

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Thursday, May 3, 2018

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

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MPP Yurek to Minister Jaczek Re: Pharmacare

>> MPP Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question's to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Speaker, posted a moving video this week about her struggle. She has cystic fibrosis and Victoria needs orcamby. Mr. Speaker, why won't this government fund the medicine Victoria needs?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And of course we empathize with those patients with cystic fibrosis and we know that they and their families certainly struggle with the debilitating effects of this disease and we know that they hope that each new drug that may be available could be promising for their particular case. So we certainly empathize with these families and these individuals and we are committed to finding solutions. But of course we have taken the politics out of drug funding. We rely on experts to determine which drugs are funded and we rely on the best medical evidence available. So as with all new drugs, we need to know how it will provide patients with better health outcomes. We need to study potential side effects that could be harmful, and we therefore rely on experts and on the best medical advice available to determine which drugs are funded.

>> MPP Yurek: Speaker, thank you. Back to the Minister. Victoria said the Premier won't take a meeting. She has also said the Premier won't take a call. She's also said the Premier won't even answer her email. Mr. Speaker, why is the Premier ignoring vice and the lifesaving medication she needs?

>> Minister Jaczek: Well, as I have said, Mr. Speaker, we have taken the politics out of this particular area when we're dealing with new drugs and their potential to help Ontarians. So we do know that orcamby will be reviewed again -- orcamby, under the national drug review process in the coming months. I've been assured this will happen in July, to see if the experts find enough evidence of clinical effectiveness to recommend it for public funding. And so, in the meantime, we will continue to provide the care that individuals need to provide cystic fibrosis patients with the current best available treatments because we know that that kind of care has been shown to improve their condition and their quality of life. So as I have said, all drugs go through a pan-canadian expert committee which undertakes a thorough evaluation based on the best available evidence. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Yurek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The pan-canadian review committee has dropped the ball and has created such a bureaucratic process that kids cannot access the medications they need, lifesaving medications. Mr. Speaker, back to the Minister. Why is the Premier letting Victoria suffer and fight for every breath she takes? As Jerry Agard said today, is the Premier ok with letting Victoria die?

>> MPP Jaczek: I would like to emphasize that we care for all Ontarians and provide the best available health care in this province. The fact of the matter is the Canadian drug expert committee did review orcamby in 2016 for patients aged 12 years and older and the review raised concerns about orcamby lack clinical effectiveness so the drug was not recommended for public funding. We know countries such as England, Scotland and Australia also do not provide public coverage for this drug. The manufacturer was encouraged to resubmit orcamby to the common drug review. If they had new evidence of clinical effectiveness. And we know that they did make a resubmission to the C.D.R. In February and the Canadian drug expert committee will be reviewing it again in July. We constantly working to fund more evidence-based medicine. And so we have, through the years, included, as an example -- Kalydeco, a lifesaving cystic fibrosis drug. This was an example where we took the politics out of this process.

MPP Jones to Minister Sousa Re: Budget

>> MPP Sylvia Jones: Thank you. my Quon is to the acting Premier. Both the auditor general and the financial accountability officer have released reports in the past weeks showing the Liberal government has misrepresented the true state of the government's finances and they are quibbling over pennies. The financial accountability officer -- And we aren't quibbling over pennies, Speaker. The financial account officer is reporting the 2018 deficit to be more than \$12 billion. That's twice what the finance Minister 's projected. The Liberal government has called this an accounting dispute. I believer the auditor and the financial accountability officer. When will the government come clean and amend their deficit forecast for 2018?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. I also appreciate the work done by the F.A.O. They both reaffirm that we obtained a very cautis and reasonable approach in our assumptions going forward. The F.A.O. Has real inforced and reinforced some of the Progressive measures that we put on will have a profound positive impact on our society as well. The auditor general has cited two issues and the F.A.O. Has assumed them in his estimates going forward. Both of these two issues, whichs pension assets that are jointly sponsored by the government, as well as the fair hydro plan that enables us to reduce rates by 25% on the ratepayer base, are being disputed by the auditor and professional accountants both internally and externally. We recognize that dispute but we're not going to weigh into it. What we're going to do is continue to foster investment. And grow our economy -- of Ontario.

>> MPP Jones: What is the point of having an auditor general and a financial accountability officer if U don't lis to them? When the Liberal government came to power in 2003, Ontario's D was \$139 billion. In less than 15 years we've watched Ontario's debt balloon to over \$300 billion. If we stay on the Liberal path of deficit spending, Ontario's debt to G.D.P., already at 40%, will exceed 45%. Twice Bob Rae's legacy. Again I ask the Minister, will you finally admit that the auditor gerald a the financial accountability officer are right and amend your financial numbers to reflect this year's deficit will be over \$12 billion?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is now disputing the integrity of our civil service and professional accountants internally that signed off on these measures. The member's now also disputing the chair of the Canadian standards on accounting principles that has also provided an opinion on the matter saying that the very pension assets the auditor's now disputing is the very same assets she audited and approved only years ago and has been for the past 20 years, even when the Conservatives were in power. Furthermore the issues around the fair hydro plan around rate regulated accounting is in fact permissible even today in this government in other areas as well as other parts of Canada and United States. So we have taken their advice.we've made a policy decision to provide supports for the people of Ontario and we've been very open and disclosed. In fact investors around the world are investing in these very measures. O.P.G. -That debt very clearly on their books, has a clean audit and is approved by our auditor as well, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Jones: Spin it all you want, Minister. The financial accountability officer and the auditor general don't believe you and neither do we. The F.A.O. Reports that the government spending plan will add \$70 billion to the province's net debt increasing it to almost \$400 billion in 2021. F.A.O. Chief economist David west said at a basic level, the government's current spending levels are unsustainable. Unsustainable. But that's not the only word people have used to describe the books. Deal tear racial. Dangerous precedence. Unlikely assumptions. Unreliable. Distorted. Bogus. That's just a small selection of the words used. That is your legacy. Do the right thing. Update your deficit numbers to reflecthe \$12 billion deficit.

>> Minister Sousa: Here's our legacy, Mr. Speaker. We lead Canada, Europe, United States in economic growth. We've balanced the budget. We have a \$600 million surplus. The lowest unemployment in two decades. We have -- foreign direct investment and Canada's doing well. And our public accounts, which is the actual results of the year, have proven that we've balanced the budget and have a surplus, Mr. Speaker. Have affirmed our double-a rating and stable, Mr. Speaker.

The F.A.O. Has made projections every year, and each time this government exceed Ed targets and we are now doing better than we've ever done and we continue to make life more affordable for the people of Ontario. They both reaffirm that we obtained a very cautious and reasonable approach in our assumptions going forward. The F.A.O. Has real informed and reinforced some of the Progressive measures that we put on will have a profound positive impact on our society as well. The auditor general has cited two issues and the F.A.O. Has assumed them in his estimates going forward. Both of these two issues, whichs pension assets that are jointly sponsored by the government, as well as the fair hydro plan that enables us to reduce rates by 25% on the ratepayer base, are being disputed by the auditor and professional accountants both internally and externally. We recognize that dispute but we're not going to weigh into it. What we're going to do is continue to foster investment.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Del Duca Re: Public Transit

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. My question to the acting Premier. The Ontario government used to fund 50% of transit net operating costs and the successful funding formula that ensures high quality service. This funding was cut by the Conservatives and it stayed cut under the Liberals. Municipalities and transit advocates like TTC Riders have repeatedly asked for this funding to be restored. Why has the Premier repeatedly refused?

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: Speaker. I thank the member for his question. I know that he and others have raised this a number of times over the last couple of years but they fail to comprehend in the way they ask their question, Speaker, is that this government is investing more in public transit infrastructure in the city of Toronto and across the greater Toronto and Hamilton area and in every community across Ontario that has public transit, more so than any other government in Ontario history, speak and in fact just a number of months ago we started to double the amount of gas tax money that the communities the supporting public transit themselves locally received, Speaker, over the next couple of years that gas tax funding to specifically support expanding public transit and support public transit service in those communities will double, Speaker. This is a significant step forward with respect to supporting those communities and their transit needs, while at the same time, Speaker, we continue to invest in the infrastructure. I'll be delighted to provide more details on that in the follow-up answers.

>> MPP Tabuns: You'd think, Speaker, from that response that everything is dealt with. But in fact subways in Toronto are still to crush capacity. Bus routes have been cut and service on remaining routes keeps getting less frequent and reliable. Meanwhile fares are going up while services are getting to be worse. No wonder so many people think that their only option is the car. But the Premier has the ability to change this. She can restore the province's traditional 50% funding for net transit operating costs and improve service not in 10 or 20 years but today. Why won't she?

>> Minister Del Duca: Speaker, as I mention in my initial answer to the first question that came from the NDP Caucus on this, here are just some of the things that our government's invested in, specifically in the 416, specifically in Toronto as it relates to public transit. So for example \$3.7 billion for go regional express rail. Here in Toronto aid loan which will help to srt and enable smarttrack. \$5.3 Billi to build the Eglinton crosstown L.R.T. Single largest public transit project in Ontario history. Almost \$3 billion to continue to expand rapid transit in wonderful Scarborough, Speaker. \$974 million from the move Ontario trust for the Toronto-york- Spadina subway extension which opened in Vaughan last December, Speaker. \$456 million to build out the union Pearson express. And specifically to the gas tax funding I allude today earlier, \$2.1 billion since 2004 for the city of Toronto I look forward to talking about more of the good news we've delivered to the people of Toronto for transit in the final answer.

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the acting Premier. That answer is why people are so cynical about public transit. The Premier will run publicly funded ads boasting about how much she cares about transit ride remembers. But on the buses, on the subways and on the streetcars, transit

riders know the truth. Service has gotten worse while fares have become more expensive. The Premier can change this. She can restore public confidence in transit. She can improve transit service today. She Cantore provincial ding for transit operations as the NDP Has committed. Why won't she?

>> Minister Del Duca: Speaker, I mentioned a seconding a that there's more. So for example here in the city of Toronto our government investing \$416 million to support the purchase of brand-new streetcars. Starting in early 2019, Speaker, all G.O. Transit trips within Toronto specifically will only cost presto card users \$3 per trip, Speaker. Which means, to the very people the member from Toronto- Danforth pretends to repre and speak for, we are making their transit more affordable. That's what our government is doing, Speaker. Just this morning, maybe the member didn't know this the Premier and Minister of transportation joined with mayor Tory and others to sign an M.O.U. To commit provincial funding to the downtown relief line, to the Yonge north subway services To more transit in Scarborough. To the waterfront L.R.T. That's what our government's doing while -

MPP Armstrong to Minister Jaczek Re: Long-Term Care

>> MPP Teresa Armstrong: My question's to the acting Premier. The NDP Hears frequently from Ontario families who are concerned about long-term care. Even frontline health care workers have also been sounding alarm bells. They work hard every day to take care of residents, but when you're short-staffed, you just can't do it all. We learned today that the families of two patients have filed ss-action claims against two private for-profit long-term care providers. The claims are horrendous. Bed sores so deep that bone was exposed. Maggots crawling inside untreated skin wounds. How is it possible that such things are happening to our seniors in Ontario?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you very M Mr. Speaker. I want to ensure the families and individuals living in long-term-care facilities that I, as the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, our government takes the responsibility to ensure our residents in each and every long-term-care home are safe and that they're living securely with dignity and getting the type of care that they deserve. Clearly I cannot comment on the issues of various legal matters. Their cases are before the courts. Our government has demonstrated our commitment to ensure the safety and well-being through a very rigorous inspection system and regulatory framework that we are continuously working to improve. Currently ---- I'm sure every member knows, we have a very strong inspection system. Thank you.

>> MPP Armstrong: Speaker, this is not a one-off scenario. These problems are pervasive, said the lawyer leading both lawsuits. We are alleging that there's a systemic negligence going on, that there is failure to deliver the kind of care that has been promised, she said. Systemic negligence. Just imagine how it must feel for an Ontario family to entrust that their elderly mothers, fathers or grandparents to long-term-care system with such pervasive problems. Why has the Premier and this Liberal government stubbornly refused to conduct a full commission of inquiry into long-term care as the NDP Has repeatedly proposed?

>> Minister Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, we have increased our oversight through the strengthening quality and accountability for patients act that was passed last December to ensure all operators are addressing concerns promptly. This includes new enforcement tools, surprise inspections. There are financial penalties that we' introduced and even provincial offences for operators who repeatedly do not comply with the requirements of the act. We've also introduced a website. It's very easily accessible. I certainly consulted it myself, where you can look up, on each and every home here in Ontario, each long-term-care home, their performance, results of inspects, and so families can -- and individuals can ensure themselves of --The safety that they willreceive from a particular home. I will have more to say in the supplementary.

>> MPP Armstrong: We also learned today that an 88-year-old Hamilton mother who was badly injured at her long-term-care home, and there's speculation it may have been as a result of an assault. Her daughter found her with a black eye and later a goose egg on her forehead and bruises

down her body. The daughter said -- if the child had those injuries, something would be done immediately. But because people in those nursing homes are old, no one fights for their protection. That was her quote. When will this government protect seniors and conduct a full commission of inquiry into long-term care so we can find and fix the problems in long-term care and look after our seniors?

>> Minister Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, we have every confidence that we have an inspection system that is working well, that is working to improve our system, work with operators across the province. But we know that there is more to do, because as our population is aging and living with even more complex conditions, the needs are increasingly complex and so this is why, in our 2018 budget, we're investing \$300 million over three years to increase staffing in long-term-care homes. This means that every long-term-care home, all 628 in this province, will benefit from an additional registered nurse. It will ensure that every home in the province has staff with specialized training in behavioural supports for residents with cognitive impairment. It means an additional 15 million hours of nursing, personal support and therapeutic care for our seniors living in long-term care. We will continue with our program ensuring our seniors are living in safety and security in long-term-care homes in this province.

MPP Yakabuski to Minister Naqvi Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the acting Premier. The Liberals' disastrous energy policy has forced many Ontarians to make a choice between heating and eating. Skyrocketing energy bills have put them in a most precarious position. The Liberals' answer was to ban winter disconnections, which amounts to no more than a sy O execution. When winter's over, Speaker, and we find that thousands are now facing disconnection this is spring. If hundreds of struggling families in Sudbury and thousands across Ontario couldn't afford to pay their hydro bills in the winter, what makes the government think they will be able to pay the bill, plus the arrears, in the spring? What is the acting Premier saying to those families now that the wolf is at the door?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, SP. Last winter, as you know, our government passed legislation that granted the province's independent energy regulator the power to end all winter disconnections and protect Ontarians, because no one, Speaker, should ever be put at risk of disconnection in the winter. Our priority is to make sure families and businesses have access to clean, reliable and affordable electricity. Speaker, while the ban on winter disconnections are ended on April the 30th, they are -- there are a number of government programs designed to help reduce the cost of electricity bills for vulnerable consumers. We encourage all customers to contact their local utility about qualifying for programs that are in place to help. For example, Speaker, our government expanded the electricity support program such as the Ontario electricity support program and the rural and remote rate protection plan, which provides support to low-income customers and those customers with the highest delivery rates. These customers, Speaker, are seeing savings -- Of up to 40 to 50% off their electricity bills. Speaker, these are important programs that are available in addition to 25% off fair hydro plan.

>> MPP Yakabuski: Speaker, it is the disastrous energy policies of this government that led to the skyrocketing hydro prices -- prices and the skyrocketing number of people that were subject to winter disconnections in the first place. They had to act because of their mistakes in the energy policy. Signing exorbitant contracts under the green energy act with Liberal friends that the auditor general herself said were far in excess of the market value for electricity. Why would the Liberals now suggest that someone who cannot pay their bill in January can pay it in May, including arrears? Speaker, won't the acting Premier simply admit that their energy policy has been a disaster in this problem, in this province and that their government is not fit for reelection?

>> Minister Naqvi: Speaker, we have worked extremely hard to develop an electricity system that is clean, accessible and reliable, Speaker. And Ontarians should be very proud that, in our province, we do not burn dirty coal to produce electricity like the way Conservatives used to do and actually ran

again and again T continue to -- continue to burn dirty coal, Speaker. That is bad for our health. It's bad for our environment. Speaker, we have taken steps to insure -- that our electricity system is clean. Speaker, we have not stopped there. We have also made sure that there is a 25% reduction in all electricity bills. Across the province. What was the response of the Conservatives? They voted against that program. When we introduced programs like the Ontario electricity program

MPP Gelinas to Minister Coteau Re: Autism Services

>> MPP France Gelinas: My question will be for the Minister of children and youth. Minister, my office has been approached by many parents, including Mrs. Julia Yich -- Julia Richie and her little girl June. June was diagnosed with severe autism in October of 2017. When she was 30 months old. She has been on the wait list for treatment since date. The family was originally told that it would take about six months. Well, the six months have come and gone and they are now facing a 2.5 to 3-year-long wait list. Can the Minister explain where children with autism in Sudbury and Nickel Belt can find the faster, more effective autism services this government promised over two years ago?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the member for the question. The member knows that this government has invested more money into autism services than any government in this country. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I would say that we've invested more resources than any government in North America. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we know that our contribution to autism is actually creating more space. 16,000 more spaces will be created in Ontario over the next few years and we are seeing change. I went to the opening of Erin Oaks and I spoke to parents specifically about the changes that are taking place and I met a young family there, a young girl who got into a program a year ago and was nonverbal. Because of the program now she is speaking. We're seeing the changes on the ground. Mr. Speaker, it's the NDP that has said that they would rip up the entire program if they were put into position of power.

>> MPP Gelinas: Speaker, we don't see on the ground any evidence of those investments in Nickel Belt or Sudbury. The kids are still waiting a very long time. Mrs. Richie could not wait the 18 months for an assessment so the family paid privately in the hope that June would be seen faster. The child and community resource in Sudbury is presently admitting children into treatment that were put on the wait list in October of 2015. This is more than two and a half years ago. This is a lifetime for the 800 children on the wait list in Sudbury. Can the Minister explain what action he will take so that little June and the 800 other kids on the wait list get the treatment that they need in a timely fashion?

>> Minister Coteau: Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite wants to see evidence, she just needs to go and talk to the people of Ontario. We've gone right across the province. We've held town halls. We've spoken to people. It's the NDP that says they'll do things. Number one they'll rip the program apart and start new, which is a shame because parents like where we're at today. The other NDP is committed to doing is not supporting direct funding. We have made a significant change. This is the first time in the history of Ontario direct funding will be applied to parents so they can have the choice. It's about building confidence in choice in the system. Not to mention the Conservatives. We know where their leader stands. Doesn't believe the kids should be living in the streets with them.

MPP Martins to Minister Ballard Re: Greenbelt

>> MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, speaker. My question is for the minister of environment and climate change. Speaker, back in 2003 our urban communities were sprawling at a dangerous rate. Every year tens of thousands of acres of farm land, wet land including ravines and rivers were being encroached by new development. Ontarians were rightfully red for economic and environmental reasons. The great majority of people including residents from my riding of Davenport, agree that to keep our communities livable, we cannot pave over every square inch of farmland and wetlands in Ontario. That's why we promised them we would take action, and we did speaker, account

minister please explain to the house how we are taking further action to protect the greenbelt?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, speaker. Thank you to tember from Davenport for that very important question. You know, as the premier said yesterday, speaker, we're committed to expanding the greenbelt. To protect, to protect even more of our natural environment from development. Speaker, we're expanding and protecting the greenbelt so our kids and grandkids never have to worry about the being able to enjoy or access nature. You know, speaker, meanwhile Doug Ford, he made a private deal to develop the greenbelt to help rich developers get even richer. Doug Ford has confessed, on tape, to having already talked to some of the biggest developers in the country and offered to give them greenbelt land. Now Doug Ford and the P.C.S are backing away from that decision. But, you know, they can't be trusted to protect our greenbelt lands, Mr. Speaker. We can't take a chance, speaker. Once the greenbelt is gone, the greenbelt is gone. Speaker, our government created the greenbelt to ensure that Ontario has –Protected Greenland and clean drinking water for generations to come. We're committed to protecting it.

>> MPP Martins: Thank you, speaker. And I want to thank the minister for that answer. Speaker, our government created the largest permanent greenbelt anywhere in the world that protects nearly 2 million acres of valuable land and water. And last year we expanded the greenbelt. We protected an additional 10,000 hectares. That's equivalent of almost 20,000 new football fields that has been protected. Residents from across Davenport sent me emails to thank our premier and thank our government for this. Our new expansion includes 21 new urban river valleys and wetlands that connect to lake Ontario. We've also extended greenbelt like protections for natural heritage, water and agriculture to the entire greater golden horseshoe area. This further ensures that sensitive lands are protected for generations to come without constraining development. Meanwhile Doug Ford and the P.C.S have flip-flopped on the issue, proving they're willing to say anything to get elected. Speaker, can the minister please explain to the house how we're continuing to protect the greenbelt for the people of Ontario?

>> Minister Ballard: Thank you, speak and thank you again to the member from Davenport for another very important question. Speaker, it's clearer than ever that Doug Ford cannot be trusted to protect the greenbelt or the environment. If his secret deal with developers hadn't been exposed, does anyone believe he would have backed off? It makes you wonder, speaker, what other promises have been made in private? To whom and in exchange for what? Paving the greenbelt? Selling cannabis in corner stores? Ending rent control? These are the promises Doug Ford makes when he says voters aren't around to deal with him. That's teal Doug F, speaker. He's not backing down. He's backing off. But if he gets elected, watch out. We know who Doug Ford is and we know who he will stand up for. Speaker, it is not the little guy.

MPP Jones to Minister Jaczek Re: Breast Cancer Treatment

>> MPP Laurie Scott: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. One out of every eight Canadian women is being diagnosed with breast cancer and 30% of all breast cancers become metastatic. Luckily there are treatments available that help to keep the disease under control and help these women live better, longer lives. Unfortunately negotiations to get these medications covered by our health care system can go on for over a year without any updates. Patients in desperate need of these drugs are being left in the dark waiting. The cancer does not wait, Mr. Speaker. Last year the ministry said that an announcement to make the process more accountable to patients would be forthcoming. When can we finally expect the announcement from this Minister ?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly we know that there is great progress made in the treatment of breast cancer and our government has obviously been very active in this particular area with the Ontario breast screening program and obviously new and enhanced treatments for patients. In terms of cancer drugs in general, I would remind the member opposite that we have an evidence-based system here in Ontario. We believe that clearly we need medical

expertise in terms of effectiveness, side effects and of course we're part of a national program as well to analyze new and emerging treatments and drugs. So we take this responsibility very seriously. We have taken the politics out of these decisions, and we will continue to do so as we believe in obviously ensuring that we do a thorough analysis and we make our choices based on evidence. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Minister. In other jurisdictions, we see more transparency and more timely benchmarks in the negotiation process, which helps government prepare recommendations to pharmaceutical companies. For example, if the price of a drug is too high or it doesn't meet certain conditions, the negotiators know what needs change and they get back to the table quickly. Last October I tabled a petition launched by rethink breast cancer, that has since received over 10,000 signatures calling on Ontario to take the lead in fixing this process. So once again, my question to the Minister on behalf of the signatories, the breast cancer patients and their families is what have you done to make the negotiation process accountable? And when are you going to put proper deadlines in place so that Ontario cancer patients get the treatment that they need?

>> Minister Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said several times in this House, we will continue to analyze data. We will obviously encourage all the experts that are involved in the processes, whether at the national level or here in Ontario to do their work in an expeditious fashion. When it comes to negotiations obviously we will be part of the national system in terms of bulk purchasing, which will have the potential obviously to drive costs down. We're on top of the situation, Mr. Speaker. We are working very, very hard in this regard, and I think, overall, the member opposite and I share the need to move as fast as we can and in the best interests of Ontarians. We are working all the time in the public interest, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Tabuns to Minister Ballard Re: Water Quality

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. My question to the Minister of environment and climate change. Dufferin aggregates is applying to expand a permit to take water in the waverley uplands. This is a critical groundwater recharge area for the Alliston aquifer. The application is for a huge expansion of the area and depth of excavation. Local residents, including the local first nations, are opposed to this in the vicinity of what would have been the area of site 41, an exceptional source of groundwater that was the site of an extensive and ultimately successful fight to protect some of the cleanest groundwater anywhere in Canada. What steps will you take, Minister, to protect this exceptionally clean groundwater?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member opposite for what is a very important question. You know, when it comes to protecting the environment and protecting our groundwater sources, we do take that exceptionally serious. Our job, our primary job, Speaker, is to protect the environment and protect human health. I know that any time an application comes before my ministry to expand or a change in the terms of use of whether it be landfill or aggregate or virtually anything else, there's a very rigorous process that our ministry puts the applicant through. We first set a very rigorous terms of reference, and then we ensure when the applicant comes back that they have met the terms of reference in terms of the information that they have provided us. So, Speaker, when it comes to this particular project, you can be assured that our ministry is carefully reviewing all of the information that has been provided and we will make sure the health of the environment, the health of humans is protected.

>> MPP Tabuns: Speaker, again to the Minister of the environment and climate change. The fight to protect groundwater seems to be never-ending in Ontario. No sooner are we done with one fight as we were with the mega quarry at Then we're confronted with another. Ontario needs a comprehensive groundwater strategy that will protect our groundwater now and for a long time to come. Will the Minister put this application on hold until the people of this province have a chance to comprehensively address the whole question of protecting our precious groundwater?

>> Minister Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker. And again a good follow-up to the question. You know, Speaker, it touches on a couple of things. You know, we know that there's real public concern about the taking of groundwater for bottling purposes for example, and with that in mind, our government put in a moratorium. We put a pause on new permits, on expanding the amount of water taken from groundwater sources. We also increased the fee to those countries that were taking groundwater for bottling purposes and with that funding, Speaker, we've been engaged in doing some real science so that we can make science-based decisions moving forward when it comes to groundwater sources, you know. But I want to touch, Speaker, for a second, I want to touch for a second about groundwater sources, because where I come from, Speaker, in my riding -- where I come from in my riding we sit right on top the Oak Ridges moraine, Speaker, which is part of the greenbelt. You may have heard me speak about that in the House just a few minutes ago. The Oak Ridges moraine is the rain barrel of multiple water sources feeding southern Ontario. So I've grown up very concerned about this.

MPP Potts to Minister Moridi Re: Clean Tech

>> MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of research, innovation and science. Now we all know that climate change is a real threat and it's a problem that must be tackled now. And that is why our government has made fighting climate change a priority with our cap-and-trade program that puts a price on carbon. Through nearly 2 billion we raise annually we've helped build the fastest growing clean tech sector in Canada if not North America with 18.8 billion in revenue, 5,000 companies and 130,000 employees. In fact since 2003, our government has committed over 740 million to more than 1,600 research and commercialization projects. And I understand that clean tech in Ontario is a diverse sector includes energy infrastructure, noncarbon generation. And storage. So, Speaker, will the Minister inform the members of this House how these investments have contributed to creating an innovative clean tech sector?

>> Minister Reza Moridi: science and technology. Mr. Speaker, on May the 2nd, I was pleased to speak about the successful recipient of Ontario's low carbon innovation fund. Through the technology demonstration stream, we are supporting ten projects, one of which uses artificial intelligence to manage energy storage systems in high-rise buildings. We are also supporting 12 projects through the technology industry including a project to increase wind turbine efficiency and the PCt that will help absorb atmospheric greenhouse gases. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak about our government investment and the work of our research entrepreneurs and the companies in their efforts to create cleaner Ontario.

>> MPP Potts: Thank you, Speaker. Thanks to the Minister. As a doctoral fellow in physics, this is ideally the right person to be leading these programs. Now it is remarkable to see -- This government's investments that are helping drive fantastic ideas into game-changing technologies that will improve the quality of life for every Ontarian. Now we know the P.C. Party, as part of their five-point strategy, they call this corporate welfare and all these programs will be cut, Speaker. But we know that these investments are part of Ontario's comprehensive climate change action plan, a plan that aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 15% below 1990 levels by the year 2020. Right in front of our own eyes we watch Ontario's clean tech companies invent innovative ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and fight climate change. They are leaders in creating jobs and focused on creating clean tech sector part of our carbon-free future, Speaker. So, Minister -- Speaker, through you to the Minister what is our government doing to ensure -- ensure the successful clean tech companies have the ability to grow and meet global demand for innovative technology?

>> Minister Moridi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you again to the member for that very good question. Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday I was excited to announce that Ontario will invest \$20 million innovation growth fund. And \$35 million investment commitment to M.R.I. Technology ventures. These investments, Mr. Speaker, are through the Ontario capital growth corporation, which is the venture capital agency of the government of Ontario. These funds, Mr. Speaker, will help tech firms get the capital they need to grow their businesses and to create good jobs in the province of Ontario and

make Ontario companies clean tech leaders. They will create jobs and safer environment for our people. Mr. Speaker, fighting climate change and saving the greenbelt are not just priorities. This is our duty, Mr. Speaker, to protect our people and our land. Thank you

MPP Yurek to Minister Jaczek (Coteau) Re: Special Needs Services

>>MPP Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much. Speaker, my question's to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Speaker, special needs services for medically complex children and their families are in a state of chaos. The Ontario special needs strategy calls for the shifting of these services from one ministry to another, which has created additional red tape, putting at risk hundreds of Ontario families that will not be able to access the care they need. This will completely destabilize the way services are provided. In fact this decision was so rushed, the government received 325 questions from providers about how this is going to unfold. My question to the Minister why did the government decide to do this without consulting with providers and parents or taking the time to necessarily think through the implications of this decision to move the services through another ministry?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're certainly very proud of our special needs strategy. It was initiated obviously by Members of our government. And there was a full and very detailed consultation in terms of looking at the needs of children with these complex medical conditions. Not in my own riding of Oak Ridges- Markham that we're serviced by the Simcoe York children's treatment centre. They do exceptional work but there certainly is a feeling that some coordination with the ministry of health is necessary in a number of different ways. In terms of the implementation of the strategy, this is a process that is ongoing. There has been considerable recent conversations with home care Ontario on this subject. And I'll have more to say in the supplementary. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Yurek: Mr. Speaker, back to the Minister. Speaker, existing electronic communications and refusal systems that are critical to service delivery are being scrapped with the promise of recreating other systems from scratch. In the meantime, the bureaucrats are going to revert to faxes, paper-based records and manual data entry in the interim. This will take away time from front-line service providers who have to deliver the service to special needs children and will impact the quality of care. Speaker, will the Minister postpone this process until the necessary planning and consultation has taken place?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We as a government recognize that families caring for children with -- and youth with special needs face unique challenges. As a government, Mr. Speaker, we're determined to make sure that we can provide the support they need so they can participate at home, at school and in the community. And that's why in our 2018 budget, Mr. Speaker, which I hope the opposition will be supporting, we announced over 250 million in funding to support children with special needs in our schools. Mr. Speaker, we're a government that believes we need to invest into young people because they're our best -- our most valuable resource as a society. We need to make they have the skills and the ability to go forward and lead productive lives. Unlike the Conservatives when they're in power where they cut 22% for anyone with any form of disability.

MPP Bisson to Minister Jaczek Re: Homecare Services

>> MPP Gilles Bisson: thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Someone we all know very well, Claire Thibeault. She had to have a second knee surgery in the month of March when it comes to the services she was offered at home when she returned home, she decided for a second surgery that she decided the services were in place in order for her to stay

at home. But what's the problem here is not only that she wasn't offered the services that she needed. Here this is a quote from the local Ihin. There are too many files and too many people are being offered services currently. This is absolutely unacceptable.

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And certainly our home care services are some that we're very proud of. We intend to make them as seamless as possible in transition post surgery to the home. And this has been a subject of a great deal of study by individual Ihins to ensure that the service is available on discharge and it is appropriate for the needs of the actual patient. And of course this is why, in our 2018 budget, we're investing some \$650 million in home care over the next three years. \$230 million in this year alone. A lot of this funding is going to go for more personal support. So we're funding some additional 1,400 full-time positions. There will be more nursing visits, more therapy visits. Overall we know there's more work to do and we are doing it. Thank you.

>> MPP Bisson: Madam Minister, your government's been in place for the last 15 years and then when people call the local Ihin, they're being told that there are too many services. That's not an improvement to the service. That's doing less with less. So the question that I'm asking you here today, is this acceptable that someone such as Madam Chabot returns home and she doesn't have the services necessary and that she can't be safe in her home, instead of having her in the hospital context?

>> Minister Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Since we've been in power in the last 15 years, we have more than doubled funding for home care. So of course we take this particular area very, very seriously. We know people are living longer which is a good thing. Sometimes with more complex conditions. We are dedicated to ensuring people have the appropriate care in their homes, and we are taking a multifaceted approach. I would say a very comprehensive approach. We there's a need for more personal support workers across this province so we're working with our Colleges in terms of the training and making it an entry-level position that will expand further in the future in their career path. We're increasing the training for P.S.W.S. We're making more of them available. We will continue to work in this regard, Mr. Speaker, and we will work with our Ihins to ensure that the appropriate supports are there. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Qaadri to Minister McGarry Re: Public Transit

>> MPP Shafiq Qaadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of transportation. Priority to invest in a wide range of transit and transportation options. And of course I know that first hand because one of the most -- the newest rapid transit project for example is the billion-dollar custom designed Finch West L.R.T. In my own community of Etobicoke North with eight stops, Speaker. Speaker, this will increase go service across the network and we're expanding highways and of course providing more efficient transportation all around. Time spent commuting, Speaker, as you'll appreciate means time taken away from family, friends and our day-to-day lives. That's why of course we need to make the right investments to get people to their destination faster and in a more efficient manner. Speaker, it's about getting us in the ground to deliver on those investments. My question, Speaker, is this. Can the Minister please provide an update on our progress to improve commute times across the region? But specifically for people living in my community of Etobicoke North and beyond? Thank you.

>> Minister Kathryn McGarry: Speaker I want to thank the member from Etobicoke North for his ongoing commitment to tackling congestion, which is one of the greatest challenges we face in this region. So I was so pleased to be in Vaughan on an absolutely beautiful morning to announce that we now have shovels in the ground on our highway 427 extension. I couldn't imagine a better person to make this milestone announcement than with our former Minister of transportation the MPP For Vaughan, the Minister of economic development and growth. For this project, the highway will be extended by 6.6 kilometres, from highway 7 to major Mackenzie Drive and widened to 8 lanes from Finch Avenue to Highway 7. This is a \$616 million investment that will help people get moving,

businesses in Etobicoke, George -- York region and Peel region will continue to move. It's all part of our government's -- to support people in their everyday lives by helping you spend less time in your car, more time with people who matter most and I look forward to giving more details in the supplement The Speaker: Thank you.

>> MPP Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker. To the Minister as well as her commitment. I have to say, Speaker, with the eight stops, as I said, custom designed from humber College to islington. Some of my Colleagues are wishing that kind of transportation infrastructure was in their own riding. I'm detecting a little bit of stop envy. Speaker, I know commuters in York region, Peel and those coming from further south Etobicoke, these sort of investments made make it easier for us to participate in advance, see our family and fre up te from commuting. Speaker, while our government's made record investments in transit, some of course are still concerned about the impacts that longer highways and commutes can have on our environment. Speaker, at the same time we have to rely on that highway network for our transportation needs. I of course agree we need to make the right choices in the right places. Speaker, can the Minister please explain how the 427 extension in my only riding and beyond is part of a balanced plan to reduce congestion while also helping to shift people away fm T commuting patterns by?

>> Minister McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker. I want to again thank the member from Etobicoke north, and he's absolutely correct. This is an important balance that we really need to strike. The health of our region is depending on it. In York region for example we've continued to build up transit options including the opening of the new line one subway extension to Vaughan and introducing all-day service during the week and new weekend service on the Barrie go line. But we also know many crs still rely on their cars for a variety of reasons, and that's why projects like the \$616 million highway 427 extension is so important but also why we need to be making the right choices when we're planning these projects. To that end I'm pleased to say that the high occupancy toll lanes will also be installed on highway 427 in both directions for a total length of approximately 15.5 kilometres. These lanes are important. They encourage people to carpool, help manage congestion and provide more options to travellers. Speaker, having shovels in the ground on this critical highway extension will support thousands of jobs on an annual basis and an incredible step forward.

MPP Martow to Minister Coteau Re: Malware Attack to Child Welfare Cases

>> MPP Gila Martow: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of children and youth services. In 2016, 22 privacy breaches were reported to the ministry of children and youth services with regards to child welfare cases. This past February, two C.A.S. Agencies were victims of ransomware attacks. In both cases thousands of dollars were paid out to cyber criminals. The government was warned that cyber security must be a priority for children-based societies and that funding had to beallocated to protect sensitive information. Mr. Speaker, this Minister mandated the A.F. Agencies to upload their data which puts them at risk of security breaches. Will the Minister tell us what police agencies were brought in to investigate the hacking of Ontarior's residents' sensitive information?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Mr. Speaker, we brought forward the most comprehensive piece of legislation for while protection in the history of this province. Mr. Speaker, this piece of legislation did a lot to change the way in which child protection is delivered in the province, including the way inch we Collect and the way in which we hold these organizations accountable. Mr. Speaker, the party opposite decided to vote against bill 89, which included very comprehensive pieces of information. And in the supplemental I'd like to talk a bit about bill 89 and why the Conservatives voted agaisnr it.

>> MPP Martow: Again to the Minister. The ministry is on record promising that -- has an I.T. Audog on file for each case to monitor who's accessing the file. Jane cuevarncova recently asked for the log-

in data of who was accessing her file. The response from a spin man the ministry is that searches on records are actually not tracked. Since data breaches are obviously occurring, and this Minister has failed to monitor the whole mess, will the Minister tell us if families have been notified that he may have allowed their private information to be exposed? And I'd appreciate an answer. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

>> Minister Coteau: Mr. Speaker, bill 89, actually lays out -- which was proclaimed this week without the support obviously of the Conservatives. The NDP did support the bill. That bill it raised the age of protection, strengthens the rights of young people, commits to addressing systemic racism. Kits -- commits to culturally appropriate services for first nations and ways to hold C.A.S.S accountable. Mr. Speaker, the party opposite voted against it. Why? Because one of their candidates, Tanya Granic Allen, walked into their caucus and told them that the life coalition would not support it because of the gender identity piece. That party should be ashamed of their position when it comes to protecting our children here in the province of Ontario.

MPP Fife to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Childcare Services

>> MPP Catherine Fife: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the acting Premier. Kitchener, Ontario, has the second-highest child care costs in Ontario, the first being of course Toronto. Finding quality affordable child care is a game changer for women. The survey which the studied gender inequality in the country and in this province found that nearly half of all involuntary female part-time workers are in a part time job because they can -- part-time job because they can only find part-time child care. Finding affordable quality child care in Toronto, in Kitchener, in Hamilton, in Mississauga, it's like winning the lottery if you can find a space that is quality and affordable. For women to try to re-enter the work force or return to school and better their lives and better their community, there are no options even with this government. If you find a space and you qualify for it, the two do not match up in this province. So what I say to this government, after 15 years of failing families, of failing children, of failing women, why should anybody believe you when you talk about child care in this budget or in any other budget?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased to rise and answer this question, Mr. Speaker, because there's so much we're doing and I really don't know where to start, but let me just start with this. First of all let's just talk about what we are doing right now when it comes to ensuring that we are building a solid foundation. Absolutely when it comes to our child care, we are investing \$2.2 billion over three years that will provide free child care for preschoolers that will save families an average of \$1,000 a year. That's in addition to what we're doing already when it comes to full-day kindergarten. But let me just talk a little bit about the NDP Platform, Mr. Speaker. Their platform -- Mr. Speaker, their platform really does not make sense. It's not fully costed out. It doesn't build a workforce. It doesn't increase spaces. Really it just makes a lot of promises. So here's what we're doing. We'll already be on track to create 100,000 more spaces because we know we'll need those spaces in order to be able to deliver free preschool child care. We're also building a workforce and we are doing everything we can to create a new wage grid.