

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Thursday, November 30, 2017

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Date: Thu, 30 Nov 2017 11:58:52 -0500
Attachments: 20171130 - Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript.doc (111.1 kB)

Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Thursday, November 30, 2017

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MPP Clark to Minister Matthews Re: Government Accountability

>> MPP Steve Clark: Thanks, Speaker. My question is for the Deputy Premier. For 14 years this government has played fast and loose with the rules, bending and breaking many of them. The fact of the matter is that this Liberal government is untrustworthy. The wino Liberals gave access to Cabinet Ministers and strong-armed companies that do business with Ontario for the benefit of the Liberal party. They reward those donors by granting them expensive contracts and corporate handouts. Mr. Speaker, will the Liberal government stand with the people's guarantee and support the fact that we have to stop Ministers from fund-raising off the stakeholders?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. And of course we've been talking about the people's so-called guarantee a lot this week. And I think we'll continue to be talking about it because there's a lot to discuss. So, Speaker, so far what we've learned is that this is a party that cannot be trusted. They're able to say anything to anybody to try to fool them to get elected, Speaker. The people of Ontario know better. They know who you are. They know what's in your D.N.A. They know you will cut the services that people rely on, Speaker. The proof is in the fine print. Over \$12 billion in cuts, Speaker. \$12 billion in cuts.

>> Back to the deputy premier. You know, it doesn't matter what the deputy premier says. Clearly the untrustworthiness of the liberal government goes far and wide, speaker. We've seen this revolving door of liberal insiders to government lobbyists over the last 14 years. Just look at the time the minister of environment led his right-hand man go right to a job with Tesla. The people guarantee will restore trust by closing that loophole. Mr. Speaker, why won't the government lock this revolving door, the one that opens in the minister's office and closes in the lobbyist's office?

>> MPP Clark: Back to the Deputy Premier. You know, it doesn't matter what the Deputy Premier says. Clearly the untrustworthiness of the Liberal government goes far and wide, Speaker. We've seen this revolving door of Liberal insiders to government lobbyists over the last 14 years. Just look at the time the Minister of environment led his right-hand man go right to a job with Tesla. The people guarantee will restore trust by closing that loophole. Mr. Speaker, why won't the government lock this revolving door, the one that opens in the Minister's office and closes in the lobbyist's office?

>> Minister Matthews: Speaker, what the people's guarantee will do is guarantee a cut of \$6 billion in programs and services and another \$6 billion in programs that support lower energy costs and G.H.G. Reductions, Speaker. But that's not all. That's not all. A signature promise, Speaker, in the people's guarantee is a 22.5% cut in income taxes. It simply is not true, Speaker. It is not true. Cutting one bracket by 22.5% does not mean a 22.5% cut in income taxes. It is simply not true, Speaker. So if the people of Ontario are looking for somebody to trust. They must not look there.

>> MPP Clark: Again back to the Deputy Premier. You know, this government should know their role. It should be to restore the trust between the people of Ontario and this place and this chamber. Our leader, Patrick Brown, and the Ontario P.C. Party will introduce legislation that will make government accountable. In that legislation, we're going to restore government advertising oversight to the auditor general. O.R. P.P., climate change, hydro. There isn't a government ad they won't use for government purposes. It's appalling, Speaker. Mr. Speaker, why won't they restore the auditor general's oversight role? Will they continue to use government resources to campaign?

>> Minister Matthews: Mr. Speaker, what we got is a \$12 billion cut, a promise to reduce income tax by 22.5%, which isn't true, Speaker. And in addition to that, we have the proposal of a carbon tax that will add

\$1,200 to the cost of families in this province. Speaker, this is a platform we're happy to talk more about. As long as they want to talk about it, trust me, we want to talk about it. But just remember, Speaker, it's \$12 billion in cuts. It's a bogus cut on income tax of 22.5%, and it's additional costs of \$1,200 for every family without reducing G.H.G.S one bit, Speaker. We've got a plan. It's --

MPP MacLeod to Minister Hoskins Re: Mental Health Services

>> MPP Lisa MacLeod: Thanks, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of health. The people's guarantee promises the largest investment in mental health in Canadian provincial history. \$1.9 billion earmarked to build the most comprehensive and integrated mental health system in our province's history. From what I hear from the government, they'll want to continue to attack us so let me be perfectly clear. We need a simple answer from this government. Will the government back a \$1.9 billion investment into mental health? Will they commit to the same investments, and will the Minister sign the people's guarantee?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, of course this government and this party, mental health -- Mr. Speaker, to this government and this party, mental health is an absolute priority. We view mental health and physical health as being two sides of the same coin, Mr. Speaker, and there can be no health care -- there can be no health, rather, Mr. Speaker, without mental health. It's that important and our investments, including this past year, going back to the beginning of our time in government in 2003, our investments demonstrate how high a priority it is for this government. We continue to make those important investments across the province in a variety of ways, including introducing the country's first cognitive behavioural therapy program for individuals with mood disorders like anxiety and depression, creating youth -- As well across the province and many other investments that our stakeholders and patients and clients are asking for, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP MacLeod: A lot of platitudes. The auditor general even said you haven't improved the children's mental health system in 13 years, but of course you'll fight with her too. The biggest gap in our health care system is the treatment of mental illness. I know that too well. Mental health should be treated no differently than a physical ailment. Just look at some of the initiatives that the largest investment in political history could go to directed -investments into youth and children's mental health. We could have support for those on Ontario's College and university campuses. We could have crisis outreach and support teams as a pilot project and we could invest in mental health services for indigenous populations for preventative mental health system that provides culturally sensitive care. So my question is will the Liberal part match the commitment in the people's guarantee?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we are making unprecedented investments in mental health across this province. But, Mr. Speaker, I have to say, when it comes to the people's guarantee, I honestly was quite intrigued by the title of people's guarantee and I wanted to see if in fact it had been used elsewhere. So, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to understand the inspiration behind the people's guarantee. Mr. Speaker, I scoured the internet high and low, far and wide, and I kid you not, Mr. Speaker, I could not find a single reference to any other people's guarantee, not a single one, until, Mr. Speaker, I went all the way back to 1893. And yes, Mr. Speaker, it's all been done before. You see here is their inspiration. The people's guarantee savings bank of can sass city, Missouri, Mr. Speaker. Group of Conservative minded people, and I'm happy to continue --

>> MPP MacLeod: Speaker, I asked the Minister of health for a commitment and he took me on a time travel back to 1893. Do your job. We're asking for a \$1.9 billion commitment into mental health. The president and C.E.O. Of the council of Ontario universities had this to say and I quote -- student mental health got a big boost this weekend when the Ontario P.C. Party's platform included a \$1.9 billion commitment to mental health. Moralin C.E.O. Of the children's mental health Ontario added -- so pleased to see topping up elementary and secondary school supports for services targeted at improving mental health and well-being, including funding awareness. Additions in mental health Ontario tweeted -- a potentially historic investment for the province. So the question, Minister, will you meet that \$1.9 billion commitment, this historic commitment -- Or will you continue to play partisan politics?

>> 1893, Mr. Speaker. The people's guarantee savings bank of Kansas -- Mr. Speaker, a fledgling group of Conservative minded people who, just months earlier, had earned the confidence of their constituents

who trusted them with their hard-earned money and their savings. Until, Mr. Speaker, only months later, after earning that confidence, the people's guarantee savings bank completely ran out of money and were forced to shut their doors and close. Promises and trust broken, Mr. Speaker, lives shattered. Mr. Speaker, the parallels are staggering. A platform that -- a \$12 billion cut -- is just as doomed to fail as the fledgling people's guarantee savings bank of Kansas City, Missouri. People, I guarantee it.

MPP Horwath to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Prepay Meters

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my question's for the acting Premier. The privatized Hydro One recently redesigned people's hydro bills to include a message from the Liberal party about the impact of their \$40 billion borrowing scheme. Clearly the Liberals still have enough sway over Hydro One that they forced the company to include campaign messaging on people's bills. Why doesn't the acting Premier use that sway to direct the privatized Hydro One not to install prepay hydro meters that will hurt families struggling to keep up with their skyrocketing electricity bills?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'm pleased to rise and to reiterate what Hydro One has said when it comes to the prepaid meters, Mr. Speaker, that none of this, Mr. Speaker, will be forced on to customers. No customer will be forced to take a prepaid meter. It will be their choice, Mr. Speaker, if -- and that's a big if Mr. Speaker -- the Ontario energy board brings forward and allows the application brought forward by Hydro One to actually come forward. So, Mr. Speaker, as Hydro One has said numerous times in the media, as Hydro One has said numerous times out in the community and as I've said in this House many times, Mr. Speaker, this would be, if it passes, Mr. Speaker, an opt-in program for customers. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker .

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, yesterday the society of energy professionals came out against any further privatization of our hydro system. President of the society said this and I quote -- and actually I agree with every word of it -- privatization is a bad deal for ratepayers, a bad deal for taxpayers, and it puts the security of a life-and-death necessity in the hands of a corporation accountable only to its shareholders, end quote. Why won't the Liberal government listen to the experts? Stand up to the people of this province and reverse their decision to sell off Hydro One?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The broadening of ownership of Hydro One has generated \$9 billion through the I.P.O., Mr. Speaker. The government still remains the single largest share hold early of Hydro One and rates will continue to be regulated by the Ontario energy board, Mr. Speaker. But let's look what we are able to do with the money that we are able to generate from that, Mr. Speaker. And I know we kept the Minister of transportation quite business wi that, because we started off with \$13.5 billion in the gtha, with go regional express looking to quadruple the number of weekly trips to 6,000, keeping the Minister of transportation even busier, \$5.3 billion in the Eglinton crosstown L.R.T. I know \$1 billion is also going into Ottawa, the great city of Ottawa, Mr. Speaker, to help them with L.R.T. As well. \$43 million in Waterloo regional transit, Mr. Speaker. We are able to find ways to continue to build Ontario up, Mr. Speaker .

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, Mr. Travers also said and I'm going to quote him again -- privatizing a natural monopoly is never, ever in the public interest. I couldn't agree more. The private Hydro One has undertaken partisan political advertising on people's bills, applied for multiple rate increases, invested in dirty coal-burning American companies, and is proposing to install prepay metre -- meters. This Liberal government sold off our vital public utility with no mandate, against the wishes of 80% of Ontario families, and now they're turning their backs on the damage that this company is doing to our province. Will the acting Premier explain why her government continues to stand by this sell-off when we know that it was the wrong decision for families and businesses?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only wrong decision, Mr. Speaker, was made by that party in the opposition voting against the fair hydro plan that brought forward a 25% reduction for all families and for those Hydro One customers, Mr. Speaker. They've seen reductions anywhere from 30%, 40% all the way up to 50% possibly, Mr. Speaker. Those are the things that we've actually done to help families, Mr. Speaker. And want to talk about helping families? We are building Ontario up. We're creating

jobs right across the province, Mr. Speaker, by building infrastructure. I know I talked about some of the programs that have kept the Minister of infrastructure busy, but I know you know we're also tripling the Ontario community infrastructure fund to \$300 million and that's keeping the Minister of infrastructure busy, Mr. Speaker. We have made sure that the dollars that we have made, the billions of dollars, have been invested in making sure that we can look at programs. We can look at infrastructure and continue to build Ontario up, something the opposition parties continue to vote against, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Horwath to Minister Hoskins Re: Healthcare Privatization

>> Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My next question's also for the acting Premier. Our hydro system should be putting people first, not private profits, and the same is true in our health care system. The NDP Will put forward an teamed bill 160, the Premier's health care privatization bill, to mandate the private clinics, or as the Liberals now call them, community health facilities, be operated on a not-for-profit basis. Will this government support the NDP Amendment or will they just continue to support private for-profit clinics just like the Conservatives?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I know that the legislation is being discussed in committee as we speak over the course of this week, and I look forward to being able to continue the debate here in the legislature, including on schedule 9 which is the aspect the leader of the third party has referenced that calls for greater oversight, greater accountability, greater transparency and plugging any gaps that might exist where the level of oversight, the level of accountability is insufficient for those health prechls that exist outside of the hospital environment Mr. Speaker -- health premises. Of course we're not talking about family health teams or community health centres. We're talking about places like X ray facilities where they do radiology. It's critically important that we have a regime that Ontarians can have confidence in. That provides that necessary oversight so we can be assured of the highest quality of care.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, privatization of our health care system is not in the best interests of Ontarians. But -- but bill 160 makes it easier for companies to open private clinics in Ontario. That's what bill 160 does. That's why we are calling it the Liberal health privatization bill. And this government refuses to support our NDP Amendment to make sure that all private clinics are not-for-profit facilities. People should not be profiting, companies should not be profiting on the health care of Ontario families. Why is this government clearing the way for more private for-profit clinics instead of improving the public health Carol of Ontario families?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I would welcome the leader of the third party to show me precisely where in schedule 9 it does, according to her, make it easier for the establishment of private clinics. It does not, Mr. Speaker. And it eliminates the possibilities of any future private hospitals. But, Mr. Speaker, we have had a moratorium in this government for many, many years on the establishment of any out-of-hospital for-profit entities including clinics, the alleged private clinics that the member O sit reports to be so concerned about. Mr. Speaker, in fact since 2011 -- and I don't have the data going back further -- but 2011, there were only five licences provided for out-of-hospital premises all them not-for-profit, Mr. Speaker. That's less than one a year and all for not-for-profit. So I'm not exactly sure. I suspect that it is additionally her efforts to fear monger about our health care system. Across Ontario. We are not changing our approach. We've had a moratorium. We're' eliminating the possibilities of any future private hospitals and we're bringing all these regimes. Highly accountable system.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, whether the health Minister wants to acknowledge it or not, there are now 1,000 private for-profit clinics operating in the province of Ontario because of decisions the Conservatives and Liberals have made over the last number of years. Bill 160, the Premier's -- This Premier's health privatization bill is another huge disappointment for the people of Ontario. Despite everything they say, when this government has a chance to stop for-profit clinics and support not-for-profit care, they won't commit to doing it. Why is the Liberal government working so hard to expand privatization in health care, just like they did in our hydro system instead of improving health care for people who need it?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's interesting that earlier in this week, including yesterday, the leader of the third party was concerned about the establishment of private hospitals. But obviously she had another look at her legislation. She talked to her stakeholders including the Ontario health coalition and realized that she was wrong. That we are absolutely clear in our intent to ban any future private

hospitals. So now she's moved on to something else. Mr. Speaker, we have defended universal health care in this province since coming into government in 2003. We will continue to defend universal health care. Schedule 8 9 provides for higher quality care, high early oversight, more accountability, more transparency of all of those facilities that do exist outside of our hospital system, many of which, by the way, were created by the NDP Or licensed by the P.C.S.

MPP Jones to Minister Hoskins Re: Mental Health Services

>> MPP Sylvia Jones: My question is for the Minister of health. My Colleague, my friend, the member from Nepean- Carleton asked you a very serious question about mental health in the province of Ontario today. And you came back with some ridiculous story from 1893. Minister of health, I want an answer. We want an answer. Do you believe that mental health in the province of Ontario needs the support now, not in 1893?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, our record on mental health stands and proves it has been a priority for this government since we came into office in 2003. Mr. Speaker, we have increased our funding for mental health and addiction services by almost double this, Mr. Speaker, since coming into office. Our plan is to increase funding by an additional 220 million over the next three years. We have provided support and investments that provide for more than 50,000 additional children and youth to have access to mental health and addiction services. We are creating youth wellness hubs which provide those wraparound supports. Mr. Speaker, we have created over 2,000 new supportive housing units over the last two years for individuals with mental health challenges. The first ever in this country cognitive behavioural therapy program for Ontarians, Mr. Speaker. There's a long list and I think probably every one they opposed.

>> MPP Jones: You turned the question from Lisa Macleod into a joke. You laughed. You were not taking it seriously. I don't know why. Why? Because she asked a question? Because you don't think that we understand that mental health is in the province of Ontario? You were dismissive. You were rude, and you need to apologize.

>> Minister Hoskins: That party was talking about their platform and I was talking about their platform, Mr. Speaker. I created a Minister s' mental health and leadership advisory council when I came into -- As Minister of health. For the 25 individuals, the most exceptional individuals, including many of them with lived exp Erience and advocates and experts across the hospitals, in the communities, academics. Everyone imaginable that would be able to provide the best possible advice to this ministry and to me as Minister. And we listened, Mr. Speaker. Every year they produce an annual report. In fact the next one is due shortly in the coming weeks and every year we respond in a tangible way to the advice that they provide us. 2,000 more supportive housing units. Youth wellness hubs across the province. Cognitive behavioural therapy which was their number one ask, Mr. Speaker. We introduced. We are making unprecedented investments. There can be no health without mental health, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Sattler (Gretzky) to Minister Matthews Re: College Strike

>> MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of advanced education and skills development. With the December 5th deadline for College tuition refunds fast approaching, the chaos and confusion continues. Faculty concerned about students achieving required competencies and a shortened semester are being suspended. Students who want a fresh start in their tuition refunded risk losing their program entirely. Students are being forced to jump through impossible hoops to access the hardship fund. College student alliance said this week, we've been in contact with the government daily, shooting questions almost nonstop, because there is so much left unanswered. Speaker, will the Minister take responsibility and clarify options for students so that College students can make informed decisions about their futures?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. I'm very happy to report that students are back in the classroom, Speaker. Of course had the NDP Been in office, they would still be on strike. But they are the overwhelming programs, Speaker, are up and running. Students are in the midst of completing their semesters. I want to take the opportunity to congratulate and thank the faculty members who have made this possible. There is, Speaker, an opportunity if students wish. If they do not feel confident that they can

complete, they can withdraw. They will get a full tuition refund and there will be no academic penalty for doing that, Speaker. We did for the first time in history establish a fund for students who have experienced exceptional hardship when it comes to -- As a result. Strike, Speaker. We will know more about that in comes day -- coming days.

>> MPP Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the Minister, who could have acted long before the five-week mark to get the Colleges back to the bargaining table. My constituent Angelica, a student at St. Clair College, e-mailed the Minister asking about this very issue and would really appreciate some answers. Angelica was part of a work study program. She specifically chose work study because these programs are very accommodating for students. But when she went to her financial aid office to receive compensation for lost wages under the hardship fund, she was denied. Mr. Speaker, when anyone, student or otherwise is hired for a job, there is an expectation that in the event of a layoff, the employee will be compensated. Angelica was actually quoted in the cbc article as saying "I feel like I've been forgotten by the ministry of education." Mr. Speaker, will the Minister respond to Angelica's email. What plan does he have Angelica and hundreds of other students will get the compensation they deserve?

>> Minister Matthews: Mr. Speaker, there are obviously many situations that we are dealing with on a daily basis. The C.F.A., College student alliance, does have a specific point person in my office. They have been communicating daily. The vast majority of the questions have been answered, Speaker. We work very closely with students through this whole strike to make sure that they are front and centre, Speaker. I would suggest that the member opposite, if there's a specific concern about a specific student. First of all they must work with their College. That is who is distributing the funds, Speaker. But -- if my office can help, we would be more than happy to do that.

MPP Qaadri to Minister Chiarelli Re: Long-Term Infrastructure Plan

>> MPP Safiq Qaadri: [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of infrastructure. [End of Translation] Appreciate the Minister's 2011 long-term infrastructure plan, building together, and the diligent work that's been proceeding. This includes, Speaker, a \$400 million expansion in my only riding of Etobicoke general hospital, which will eventually quadruple the floor space. The 2017 long-term infrastructure plan is entitled "Building et -- better lives" and of course embodies a number of the government's core values. These developments shape who we are and help Ontario live life to the fullest. This includes, Speaker, a \$2 billion expansion of the finch L.R.T., with eight stops in my own riding. The Minister of transportation actually informs my riding yesterday and together we made a related announcement. Speaker, I know there's a number of details of the current plan, building better lives. I ask the Minister to please detail some of those.

>> Minister Bob Chiarelli: Thank you, Speaker. Thanks to the member for the question. A new plan built from a position of strength. \$190 billion, the largest infrastructure investment in the province's history, averaging \$12 billion per year, Speaker. We've carried out 100 major hospital projects with 35,000 more in plan or under construction. We're investing almost \$20 billion in G.O. Transit expansion. For smaller and rural municipalities, we tripled ocip to \$300 million annually and invested \$490 million in broadband. In partnership with the federal government, we are delivering 600 transit projects and 1,300 Klee clean water and wastewater projects. And we're the first Ontario government to invest in rural natural gas expansion with a \$100 million program, which the Conservatives have cancelled in their plan, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'll have more details in my supplementary.

>> MPP Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker. I'd commend the Minister on that array of projects that he's listed. In particular I think it's important folks across Ontario have access to broadband. And so the broadband strategy and the remated community pilot project of course I think will have a material impact on the quality of life for people across tomorrow. I know as well that the long-term infrastructure plan also includes measures to make infrastructure greener as well as keep community needs at the heart of decision making. The plan is going to guide our unprecedented investment in public infrastructure and make sure that we're building the right thing at the right place at the right time for the right reasons. Speaker, this is as you might imagine more important than ever as Ontario faces climate change, destructive technologies and an aging population. In my own riding as I've mentioned, Speaker, whether it's the hospital, the College, the infrastructure, roads, highways we have an extraordinary amount of

development. I'd like to thank the Minister personally. My question is -- [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: My question is, account Minister elaborate in terms of the measures that our government is implementing? [End of Translation]

>> Minister Chiarelli: Speaker, our infrastructure investment supports 125,000 jobs per year, and there's much more than bricks and mortar. It's an investment in people and it's about building better lives. Our new plan announce as new broadband strategy and expand community benefit programs. It will phase in life cycle assessment to reduce our carbon footprint and the sale of surplus property will include a social purpose analysis. In their last year the Conservatives invested just \$1.9 billion in infrastructure, not even enough for maintenance of existing infrastructure, and invested next to nothing in the energy sector. They promised billions of new spending and buried on page 76 is \$12 billion in cuts that they're promising the people of Ontario. And those are just the cuts they're being up front about. Speaker, all of that is sleight of hand by the Conservatives.

MPP Martow to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Child-Care Funding

>> MPP Gila Martow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister responsible for early years and child care. The Minister 's obviously very close with Martha friendly the found early and executive director of the child care resource and research unit. Yesterday friendly said that delivering child care relief is, and I quote, a waste of taxpayer money, end of quote. Now we here on the P.C. Side profoundly disagree with Martha friendly. That's why the people's guarantee refunds up to 75% of a family's child care expenses or up to \$6,750 per child. Supporting families isn't a waste to tus -- us. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister -- miss friendly's comments that child care relief is a waste of taxpayer money?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really want to thank the member opposite for this question, because it gives me a chance to really talk about the amazing work that we're doing when it comes to child care in this province. And I want to start out by saying band-aid solutions are not a solution. What we are working on here on this side of the House is working on really solutions, solutions that are going to transform the way we deliver child care in this province. And that starts by building a solid foundation, which is what we're doing. So we're not doing the cash grab, here's money up front. What we're doing essentially is a deep dive into those changes that need to happen when it comes to fees, when it comes to quality, when it comes to affordability. The plan coming from the other side of the House does none of those things. They're not doing anything to reduce fees. They're not doing anything to build quality spaces. They're not making child care more affordable. They're not doing anything for the work force. We need 20,000 more early childhood educators. We have a plan in place. We're doing everything we can to ensure that we're building a solid system. We're not just saying that we're going to give people a certain amount of money. Up front and that's it.

>> MPP Martow: Thank you. Back to the Minister. I noticed the Minister didn't comment on miss friendly's comment, but respected economist Kevin milligan did. And he said and I quote -- Martha friendly gets many of the policy details wrong. Let me repeat that, wrong. Now, this is coming from someone who is close to a government that will says facts still matter. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister tell her friend, Martha friendly, that she is wrong and that child care relief is not a waste of taxpayer money?

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: You know, Speaker, I'm not going to get into an argument about which person said what and, you know, which comment is more on track than others. What I will say is this. When it comes to child care and affordability, we know well enough on this side of the House to trust the experts in the field. And that's why I have a table that actually informs us. It's called meak. It's made up of 60 different organizations or more that are really experts on many different levels that are informing us about what they think should be happening. And the reality is this. The plan that the P.C. Has put forward doesn't do anything when it comes to building the system. We know, in fact, that what they've chosen to do is recycle Stephen Harper's infamous child care scheme, one that saw rich families benefit while middle- and low-income families were left behind. Where is this funding they're talking about? They're going to cut out \$12 billion, \$12 billion out of the system. We are putting money into the system because we get it. Investments are how you build.

MPP Forster to Minister Hoskins Re: Public Health Funding

>> MPP Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the acting Premier. After years of frozen hospital budgets, this government just keeps on cutting health care. Niagara public health now expects its provincial funding to be frozen for a fourth straight year. Fund be has been frozen under this Premier since 2015, and as a direct result, niagara public health is being forced to lay off crucial public health workers. As mayor Dave Augustine from Pelham says, this Liberal government has, and I quote -- cut to the bone, and now we're cutting to the bone. Why is this government forcing niagara public health to lay off workers who keep our families safe and healthy and our communities safe?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, we absolutely value our public health units, the hard working health care professionals and all staff that work within those entities to provide critically important care, especially on the prevention side, and -- but also help us when we are facing public health crises like the one we are facing with opioids today. In fact niagara public health received substantial new funding this year so they could hire more full-time workers to work specifically on the opioid crisis. But, Mr. Speaker, we have dramatically increased our funding for public health since we came into office. In fact increased by roughly half a billion dollars, almost double -- more than doubling. Our contribution. And we continue to make those important investments because we believe so strongly in the work that they do.

>> MPP Forster: Speaker, we all know public health is incredibly important. They provide exceptional support for everyone from new moms to little ones to health and safety inspections to emergency dental care for our most vulnerable. And I agree with my local medical officer of health that public health deserves to get more funding, not less. But for four straight years this Premier has frozen public health funding forcing cuts of almost 2% per year, cuts that our local councillors in niagara call disturbing. Will this Liberal government stop acting like the Conservatives, stop cutting public health in niagara and save the jobs of our public health workers and the services that our families in niagara --

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, we increased health -- public health funding last year, Mr. Speaker, and we increased public health funding this year, Mr. Speaker. I'm a public health doctor myself. I understand just how critically important that work is to our province and we're making the requisite investments. Healthy smiles Ontario where almost 400,000 children benefit each year. That is 100% funded by the province. Our 180 infectious disease control staff across the province through our public health units, 100% funded by the ministry of health. Smoke free Ontario strategy where our public health units are critically important in that work, Mr. Speaker, 100% funded by the provincial government. We fund 147 nursing positions, including chief nursing officers. Infection control nurses and public health nurses. We provide 100% of that funding, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to make those important investments.

MPP Martins to Minister MacCharles Re: Accessibility in Ontario

>> MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister responsible for accessibility. Our government has made it a priority to increase accessibility and remove Barriers for persons with disabilities. I have constituents in my riding of Davenport who have raised questions about what we are doing to remove Barriers and make Ontario a more accessible place to live. As well, this coming Sunday marks the united nations international day of persons with disabilities. The theme this year is transformation towards a sustainable and resilient society for all. Could the Minister please tell us what this government is doing to support this worthy goal?

>> Minister Tracy MacCharles: Thank you. I want to thank the member from Davenport for her important question this morning. Key to the foundation, Speaker, of a sustainable resilient society of course is a strong economy. And our government has taken several steps to insure our economy is fuelled by people with diverse skills and talents. To that end, in June, we launched a comprehensive new plan to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities and it's called access talent. Speaker, we have five existing accessibility standards for areas including transportation, customer service and employment, are working towards two new accessibility standards in education and health care. The education standard in particular, Speaker, will meet a serious and growing need in our educational system. Speaker, with close

to 400,000 students in Ontario who are identified as having disabilities, be exceptional. Or special education programs, the significance of this new standard is clearment and I look forward to providing more information in the supplemental.

>> MPP Martins: Thank you, Minister. Mr. Speaker, this government's stellar record at making Ontario accessible is undeniable. With the passing of the landmark accessibility for Ontarians with disability act, or A.O.D.A. Rather, Ontario became the model for other jurisdictions to follow. Speaker last month the federal Minister of sport and persons with disabilities, the Honourable Ken turler, indicated that the federal government has decided to see to the actual protocol in the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. My question for the Minister is will this government commit to this House to join our federal counterpart in adopting the optional protocol in the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities?

>> Minister MacCharles: Speaker, I am very delighted and pleased to inform the House today that our government has officially given its support to the federal government on the optional protocol in the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. This is very significant. We are tireless in our efforts to make every aspect of everyday living easier for people with disabilities and we're firmly committed to building on the momentum from accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities act. Our government committed to making this promise accessible by 2025 and our support of Canada's inclusion in the UNas optional protocol is a clear signal that our determination is unwavering and steadfast. Accessibility's the main priority for our government, Speaker, and we are propelling a positive shift towards fairness and opportunity for people. Of all abilities. Thank you.

MPP Coe to Minister Matthews Re: Campus Mental Health Services

>> MPP Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for Deputy Premier. Together alt report co-authored by Colleges Ontario, the council of Ontario universities, the College student alliance and the Ontario undergraduate student alliance highlights the mental health crisis, Speaker, of postsecondary campuses throughout Ontario. This report, Speaker, clearly documents the critical need for mental health supports and services for students. That is why Patrick Brown and the Ontario Progressive Conservative party have committed \$1.9 billion over ten years to implement mental health services and supports across the province. Speaker will the Liberal government match today the Ontario P.C. Party's commitment for mental health services and supports?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I think we all agree mental health services on campuses, the demand for services is increasing and we must be there to support students who are facing mental health challenges. And that's exactly why, Speaker, we added an additional \$6 million annually on top of the 9 million we were already investing, to bring the total investment to campus mental health to \$15 million. I have to say I was very supportive and very happy to see that those four organizations joined together to create one report that really shines a light on the importance of investing in mental health services for people on our campuses, Speaker. I'm proud of that initiative but I know there is more to do.

>> MPP Coe: Now back to the Deputy Premier. Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, I'd like to share a quote from a leader in Ontario's postsecondary education sector. And here's what she had to say -- we're very pleased to see the commitment by Ontario P.C. Leader Patrick Brown to increase funding for mental health services for postsecondary students. This is a huge priority on our campuses. Who said that, Speaker ? The president and chief executive officer of Colleges Ontario, Linda Franklin. Speaker, the Ontario P.C. Party will make the largest mental health investment in Canadian provincial history, \$1.9 billion. Speaker, will the Liberal government agree to match P.C. Party's commitment today and address the mental health crisis that exists on Ontario's postsecondary campuses?

>> Minister Matthews: Well, Speaker, as I said we're absolutely committed to improving mental health services on campuses in addition to what we've already done. One way that we are reducing stress on students, Speaker, is by taking burden, financial burden off their shoulders through the new osap. We know that money can be a real mental health stress storm. This is an important step towards easing some of that burden, Speaker. But I have to come back to the \$12 billion in cuts that that party has put inside their platform. \$12 billion. It is impossible to find that kind of money without cutting health services,

including mental health services. So yes, Speaker, these are guaranteed cuts.

MPP Gelinas to Minister Naqvi (Flynn) Re: Sudbury Counselling Centre Strike

>> MPP France Gelinas: Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [End of Translation] Speaker, members of the Sudbury community, particularly the francophone community, are experiencing hardships and the loss of the services they need due to the prolonged labour dispute of the Sudbury counselling centre. Twelve members of U.S.W. Local 2020, all of them women, have been on strike for seven long weeks. I visited the picket line on Friday and Mr. Tim Horton came to talk to me. Mr. Horton is a survivor of serious trauma and a client of the centre. He's having a really tough time right now. He needs access to the care and he has nowhere else to turn. Why is this government leaving people in my area, like Mr. Warton, without the care they need for seven long weeks?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate the question from the member opposite. She had spoken to me about this issue before as well. You know, we of course are mindful of the fact, Speaker, that there is a labour disruption or strike that's taking place and as a result, Speaker, services are interrupted. Speaker, the commitment of course of my community is to make sure those very important vital services that are necessary for individuals who need these court mandated services or victim services in both official languages, in French and English are provided. We're hopeful that the parties will resume negotiations and get back to the table and able to come to an agreement because that's, as we know, Speaker, it is the best way of making sure those services resume. In the meantime. We are mindful. We want to make sure and we are concerned as well, Speaker, that those services, important services and we are hopeful -- As soon as possible.

>> MPP Gelinas: Thank you, Speaker. The workers at Sudbury counselling centre provide counselling, psychotherapy, employee assistance programs, partner assaults program response both for men and for women. Counselling for women experiencing domestic violence. Assistance for male survivors of sexual violence. They even counsel some of our youngest citizens, little kids, before they need to sit in as witness in the witness stand before a judge and jury. Nine of those 13 programs they provide are unique. They are not available anywhere else in our area. Account Minister please explain why he's leaving some of Sudbury and Nickel Belt's most vulnerable residents and the people who depend on them literally out in the cold?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member for that very, very important question. Nifs Sudbury just last week with the Minister of energy. Obviously this was an issue that came up as we toured through the community. I can tell you in the province of Ontario, Speaker, about 98% of all Collective agreements are reached without having to resort to a strike, without having to resort to a lockout. The labour relations regime in this province, Speaker, is second to none. From time to time, Speaker, unfortunately sides cannot come to agreement. That's where the staff from the ministry of labour come in, Speaker. The mediators we have, the arbitrators we have on staff are amongst the best in the world. We have a number of mediators that are working on this case, Speaker, and I'm pleased to report to the House that the sides have agreed to return to the table in early December, Speaker. We know know that the best agreements are those that are reached at the table, negotiating nature is tough, Speaker. It's supposed table tough. And we hope that cooler heads prevail here, Speaker, that we can get an agreement and to serve the people of Sudbury.

MPP Potts to Minister Thibeault Re: Smart Grid Fund

>> MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of energy. Ontario is well known as a leader in the field of innovation and new emerging technologies, especially clean and sustainable technologies. Just a few weeks ago the long-term energy plan made a solemn commitment to Ontarians to continue building an affordable and clean electricity system in which customers are given more choices in their energy use, like with net metering and so that shows, Speaker, demonstrates Ontarians and their families continue to be at the centre of our plan. But, Speaker, the plan also talked about how innovative technologies have the potential to transform Ontario's energy system and to keep up with these changing technologies, Ontario has relaunched the smart grid fund. And it will support the growth and the advancement of the province's electricity grid in a smart and clean way, sustainable way as possible. So, Speaker, will the Minister please provide more information to the House about the smart grid fund and how

it is helping Ontario -- And our energy system as a whole?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also want to thank the member for Beaches- East York for his constant advocacy for hydrogen and many other instances that help us with our smart grid fund. Mr. Speaker, the smart grid fund was launched in 2011 to support innovation in Ontario's electricity sector. Ontario's innovation has produced a wide range of technologies such as home energy management, grid automation, energy storage, which is a game changer, Mr. Speaker. Micro grid, cyber security and electric vehicle integration. Through this fund, Mr. Speaker, Ontario companies have solved problems on distribution grids and utilities have increased their understanding of how the smart grid can benefit the system and their customers. Just last week, Mr. Speaker, ENER store secured funding from the situation -- swiss-based Susie energy storage fund to roll out innovative. Behind-the-meter energy storpgel storage conclusion at commercial and institutional sites in Canada, Mr. Speaker. I want to congratulate ENER store and look forward to adding more in the supplementary.

>> MPP Potts: Thank you not Minister fort incredible work he's done to help transform our electrical system into the future to the best it can be. The smart grid fund, through it our government continues to support jobs growth and innovation. There are tremendous opportunities as the Minister noted with hydrogen technologys and other power fuel technology particularly around areas like smart electric vehicle chargers and there's more. And a number of the previously successful recipients of the smart grid fund and the products that they have developed are now gaining traction in foreign markets, including end dimension solutions which is a cyber security firm, which can boast over 100 utility companies using their services in North America. All be smart distribution system. It's a monitoring software that has been installed by over 140 utility companies. There's a new transformer sensors by grid 2020. And it's been ses test under 11 countries. Would the Minister please inform the House as to how the government will continue to support local into vairts through the smart grid fund?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again thank you to the member for the question. As part of our government's grid modernization strategy, now is the right time to build on the success by renewing and enhancing the smart grid fund. That is why our 2017 long-term energy plan entitled "Delivering fairness and choice" committed \$60 million, Mr. Speaker, in new smart grid funding, and we intend to launch a call for applications before the end of the year. This will continue our government's strong support of Ontario's innovation sector and help overcome Barriers to electricity grid modernization. An enhanced smart grid fund will focus on encouraging the culture of innovation within the electricity sector that explores new solution for integrating technologies, test new business model,, incorporates electricity and other energy resources and generates new ideas for advancing grid modernization, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to be able to launch this program.

MPP N.Mller to Minister Thibeault Re: Northern Ontario Heritage Fund

>> MPP N.Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Deputy Premier. Mr. Speaker, in March of 2015, the northern Ontario heritage fund gave \$4 million to california-based rentech to convert two sawmills in wawa and Atikokan into wood pellet manufacturing plants. It sounded like good news. It was protectk jekted to create 60 jobs in these communities -- projected. In February of this year, less than two years later rentech closed the wawa plant and now they have the Atikokan plant up for sale. News coverage says the northern Ontario heritage fund is asking the company to pay \$2.5 million back, but rentech seems to believe they have complied with their commitments. Speaker, will the Deputy Premier please tell Ontarians how this government is going to make sure this company doesn't leave Ontario -- Without repaying the money?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Always pleased to rise and talk about the great work that's happening in northern Ontario and a lot of the accomplishments that are happening thanks to the northern Ontario heritage fund. The northern Ontario heritage fund is continuing to invest in creating a diverse economy in northern Ontario and one that's creating jobs. Just last week in my riding of Sudbury, when I had the Minister of agriculture and small business and the Minister of labour with me in Sudbury, Mr. Speaker, we talked about some of the programs that the nohc has been bringing forward to help mining companies, to help forestry companies, to help the movie sector, Mr. Speaker. We are creating more film and television programs in northeastern and northwestern Ontario, Mr. Speaker, that is creating over 1,200 jobs. We are making sure -- Mr. Speaker, that northern Ontario is continuing to grow and

prosper thanks to the investments that this government is making to the northern Ontario heritage fund, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP N.Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister didn't seem to understand my question. This is not the first time that the northern Ontario heritage fund has invested in companies only to see them leave before making their commitments were fulfilled. Earlier this year great Lakes graphite left Ontario just ten months after the government gave the company \$400,000. Our leader is committed to penalize companies that take advantage of government programs and then leave town. Speaker, what has this government done to ensure future northern Ontario heritage fund grants don't go to companies that are not committed to staying in northern Ontario?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again very pleased to stand and talk about the \$100 million-a-year investments that we are making to ensure that the priorities of northerners are being met. And since 2003, Mr. Speaker, the northern Ontario heritage fund has invested \$1.2 billion, which has directly created over 32,000 jobs across northern Ontario, helping northerners live, work and build careers in the north, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about a few of those things. We've expanded broadband to 100,000 more people in northern Ontario. \$32 million of that, Mr. Speaker, has been invested to support the expansion of broadband infrastructure into 21 remote first nations communities. \$6 billion invested since 2003 in our northern highways program, Mr. Speaker. Keeping the Minister of transportation busy. We're continuing to finish the expansion of highway 69 making our roads safer and bringing more economic development to northern Ontario.

MPP Hatfield to Minister Del Duca Re: Electric Vehicle Rebates

>> MPP Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. My question this morning is for the Deputy Premier. Good morning. The Liberals grabbed the headlines, Speaker, with a rebate for people buying new electric vehicles, fuel efficient vehicles. Here's a new headline. The Liberals are deadbeats. They're not paying their bills. Some -- Owed as much as half a billion dollars. I have a dealer in my riding that is owed \$300,000. A small business fronting these guys over here who aren't paying their bills. Dealers front the rebate off the top, Speaker. They file the paperwork to get it back. And it takes seven months or more for that to happen. Seven months or more, and then sometimes they're told oh, you made a mistake in the form. Start all over again. In the spirit of being open and transparent, when will these deadbeat Liberals start paying the rebates to new car dealers in a timely fashion?

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I thank the member from Windsor for his interesting question. Obviously, Speaker, our government's very proud of the fact that we provide generous incentives to the electric vehicle incentive program. For those individuals who are both purchasing or leasing -- Speaker, as I was saying we're very proud of the fact the electric vehicle incentive program both for the purchase and lease of vehicles and also to support the purchase of home based charging infrastructure. Our government provides very generous incentives. The member is right. There have been some challenges within the processing of payments for those. In some cases dealers and in some cases individuals to receive their rebates. I can assure the member that the government. And ministry of transportation are working very hard to fix some of the challenges and I anticipate that the individual dealer that he's talking about will receive the rebate soon. Speaker, I will also point out really quickly all of this really and truly underscores how successful these programs actually --