comments in this regard. We've been working on this, Mr. Speaker, consistently for years and years.

>>MPP Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the acting Premier. What the Minister may not know is I actually was a dental assistant and worked in an office where we actually helped the children through the healthy smiles program. It is chronically underfunded and the wait list is years long. Just like this Liberal government chose to ignore dental care for the past 15 years, they've devastated our health care system, too. Last month, David Williams of Bell River had a heart attack in Florida. After two weeks of being told there were no beds back home in Ontario, he was forced to have bypass surgery in the US. When he returned home, he received a medical bill for almost \$900,000. The reality is that, while some hospitals in Ontario are overcrowded and patients are forced into hallways and bathrooms, there are other hospitals with empty beds going unused because there is no government funding. In Windsor, we know Hotel du Grand in Windsor has 89 unused mental health beds alone due to the lack of funding. Will the acting Premier admit this government has neglected the health and wellness of the people of this province for 15 years?

>>Minister Jaczek: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm having a little difficulty relating the supplementary to the original question, however we continue to talk about what we have done with our health care system. We have a world-class health care system. Earlier today I was with the Premier announcing what we are going to be doing in this budget in relation to hospital capacity issues, and so we will be investing in fact \$822 million. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that the audience in that auditorium at North York General, made up of some of our health care professionals and also family members and patients, were most appreciative. They understand that we are looking at the needs of the people of Ontario and we continue to build our health care system.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Hunter Re: Post-Secondary Apprenticeship Strategy

>>MPP Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of advanced education and skills development. Earlier this year I was proud to stand with the Minister in my riding of Barrie as this government released a stronger apprenticeship system for Ontario, the province's strategy to

develop a system that provides end-to-end support for apprentices and employers in response to the needs of the changing economy and work force. Speaker, I was very pleased to see that five out of 12 of the apprentices were women. In a rapidly changing global economy, Ontario must build a highly skilled inclusive work force to keep our competitive edge. Speaker, the people of Ontario have always been our strength. Ontario's apprentices deserve a system that opens opportunities, connects them to good jobs and helps them gain the skills needed to be successful in their career. Can the Minister inform the House of the great work that this government is doing through the apprenticeship strategy to help all Ontarians adapt to change. And achieve their goals?

>>Minister Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. And thank you so much to the great member from Barrie for this question. I had the pleasure of doing my first announcement in this ministry with her in Barrie. Speaker, as Ontario's economy continues to grow, this government is always thinking ahead. By developing programs that keep us on the forefront of growth here in Ontario and meeting the needs of our people. And that is why, Speaker, we've launched Ontario's apprenticeship strategy, a vision that we share with our apprenticeship partners and the many people looking to learn new skills and start an exciting career in the trades. I want to say thank you to my predecessor for all her work on this file. Speaker, our vision for the future is an apprenticeship system that is easy to access, navigate and complete. It's a future where apprenticeship is valued and recognized as part of our postsecondary education system, working in the trades puts people on a path towards stable, good-paying and meaningful careers.

>>MPP Hoggarth: Sorry, Speaker. Thank you, Speaker. I'm thrilled about the work that is being done to strengthen the province's apprenticeship programs. I think it will make a real impact on people's lives. I know that Ontario's apprenticeship strategy was developed following extensive engagement with partners in the apprenticeship system from all across this province, and the strategy directly responds to what our ministry heard from over 1,000 people. We know that the province needs more people doing work in the skilled trades which means we need more people completing these apprenticeships. Would the Minister provide the House with an update on what the province has done to increase the number of people looking to work for the skilled trades and what we're doing to support them to complete their training?

>>Minister Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you again to the wonderful member from Barrie. So our apprenticeship strategy focuses on five key areas of action that will help more people start and finish an apprenticeship. We want more people to be able to benefit from the rewarding career that they can find in the trades, and in fact we have grown apprenticeship registrations from 17,000 in 2003 to more than 24,000 in 2017. But we knew that there is more work to do. So one thing we're doing is introducing a new apprenticeship, graduated apprenticeship grant for employers to offer financial incentives to businesses, not just when they take on an apprenticeship but all the way through key milestones to completion of their training. We're going to increase access for underrepresented groups offering additional financial incentives for employer hos take on apprenticeships from groups such as skilled women, indigenous people, newcomers and people from diverse backgrounds. The modernization of the apprenticeship program is about ensuring that seamless pathways and the right supports are offered to apprenticeship employers and training delivery agents.

MPP Scott to Minister Sousa Re: Ministers Remarks To Women

>>MPP Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the Minister of the status of women. What a day it's been for women in politics. We have the Minister of economic development and growth called my female Colleague adorable is to me in a condescending manner. The Minister of finance called the women behind him at an announcement today eye candy. What is going on over there? How is this acceptable?

>>Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, this morning we had the pleasure of being hosted by the hospital, and together, with men and women of all ages, we're standing there and we thanked them for their tremendous contribution to their service, to the hospital, to the individuals they care for in our society. We expressed that gratitude. I thanked them and they were all ages, of all different

cultures, both men and women, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is insinuating something which is distasteful because it's the men and women that we were congratulating and we will stand with them always, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

>>MPP Scott: Well, Minister, you did say "Eye candy" and it's condescending attitude like that with your male Minister s is shocking and piling and quite frankly unacceptable. How can this government claim to support women when they use such demeaning language towards them? So will the Minister apologize for the words that he did use this morning?

>>Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to apologize to the beautiful people that work so hard for this, for this province and our country. They're doing hard work. They deserve to be congratulated and that was what I was doing. And I take offence, Mr. Speaker, that the member opposite is insinuating something that I held so dear and that's equality, respect for all ages, for all genders, including my wife and my two girls and at that event was also me thanking my niece, Nicole pachenko that does tremendous work at that hospital. I take full offence. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Fife to Minister Jaczek Re: Long-Term Care Spaces

>>MPP Catherine Fife Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Speaker, in Oshawa there are more people waiting for long-term care beds than there are existing beds. And that's why my constituents Maryanne follis and Steven hoar came to my office. Their mother Anna was sent to the hospital by her retirement home in early February, a home that could no longer meet her needs. After she received emergency hospital care, there was nowhere to send her. Anna is in limbo waiting in the A.L.C., or alternate level of care unit in the hospital. Her family has no idea when or if she will be able to leave. There is nowhere for her to go. This government has allowed long-term care wait lists to balloon to a crisis state. When will this government take responsibility for the long-term care crisis and start helping families like and nav's get the care that they deserve?

>>Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Of course we have been addressing the issue that the member opposite is referencing. In fact just recently we have announced the opening of 5,000 new long-term care beds over the next four years, as well as providing more than 15 million I don't know more hours of nursing, personal support annually for residents in long-term care homes. This is part of our 10-year plan. Mr. Speaker, we are really into long-term planning. This is a stark contrast obviously to the third party. We've never heard of any plan on their part to increase long-term care beds. So our 10-year plan is to create more than 30,000 new beds over the next decade, and we're continuing to work with the long-term care sector to determine exactly where those beds should be placed in our province.

>>MPP Fife: Thank you, Speaker. This government has had 15 years to help seniors and families get the care they deserve and instead of a long-term care plan, they have a long-term storage solution. If they truly cared, they would have already fixed the wait list. Instead they have only made them worse. Liberal cuts and privatization much like what we would see from Doug Ford ant Conservatives, have left Anna's family in an impossible situation. Her family is being told that if they want to get Anna into appropriate care before the end of the year, they would have to start looking far outside their community. While she has been in hospital, Anna has fallen. She as's gone without any showers and watched her hospital roommate and other forgotten seniors die while waiting for a space in long-term care. Anna's family is terrified, Speaker, that she is also going to die in the hospital waiting in A.L.C.. Which is serving as long-term storage, not long-term care. How does this government justify years of gut our health care system while families have nowhere to turn. And seniors like Anna have nowhere to go?

>>Minister Jaczek: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite perhaps just needs to be reminded of our throne speech earlier this week wherein we talked about all the investments our government has made over the course of our being in government over the last 15 years, specifically for the vulnerable population that she is --Of course long-term care homes are part of the picture. But our investments through the years in home care have been absolutely phenomenal, in my view. Since 2013 our government has increased funding for home and community care to help those frail elderly stay where they would wish to stay for as long as possible in their own homes by some \$250 million

a year. So this is in addition to the government's ongoing funding of more than \$5 billion.

MPP MacLaren to Minister Sousa (Damerla) Re: Changes to Insurance Act

MPP Jack MacLaren: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of finance. Minister, today I will introduce a private member's bill that will amend the insurance act to allow life insurance policy owners to use their life insurance policy as collateral to obtain a loan. This will give life insurance policy owners the freedom to use their life insurance policy the same as any other properties they might own, properties such as land, buildings, stocks or bonds. All these properties can be used as collateral to obtain a loan. This is a fundamental right of a property owner. It is a right denied. Minister, will you help us restore this property right to life insurance policy owners? Will you support our bill to amend the insurance act?

>>Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you to the member for the question. I know the member for Eglinton- Lawrence also put forward a private member's bill to the same effect. For those that don't know, we're talking about the sale of existing policies to third policy and third parties. It's something that has been prohibited in Ontario since the 1930s. Québec has it now and they're actually looking at retracting from it. Saskatchewan is looking at prohibiting it so that only leaves two or three provinces now who are still allowing it to take place. It's a financial instrument. We need to foster a way to protect consumers and investors. We've done so much more now to provide for those who are near death or are looking at providing for more supports in their elder years. That's why we take steps that we have most recently. Up coming in the budget but we will look at this opportunity and we'll address it as well. Thank you.

>>MPP MacLaren: Speaker, my question is to the Minister of seniors affairs. Minister, this bill will -- To the Minister of finance. To the Minister of seniors affairs. I stand corrected. Minister, this bill will help seniors. It will allow seniors to borrow against their life insurance policy. Many seniors are struggling to make ends meet because of the high cost of hydro bills and cuts to seniors' services. This access to their wealth, to their cash will help seniors to live without worry and without having to impose on their families and without having to depend on government. They will be able to live with dignity. It is time to give our seniors the freedom to use their wealth the way they want. Minister, will you help us to help seniors? Will you support our bill to amend the insurance act?

>>Minister Dipika Damerla: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for this question. You know, as the Minister of finance outlined, this is a good idea. It certainly has some merit in helping people who want to access assets being able to access those assets, but also we're concerned about consumer protection, because the risk is that some vulnerable people might get caught in fraud or be forced to sell at a lower price. We really need to balance the innovation with consumer protections. I look forward to the introduction of this bill, which was introduced earlier last year by the member from Eglinton Lawrence, and I spoke to it. I really look forward to debating this bill. But I do want to assure the member opposite that we're not cutting services to seniors. If anything, we are enhancing services to seniors.

MPP Rinaldi to Minister Ballard Re: Water Protection

>> MPP Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of environment and climate change. Today's world water day, a day to recognize the importance of protecting our most vital resources. In Ontario, we're lucky. Our province touches four of the five great Lakes, and in my riding of northumberland-quinte west, seven of the eight municipalities border the shores of Lake Ontario. The majority of them relying on this resource for their drinking water. We know that protecting this precious natural resource is an essential part of helping Ontario families and communities thrive, and we can't do it alone, Speaker. That's why the province is investing \$1.5 million in grants for projects that allow communities to participate and protecting restoring great Lakes through the great Lakes guarding community fund. Through this fund we're enabling greater communities' participation in protecting the local watershed. Mr. Speaker, account Minister please explain to the House. How the great lake garden community fund To protect and restore this important natural resource?

>>Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. And I'd like to thank the member from northumberland-quinte west for that very important question as we celebrate world water day today. And I would start off by toasting you with a glass of tasty Toronto water, Speaker. I'm delighted to take this opportunity to talk about the importance of protecting water here in Ontario. We know that it is a valuable resource, Speaker, and that's why we're helping communities take action to protect their local watershed. Speaker, since 2007, Ontario has invested more than \$170 million into 1,420 local great Lakes protection projects that have reduced harmful pollutants, restored some of the most contaminated areas, engaged hundreds of partners and community groups to protect and restore the health of the great Lakes. This improves, Speaker, one project that I'm particularly fond of, the girls can too program in Caledon that empowers girls to learn about environmental and skilled trade sectors. Through these programs, Speaker, we're helping Ontarians take action in their communities. Promote efforts to clean and protect the great Lakes. Thank you, Speaker.

>>MPP Rinaldi: Well, thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for that answer. Speaker, we know how important it is to keep our environment healthy and safe for Ontarians. That's why we're investing in protecting our great Lakes. Speaker, through the great Lakes guardian fund, over 37,000 volunteers have planted more than 285,000 trees and shrubs, released over 800,000 fish, build and enhanced 760 trails and collected more than 2,800 bags of garbage. Speaker, can the Minister please explain to the House how this government is further strengthening our water protection in this province?

>>Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. I'd be delighted to. I thank the member from northumberland-quinte west again for that important question. You know, the government has taken significant actions to increase water protection for the health of Ontarians and for the overall environment. A few of the things we're doing, Speaker. We've updated standards to further protect our drinking water. We're taking action to reduce algae blooms in Lake Erie. We're introducing and have introduced stricter requirements for bottled water permits and we're strengthening water testing requirements in schools, Speaker. Our government takes our job to protect the environment very seriously. Speaker, but what is shocking to me is that the P.C.s have walked away entirely from any credible plan to protect the environment. You know, just yesterday, Speaker, the member for Nepean-Carleton -- The member from Nepean-Carleton couldn't answer a single question yesterday, Speaker, about how they would protect the environment if they were elected. Meanwhile we've taken serious steps to protect both the water and overall environment, Speaker.

MPP Martow to Minister Jaczek Re: Shortage of Medical School Residencies

>>MPP Gila Martow: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I think the Minister will agree that we must plan for Ontario's future health care needs. Part of this planning must ensure the adequate training of our future health care delivery professionals. Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a problem in the system leaving many of our valuable medical school graduates unable to practise medicine. The problem stems from our medical school students not being able to match with a required residency program. Unlike the days when the Minister attended medical school and I myself went to optometry training, all medical graduates must now complete a residency program to receive a licence to practice. Will the Minister agree that more should be done to ensure we fund medical students, many of whom are here today and all female I may add, who are able to treat patients? Thank you.

>>Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to recognize those medical students who are with us today. I think if I had attended when I was a medical student, perhaps I would never have engaged in this particular profession as a politician, because question period, as they have seen, is an interesting place. And so I know that the private -- the member opposite has introduced I believe a private member's bill or a motion in this regard. And it is an important question and I certainly look forward to hearing the results of the debate later today. So we do know that the number of unmatched Ontario medical graduates has been increasing in recent

years and that we recognize the challenges faced by those medical graduates who do not obtain a residency position through the --Matching process. So we do take this issue very seriously. We're reviewing the outcomes of the matching process, and we're working with relevant stakeholders. Thank you.

>>MPP Martow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And again to the Minister. Our medical students are very concerned about graduating and not finding residency programs. In fact the students of the Ontario medical student association are here today to raise their concerns. According to alms, the greatest issue that they want government to address is unmatched medical school graduates and physician services planning. These medical students want to become doctors. They want to work at our hospitals and clinics. Research into new cures and treatment. Unfortunately some of our brightest and hardest working young adults are not getting a fair chance. Mr. Speaker, the number of unmatched students is rising in part because this Liberal go -- Liberal government reduced the number of residency program spots. Later today I will be introducing a private member's bill to address the issue. Will the Minister show her support for our future generation of physicians by committing to support the careers in medicine advisory committee act?

>>Minister Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll certainly commit to working with our medical schools to support Ontario medical school graduates through the upcoming 2018 matching process and to develop a sector sustainable solution to this issue. I would like to point out that the matching process, in fact Canada wide, and so it is important to note that this is actually a pan-canadian process. It's a process where Ontario medical graduates compete with the graduates from other Canadian medical schools. So we're going to be working with our provincial and national counterparts to better understand this issue, and we will certainly do everything we can to ensure that every one of our medical students finds a place to practice. Thank you.

MPP Armstrong to Minister Jaczek Re: Dental Services

>>MPP Teresa Armstrong: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the acting Premier. My constituent Amanda told us that she grew up without basic dental care because her parents didn't have dental plans at work. They couldn't afford to pay for appointments at the dentist. Because of that Amanda knows firsthand what a disadvantage it is to not have access to a dental plan. Amanda is 28 years old. She can't work. She has lost most of her teeth and has reoccurring infections and debilitating pain. And now she has been told that she needs to have all her remaining teeth extracted and obtain dentures. Why does this Premier and this government choose to prioritize selling off hydro instead of investing in a dental plan that would help Amanda and other Ontario families?

>>Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'd just like to remind the House that we did reaffirm in the throne speech that our government will be making investments to ensure more people without a drug or a dental benefit plan will have access to more affordable prescription drugs and dental care. Obviously I think we're all waiting with anticipation to see exactly what that means in our budget. What I do know is that we have been consistent in our ongoing investment in the health care of Ontarians since we took office 15 years ago. In particular, yet again, I would like to talk about our healthy smiles program. This is a free preventive routine and emergency dental services for children and youth from low-income House holds across the province. In reference to the question posed by the member opposite, the case that she refers to sounds like she might qualify for dental benefits through our social assistance program. Thank.

>>MPP Armstrong: Speaker, because Amanda is now receiving social assistance, she has been advised that the standard emergency care for adults is four extractions every six months. At this rate, it will still be more than a year before Amanda's out pain and able to look for a job. Speaker, the NDP Has a plan to help every Ontarian from, children to seniors, to access dental benefits either through work or a health care card. No one should have to deal with the pain or lifelong damage of going without dental care. Can this Liberal government explain to Amanda why they think it's fair to pay the C.E.O. Of Hydro One an executive salary of \$4.5 million while they do nothing to help families like hers over the past 15 years?

>>Minister Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, we do recognize that there are adults and seniors that struggle with

access to affordable dental care. And that's why of course we do have existing publicly funded programs such as the Ontario disabilities support program and benefits through Ontario works that may provide coverage for those in need. So we did create, back in 2015, two working groups with the Ontario dental association to discuss this particular issue. On this side of the House of course we want to consult. We want to listen. We want to get the best advice. And so we -- as a result of those working groups, we continue to want to look forward to them as we anticipate our budget, to ensure that the appropriate care reaches those who need it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Martins to Minister Moridi Re: Life Sciences Sector Investments

>>MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of research, innovation and science. The human life sciences sector continues to be a priority sector for the government of Ontario, with 1,900 science firms, our government and our people have worked hard to make Ontario the largest life science jurisdiction in Canada. And as a matter of fact, Speaker, prior to entering politics, I had the opportunity to work in the pharmaceutical industry. So I know first hand that each day our life sciences sector is working towards discovering new therapies and cures for various diseases. Our government has a strong track record when it comes to investing in the sector, Mr. Speaker, and we are committed to maintaining our global position. So account Minister please inform the members of the House how your ministry plans on further contributing to Ontario's successful life sciences sector?

>>Minister Reza Moridi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from Davenport for that very good question. Mr. Speaker, last month in February I was pleased to announce that our government investing up to \$15 million in the new life sciences venture capital fund initiative. This will assist life sciences firms, leverage additional capital, helping them access the resources they need to grow their businesses and compete globally. These firms will foster new discoveries and technologies for treatments of -- and a cure for diseases such as cancer, multiple sclerosis and diabetes. All done, Mr. Speaker, while we are supporting high-quality jobs for people across our province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, our government is always discovering new ways to support our people. Thank you.

>>MPP Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Minister for that answer. And this new venture capital fund will surely help Ontario retain its position among the ten top venture capitals in North America. And it's important that we continue to invest in this sector so that we continue to discover new therapies and cures for various diseases. And the Minister spoke about diabetes, which was discovered right here in Ontario in the city of Toronto. Moreover it will help create high value jobs in the sector that already does so much to drive Ontario's economy. I understand that in recent activities our government and your ministry has supported the sector through the establishment of the office of the chief health innovation strategist and the life sciences working group. So Minister, could you inform the members of the House how our investments have contributed to Ontario's health care system and economy?

>>Minister Moridi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again thank you to the member for that question. Mr. Speaker, Ontario's life sciences sector generates \$47 billion in revenue every year and with \$9 billion in export and employing over 60,000 people good jobs in our province of Ontario. We will support life sciences sector, Mr. Speaker, in this province and we want to see the sector continues to grow and flourish. This is why we established the office of chief healthy innovation strategies as it works to support the medical technologies and enhance Ontario's health care system. We have also established life sciences working group, Mr. Speaker, which identifies Barriers to this sector's progress and the potential solutions. Mr. Speaker, this will position our province of Ontario as destination for global investment and talent in every sector of economy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .