

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Thursday, October 5, 2017

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Thursday, October 5, 2017

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MPP Smith to Minister Duguid Re: Hydro One Salaries

>> MPP Todd Smith: Thank you, Speaker. My question this morning is for the acting Premier. Speaker, we know that the opposition parties think that the \$4.6 million compensation package for the Hydro One C.E.O. is too high. We know that the Ontario public thinks that the \$4.6 million in salaries for the C.E.O. At Hydro One is too high. We now know that the Ontario energy board, the O.E.B. Thinks that the \$4.6 million salary for the C.E.O. Of Hydro One is too high. What we don't know, Speaker, is do the Liberals think that the \$4.6 million salary for the C.E.O. Of Hydro One is too high?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure why the opposition has such a tough time understanding the role of the Ontario energy board. I'm not so sure why -- they seem to want to have it both ways. When the Ontario energy board makes a decision that I think, you know, we all believe is in the public interest and do their job, they want to criticize. And then they talk about the Ontario energy board not having any role whatsoever in trying to lead consumers into thinking -- I think they're trying to lead consumers into thinking somehow the government sets rates, not the Ontario energy board. Ontario energy board, we're proud of the role that will they're playing standing up for consumers. As this government did when we cut the energy rates by 25% for consumers.

>> MPP Smith: Speaker, perhaps the Minister didn't understand the question but the Ontario energy board has ruled that \$4.6 million is too high of a salary for the C.E.O. At Hydro One. That salary was handed to the C.E.O. By this Premier and this Liberal government. Two years ago the Premier tried to defend this outrageous salary by saying this is what they pay in corporate America. And that's actually less than American energy C.E.O.s so \$4.6 million is acceptable is what the Premier said. But I don't think the Premier can still spin it that way given the decision by the O.E.B. In the last week that we're paying way too much for all of the executives at Hydro One. It doesn't require spin, Mr. Minister, Speaker. Mr. Speaker, do the Liberals think that -- it's really simple. Do the Liberals think that a \$4.6 million salary for the C.E.O. Of Hydro One is too high?

>> Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, a party that used to understand the importance of putting private sector decision making in some of our agencies now seems to want to go the exact opposite direction. Hydro One is now a publicly traded company. Our role, Mr. Speaker, is to ensure that they have the ability to provide the best possible level of service for the people of this province, taking advantage of that private sector acumen and improving the level of service and improving the returns to the people of this province of that now publicly traded corporation. We believe that's going to be in the public interest. We believe we're going to seal and we're seeing improvements in our energy system as a result of that, and we believe the Ontario energy board is doing their role in performing it very well in ensuring. That public interest continues to be served. I'm not sure where the member finds that there is some kind of a problem with --

>> MPP Smith: I'm re-reading the lines here. It seems like the Minister believes that a \$4.6 million salary for the C.E.O. Of Hydro One is acceptable, and his Liberal government believes that a \$4.6 million salary for the C.E.O. is acceptable. And I can tell you that people across the province disagree with this Liberal government, vociferously disagree. Bill Kelly from Chm1 in Hamilton put it pretty well. He said the Ontario energy board's recent decision slapped down Hydro One because they wanted rate pay Tories quote cover what they call administrative costs which is a sly way of saying that they wanted more money to give increases to their already overpaid executives. In fact, in the O.E.B. Ruling, he decided that the budget needed to be cut by \$30 million. So, Mr. Speaker, why does it take -- The Ontario energy board and not the Liberal government to slap down these high-priced executives at Hydro One?

>> Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, this is far from the first time that the Ontario energy board has asked one of the energy agencies to reduce their rate asks, their rate increase asks. In fact it's very,

very normal. It happens almost every single year and every single application. I can share with the member a list of dozens of times where this has happened. The Ontario energy board's doing their job looking out for consumers across this province. This government's doing our job by lowering energy rates across this province for those very consumers. Mr. Speaker, I ask the member opposite to do his job and tell it like it is, Mr. Speaker, that the energy board is simply doing what it's in their job procedurally to ensure that consumers' interests are looked after, and at the same time we have an energy system that is being improved. On a daily basis by this new publicly traded company. Good news for the entire province.

MPP Fedeli to Minister Sousa Re: Economic Growth in Ontario

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you and good morning, Speaker. My question's for the Minister of finance. Last month there were two legislative reports on the state of Ontario's finances. They were described as blistering and scathing. And those descriptions, Speaker, are well deserved. Both of the legislature -- Both of the legislative -- legislature's independent officers openly challenged the ministry's credibility. The financial accountability office said that the Minister is using, quote, unlikely assumptions, quote, to make his debt claims. In fact they said that if any of these wild assumptions fall short, the government's targets would not be achieved. They particularly took issue with the government's overly optimistic growth projection. So, Speaker, if the F.A.O. Doesn't believe the Minister's numbers, why should the people of Ontario?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, economists independent of government across Canada have cited this. Ontario is leading the way in economic growth in our country. The board of Canada has cited that we've outperformed, this had the most transparent levels of reporting than any other government in Canada. Mr. Speaker, this member opposite continuously degrades and talks down the outstanding achievements of Ontarians and businesses in our province that are creating wealth, create greater prosperity, hiring for jobs and the lowest unemployment of any part of this country and we are overachieving every single year that we put forward our budget to the benefit of Ontario. We've reduced the deficit to under \$900 million, Mr. Speaker, just last year, and we're going for it. We're balancing the budget the year, next year and the year after that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Fedeli: Back to the Minister. The f.a.o.'s comments were strong enough, but, Speaker, the auditor general painted an even more damning picture of the Minister's financial reporting. For the second year in a row, the auditor wouldn't sign off on the province's books without a big asterisk. But the auditor went further, stating flat out that the statements are, quote, significantly misstated, quote. She says our deficit last year was \$1.4 billion higher than claimed and our debt is a whopping \$12.4 billion higher. She warned us and the markets and investors that we need to be able to rely on government's figures being accurate, but this year they cannot do so. That's her quote. You cannot rely on their numbers is her quote. Speaker, again we ask -- and I know -- the auditor. I can hear their comments. We ask the A.G. And F.A.O. Don't believe the Minister's numbers. Why should we?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, investors around the world believe our numbers. The people of Ontario and throughout Canada who buy our bonds believe our numbers. We have the highest liquidity of trade in bonds of any government across this continent in fact. And, Mr. Speaker, our debt to G.D.P. Has been reduced and it continues to reduce below 37%. Again overachieving our targets. Our deficits which is a representation of that historical activity of Ontario's budgets, today, Mr. Speaker, it's at around 27%, the same as it was 25 years ago, Mr. Speaker. Our interest on debt as a percentage of revenue today is 8%. When he was in power, when the Progressive Conservatives were in power, Mr. Speaker, it was 15% of our revenues. We are overachieving and we continually do so. We are using the same standards as we've always done including what the auditor general has done even as recently as three years ago. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Fedeli: Thank you. Back to the Minister. So if the Minister is comfortable using, quote, significant misstatements and, quote, unlikely assumptions, then it should be no surprise to hear what else he continues to claim. They continue to say, quote, we're leading the G-7 in economic growth. But Ontario is not number one, Speaker. There are 27 US States ahead of us. And the

Minister continues to claim that manufacturing exports are up. But statscan just last week reported that Ontario manufacturing sales suffered their largest decline in eight years. Here are some of the recent headings. Trade deteriorates. Exports languish. Ontario residents hit hard by manufacturing downturn. International merchandise exports fell. Manufacturing sales slipped. Speaker, given all these examples plus the financial accountability officer -- And the auditor general's criticism, how can anyone trust anything this government says?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, facts do matter, and that's -- Mr. Speaker, facts matter. This member opposite is citing sources -- Citing references from years past, recognizing that, as of today, Ontario is ahead of the curve. Our unemployment rate is the lowest it's been in 16 years at 5.7%. And, Mr. Speaker, that's not to say that we're not continuously looking at stimulating economic growth around all of Ontario, recognizing some regional -- Exists. That member opposite and that party voted against those measures that improve prosperity, stimulated growth and continuously balanced the books.

MPP French to Minister Hoskins Re: Healthcare Investments

>> MPP Jennifer French: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the acting Premier. In my community of Oshawa, I have constituents come into my office all the time to tell me about their long wait times in the E.R. Lakeridge health Oshawa is no different than hospitals in Tillsonburg or Etobicoke or Brampton or Toronto or Peterborough, which just announced that it will open 24 beds without help from this Liberal government, just to try and keep up with the number of people who need care. In February of 2017, the occupancy rate of Lakeridge Health Oshawa's acute care beds reached 92%. Does the Premier have a plan to fix this unhealthy mess that she's helped create in Oshawa?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course unlike the party opposite that simply opposes all of the plans that we have for addressing capacity and wait time challenges across this province, different than the party who opposed our \$500 million investment in hospitals earlier this spring, we do have a plan. And with Lakeridge specifically -- and they are facing challenges, because the member knows it's a rapidly growing area. We've given them a planning grant so that they can actually plan not just for today but also 20, 30 years into the future for that entire region of Durham. In fact we're doing the same in Scarborough, Mr. Speaker. But for Lakeridge itself specifically, they're working together with Ontario Shores to open up a brand-new behavioural support unit. Which is specific that we provide 20 beds for A.L.C. Patients that have mental health needs, Mr. Speaker, so they can -- Out of pocket for a more appropriate setting.

>> MPP French: Mr. Speaker, again to the acting Premier. Lakeridge Health in Whitby is also over capacity. In February it reached 102%. I would like to remind the Premier again that a maximum of 85% over capacity is considered safe. The Premier has said over and over again that she makes decisions based on evidence. Well, the evidence that Ontario's hospitals are facing an overcrowding in hallway medicine crisis is out there. The evidence is piling up, literally piling up in the hallways. Why is the Premier refusing to act on the facts?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm gratified the member opposite mentioned Ajax-Pickering hospital, which is part of the Lakeridge Health Corporation, Mr. Speaker, and Lakeridge Health received this year a loan -- alone, Mr. Speaker, a \$6.6 million increase in their operating budget to allow them to make modifications and continue to provide that high quality care. But also when it comes to Ajax-Pickering and staying in line with the discussion on mental health that specifically we're opening 20 new acute care mental health beds at the Ajax-Pickering site as well, in addition to what we're doing at Ontario Shores. So we're listening to the local community. We're listening to the hospital leadership and we're making those multimillion-dollar investments on the operating side and on the capital side, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that they are -- Able to competently address with the highest quality service those particular needs, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP French: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the acting Premier. In Oshawa, as elsewhere, it's not just acute care beds that are over capacity. Mental health beds are also locked in a constant state of gridlock. Both lakeridge health in Oshawa and lakeridge facility in Whitby registered capacity numbers in their mental health beds of 115% last winter. The Premier cannot defend this, but can the Premier tell the people of my community when is help from this Liberal government coming?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, I would hope that the member opposite would understand and believe that 40 brand-new beds for mental health, 20 of them for A.L.C. Patients that have specific mental health challenges, 20 acute -- which is through Ontario shores in concert with lakeridge site in Oshawa, as well as 20 acute new beds at the Ajax site. But, Mr. Speaker, the NDP, in a single year in 1994, announced a \$53 million cut to ten of Ontario's psychiatric hospitals. That represented up to a 1% cut in the operating budget of some hospitals -- 17%. In Hamilton, Brockville, Kingston, penetang, Toronto, St. Thomas and Whitby. A \$4.7 million cut in Hamilton alone. A \$5 million cut in Whitby alone, Mr. Speaker. \$6.3 million in Kingston. And at the end, the NDP Was forced to backtrack, so instead of \$53 million, they only cut 20 million dollars. In a single year, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Armstrong to Minister Hoskins Re: Long-Term Care Homes

>> MPP Teresa Armstrong: My question is to the acting Premier. Yesterday the Minister of health said the vast majority of long-term care homes in Ontario are meeting the province's minimum standards of care set out in the various acts that apply to them. But what the Minister and the Premier failed to realize is it seems that this is not good enough. Families with loved ones in care have been coming forward speaking up for months to tell this Liberal government about the heartbreaking conditions in some of these care homes. Does the Premier not care what families are telling her? Or is she just out of touch with what's really going on in this province?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP Continues to disparage not only our hardworking frontline workers in long-term cares across the province, but also does not understand in fact that we are listening to Ontariansment we are listening to residents of long-term care homes to call long-term care homes their home, Mr. Speaker, and we have an obligation I take very seriously to ensure we're providing the highest quality of care. Again I need to ask the question whether that party is going to vote for or against the new legislation that has just been proposed last week, Mr. Speaker, that actually will increase our ability to further inspect homes, will increase the penalties and fines available to government to impose upon those noncome pliers and give other powers to the government so we can ensure not only -- In compliance with the act but these homes are of the highest quality possible.

>> MPP Armstrong: Speaker, this is what's happening in long-term care. Seniors are being left in beds for 18 hours. Getting a bath just once a week. Constant shortstaffing and lack of consistency in care. Vulnerable seniors are not even getting the basic help they need to make it to the bathroom on time. These are just a few of the thousands of stories described to me in the past few months by families with loved ones in care. How can the Premier continue to claim that everything is fine in these homes when she hears from families themselves that there is a crisis happening right under her nose?

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And that is precisely why this week I issued three cease of admissions to long-term care homes in this province, because they weren't complying with the act, because there were director's orders against those homes for issues such as a fall taking place and that fall not being reported to the proper clinical authorities. The physician that would then do the proper assessment. That these are important and critically important activities that need to be taken, that need to be done in Ontarians with the act. Mr. Speaker, it's also important to recognize that we're seeing that impact from our inspections, annual inspections of 100% of our long-term care homes, and we're seeing that, since 2014, the average number of compliance orders issued during an annual inspection have actually -- Down by more than 50%. We are seeing the improvement. The inspections are working, but we need to identify and act on those that are not in compliance.

>> MPP Armstrong: Speaker, the three ceased admission orders in London, Mississauga and Fergus are indicators of the systemic problems in long-term care. You, Premier and Minister, over and over again we have told the Premier and her Minister of health the heartbreaking stories of neglect and even abuse in long-term care homes. Over and over again we have called for the Wettlaufer inquiry to be expanded so that we can get an honest picture of what's happening in the long-term care system, identify the systemic issues and fix them. But over and over again, the Premier and her Minister have ducked our questions and refused to expand the inquiry that would help thousands of people. They are content to ignore the problems in our long-term care system. Can the Premier tell us when will there be enough evidence for her to take this issue -- Seriously?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are taking it seriously and we've been taking it ear justly for a lot longer since the member opposite and her party have been raising this in a partisan fashion and fear mongering among -- across this province so that people in their long-term care homes, they don't need to be afraid of the quality of care that they're receiving with a few exceptions, Mr. Speaker, that we're addressing effectively. They need to be afraid of what the NDP Party is doing in fear mongering and suggesting to Ontarians that their loved ones are not safe in long-term care homes. I think it's reprehensible. I think it's completely inappropriate -- Appropriate -- inappropriate to be elevating it to that level of conjecture and fear mongering across this province, Mr. Speaker. If they believe in supporting the long-term care sector, why did they vote against our \$80 million investment?

MPP Hardeman to Minister Duguid Re: Jobs in Ontario

>> MPP Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the acting Premier. Two weeks ago I stood up in this legislature and asked the Premier to change her policys that are driving jobs out of Ontario, including the 1,300 layoffs that have been announced in Oxford over the last 10 months. Business after business warned this government that the high cost of operating in Ontario would force them to close their doors or move. Yesterday 200 more layoffs were added to that total as Firestone announced that they are closing their doors after 81 years and shifting the remaining production to North Carolina. Will the government now finally admit that their policies are driving jobs out of Ontario and take action today?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Let me respond to that question in two parts, Mr. Speaker. I want to start off by saying that we share the member's concerns for that community. They've been hit by a couple of significant layoffs in the last month or so. And we're very aware of those challenges. In fact we'll continue to work with local authorities there. Really our focus will be on helping those workers find other opportunities, and we'll continue to ensure that our training, Colleges and universities, our now mainstay, will be engaged in that as well. At this time, Mr. Speaker. We're talking about something very important to one of his Colleagues. So I look forward to working with my Colleague as -- My Colleague Minister to help in any way we k.in the supplementary I'll address the issues. About Ontario's competitiveness.

>> MPP Hardeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. 1,500 layoffs in Oxford in less than a year, and 2,800 cami employees on strike trying to keep their jobs in Ontario. The government can try to spin this however they want, but that's the impact of your policies. The people of Oxford are doing everything we can to support our local businesses. But this government just adds more and more burden until the companies are forced to close their doors. How many more people have to lose their jobs before you're going to take real action and keep our businesses and our jobs in Ontario?

>> Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, now it's time for me to bring the member into the real world, because that is not the real world in Ontario or even close to it. This province is growing, Mr. Speaker, faster than the g-7. We have an you unemployment rate in this province at a 16-year low. We have created a net 760,000 net new jobs since the global recession. So for the member to talk down the work that's being done in this business community and this province to create jobs is absolutely inappropriate and absolutely wrong, Mr. Speaker. I understand there are challings --

challenges in that particular community. There's been a couple very significant layoffs and we will work with the member to help those workers. The best thing we can do is stay on track and keep building a strong economy in Ontario. Keep leading the G-7 and keep that unemployment rate at record lows, Mr. Speaker. We're determined to do that.

MPP Mantha to Minister Coteau Re: Algoma Family Services

>> MPP Michael Mantha: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of children and youth services. In a letter you received from chief Elaine Johnson from Circuit River First Nation, Sault Ste. Marie, Blind River or Elliott Lake, they have direct access to Algoma family services children's mental health services. However if a family lives on a first nations community, they receive no children's mental health services from Algoma family services. Minister, why is this?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for the question. I've been in this position now for just over a year and have had the opportunity to visit many of our indigenous communities across the province of Ontario. In fact, Mr. Speaker, last -- two weeks ago I was at Treaty 3, and met with the chiefs in Kenora and I signed a historical document out there, moving towards an agreement between our indigenous partners and the government of Ontario to put the resources and the control back in the hands of the community so young people from the indigenous communities can get the services they need and they deserve where they live. This is the first time in the history of this province, in fact this country, that we've made a type of agreement that will put the responsibility and the ownership of the responsibility to look after children back into the hands of communities where it should be. And I'm very proud of this government's direction in regards to that policy.

>> MPP Mantha: Again to the Minister of children and youth services. Algoma family services have indicated that they don't have the expertise or resources to provide any services to first nations in my area or to indigenous children who are in the care of family and community services. This is why Nokwindamin has to deliver culturally appropriate children's mental health services to my area first nations communities. Your ministry simply answered that there's no money for this. Minister, every child matters. Why is there no money for direct treatment of children's mental health on first nations in my area?

>> Minister Coteau: Mr. Speaker, we brought forward bill 89 this year. Again it was a historical document, the furthest document in the history of this country that acknowledges that a cultural approach to working with -- acknowledges systemic racism does exist and indigenous communities have been victims of colonialism here in the province of Ontario and across this country. Mr. Speaker, when we move forward with that bill, you know, the NDP did support it. The Conservatives did not support that bill, bill 89. We still don't know why today that they didn't support that bill that raised the age of protection. Actually moves forward to build a framework to put those resources back in the hands of the community. Mr. Speaker, you'll see as we go forward here in Ontario. Those resources will be put back in the hands of the community and the first government in this country to do just that.

MPP Kiwala to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Safe Access Zone Legislation

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister responsible for the status of women. This past week, I received a very concerning call from my daughter. She was walking down the street in Ottawa when she came across a protest, Mr. Speaker. She was walking by the Morgentaler clinic. We know in recent months protest activity outside of several abortion clinics across Ontario have escalated to the point of harassment and intimidation. My daughter, who was simply walking down the street, felt it and she called me about it. Let alone the women and health

care providers that work in these clinics. This is not right. And we know that it is happening all across this province. Mr. Speaker, as a woman, a mother and a member of this government, we have a responsibility to act. Yesterday the government introduced legislation that would in fact do just that. Mr. Speaker, account Minister please tell us about our government's plan. To keep women safe?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had a chance to thank the member from Kingston and the Islands for raising a very important question. Speaker, as a woman and mother myself, with a young daughter, I have an obligation to not only my daughter but to all women in this province and their daughters who make a difficult choice. It is my belief and our government's belief that every woman in Ontario has the right to make decisions about her own health care and that they should be able to do so freely, without fear of bullying, intimidation or harassment. In fact that is why our government introduced safe access zone legislation yesterday. That sends a very clear message that we will not tolerate any form of harassment against women exercising their fundamental right to choose. These proposed access Zones would help ensure that women across Ontario have safe access to health care services and that their privacy and dignity are protected.

>> MPP Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the women across this province are relieved the staff in these facilities about hearing this government's actions, work towards this. However, Mr. Speaker, I would like some further information about the legislation. Mr. Speaker, the difficult decision that these women make is not one that is ever made easily. It's a very difficult decision they live with for the rest of their lives. The reasons for making such a decision is deeply personal and entirely up to them and no one else. We have a responsibility to ensure the privacy and emotional well-being of these women who make a choice about their own physical and emotional health. This responsibility, of course, also extends to health care providers. So, Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister, how can we ensure -- That there is safety in every clinic, in every home and on the street?

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member raises a very good point and I can tell you that yesterday the health care professionals and advocates in the room were very supportive of the proposed changes we are making to protect their patients and themselves. In fact they applaud it. They were telling us how much this legislation was needed, needed to stop women from being harassed, intimidated and bullied. This legislation, Speaker would, if passed, provide for the creation of safe access Zones of 50 metres, that can be increased up to 150 metres around abortion clinics. Speaker, we can't just stop there. We also have a duty to protect the safety and security of the staff, the staff that offer women's reproductive services, which is why this legislation would also implement safe access Zones of 150 metres around the homes of the staff. Speaker, we're moving forward with this legislation because we take it seriously, because we have a responsibility to the women in this province.

MPP Bailey to Minister Flynn Re: WSIB Hearing Aid Program

>> MPP Bob Bailey: Mr. Speaker, thank you. My question is to the Deputy Premier. Deputy Premier recently the wsib made significant changes to its hearing aid program without properly consulting audiologists and wsib recipients. Before the summer, the Minister of labour committed to looking at ways to fix the mess the wsib has created. However, months later, the official opposition is still hearing from patients right across this province who cannot access the hearing aid that works best for them. We've heard stories of individuals limiting their time with loved ones because the hearing aids they are now forced to use is affecting their quality of life and hearing. Deputy Premier, Ontario hearing aid patients are asking you to put them first and reverse the wsib changes that are not benefitting in any way. Mr. Speaker, I ask the Deputy Premier today, will you act?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. And thank you to the member for that important question. I think a number of us in the chamber have been asked about exactly the same thing, Speaker. What we need to ensure is that the wsib is operating in the best interests of workers at all times, Speaker. It's an organization that was put in place to ensure that if somebody gets hurt on the job, our preference, Speaker, is that the injury does not take place in the first place. We work hard

on prevention. Should -- should that injury take place, take place and from time to time those can include hearing loss, we need to ensure that the services that are provided to the worker are services that meet the needs of the workers, Speaker, whether it's a return to work, whether it's a recovery from illness, Speaker. So the information that the member has brought forward with a change of policy at the wsib, it was an attempt to ensure that the services that are brought forward in terms of hearing AIDS, Speaker, are the ones that are best to meet the needs of the injured workers, Speaker. We have talked to the wsib about this. We remain in conversation with them. We hope we can -- We hope we can reach a resolution. I'll address the rest of the supplementary.

>> MPP Bailey: Thank you, Speaker. To the Minister of labour again. Just one single audiologist from my riding of Sarnia- Lambton alone has sent over 0 appeals to the wsib in the last few months. It takes an average of three to six months to receive an answer. In my riding I met with more than a dozen affected constituents and received over 200 handwritten petitions on this issue. I can only imagine how many other patients and constituents are being impacted right across this province. Mr. Speaker, to the Minister, let's do what's right and what's fair and make sure that injured workers in Ontario have access to the hearing AIDS that they need without further delay. Will the Minister deal with this issue today?

>> Minister Flynn: Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member. And I have had a number of exchanges about health and safety in his own riding. I've always found the member to be very, very sincere, brings issues to me first. He doesn't try to hijack the House, Speaker, when he brings these things forward. So, Speaker, I'm committed to continue to work on a variety of issues with the wsib, Speaker, because I know they're brought forward sincerely. In this case what I think you have, Speaker, is an organization, the wsib, that thinks it's doing the right thing, that has looked, has looked to what exists today in terms of hearing AIDS that are available to the members of the public, to citizens of Ontario that need to avail themselves of the services of the wsib and have tried to provide that service in an effective and efficient manner as they possibly could. However, Speaker, you have a number of citizens that think -- This is not working for them. I believe that working with the member we can sort this out and everybody can get what they need at the end of the day, Speaker .

MPP Forster to Minister Flynn Re: Paid Leave for Domestic Violence Victims

>> MPP Cindy Forster: Ments thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Deputy Premier. This morning the Liberal government made it clear they don't intend to support the NDP's push for paid leave for victims every intimate partner violence. Despite clear evidence that too many women are afraid to escape because they simply cannot afford to. We heard from unifor's sue Mackinnon this summer, who described one woman's nightmare. She packed her life in a basket and fled with her three children. She was in constant fear of making sure her kids were fod, safe and had a roof over their heads and she still had to make mortgage payments on a home that her partner destroyed. Why is this government ignoring women who say paid leave will help them escape with their lives?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Speaker, I appreciate the question, but we are doing anything but ignoring women in the province of Ontario. You look at the impacts of bill 148, Speaker. A lot of the advantages that will be gained by the passage of that bill, should the House presume to do that, Speaker, will be aimed directly at women who haven't been treated in the past in the workplace the way they should, Speaker. That's the whole point of this. I was in Hamilton this morning, speaking at the ywca, Speaker. Result of -- as a result of us taking bill 148 out after first reading, Speaker, we were able to hear from people around the province of Ontario, and one thing they brought forward was something that the member's bringing forward again, Speaker, and that is domestic violence, Speaker. People need to know that when they need to take time off in the eventuality of that, Speaker, that their job is not in jeopardy, that they're not in risk of being fired. And, Speaker, that's exactly what we do with leaves in the province of Ontario. I believe if we work together on bill 148, Speaker, we can bring forward a bill that will exactly meet the needs of these women, Speaker .

>> MPP Forster: Back to the acting Premier. New Democrats have repeatedly called for paid leave for

victims who need it. The member from London West introduced two pieces of legislation. Your government is stalling it. New Democrats introduced amendments to bill 148 during the clause by clause. The Liberal government voted against those amendments. The NDP Leader last week, the member from Hamilton-centre introduced a bill that would have 10 days paid leave for victims of sexual and domestic violence so survivors can actually afford to take a leave, so they can afford to have time off to file police reports, so they can testify and have time off to testify in court proceedings against their abusers. But the Liberal government refuses to support this. Why is that?

>> Minister Flynn: Speaker, once again I appreciate the question, but the information being brought forward to the House, Speaker, simply is not accurate in this regard. I was out in Hamilton this morning, Speaker, talking publicly about the reason we took bill 148 out in the first place, Speaker. The way we have listened to the people of the province of Ontario, the way we are bringing forward up to 17 weeks, Speaker, of job-protected leave. What we do in case of compassionate leave or these types of leaves, Speaker, is the province, under the employment standards act, under the labour relations act, under the occupational health and safety act, Speaker, provides the job protection. Says to the individual your job is not in jeopardy during this period of time. We then turn to our federal counterparts in Ottawa, which I have done, Speaker, and we ask them to provide the income during that period. Under the employment insurance. We're doing the right thing here, Speaker. We're doing right by women, with the support of the House, Speaker, we'll get to where we need to get to.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Matthews Re: Post-Secondary Education Investments

>> MPP Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is for the Minister of advanced education and skills development. Ontario has one of the most highly skilled work forces in the world, and this is thanks in large part to the incredible transformation of our postsecondary system that we've undertaken in the last 14 years. As I'm sure all of us will agree, increasing access to postsecondary education by removing unnecessary Barriers is one of the best ways that we as a government can help improve the life outcomes of Ontarians. As such, Mr. Speaker, can the Minister please inform this House how we've removed Barriers and increased access to postsecondary education in our province since 2003?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. It has a remarkable 14 years for postsecondary education in Ontario. Members of the opposition have said they don't believe that costs and income are real Barriers to post secondary education. That couldn't be further from the truth. We know participation rates for kids from higher income families are far, far greater than for lower income families. And that's why we've moved forward with an extraordinary transformation of student assistance every day, Speaker. This year, over 200,000 students in Ontario are getting free tuition. Speaker, for hundreds of thousands of more students. One third of our students are getting free tuition and another third are getting help as well, Speaker. The number of students is -- Number of students attending has also gone up dramatically, Speaker, by over 38%. They're paying results.

>> MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. And thanks to the Minister for her answer. When our government was first elected, our postsecondary sector was in desperate need of significant investments to make sure that its institutions could continue to provide the world-class education our students expect and deserve. But we know that world-class education and instruction requires world-class facilities and faculty. Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, can the Minister please share with this House and all Ontarians some examples every significant investments our government has made to improve Ontario's Colleges and universities in the last 14 years?

>> Minister Matthews: Speaker, as I've said, enrollment has gone up by 38%, but grants to Colleges and universities have almost doubled. They've gone up by 85%. And that allows our Colleges and universities to hire top-tier instructors and deliver state-of-the-art programming, Speaker. We've also invested heavily in the physical structure of facilities as well. Speaker, when the Conservatives were in power in 2000 their last year of power, they spent about \$100 million in capital for Colleges and

universities. Speaker, we have on average invested \$300 million a year on Colleges and universities. And we've been able to do that, Speaker, so that we've been able to build important projects such as the software and informatic research centre at uoit in Durham, Speaker. At Trent. These are just two examples of the extraordinary investments we have made.

MPP McDonnell to Minister Duguid (Ballard) Re: Renewable Clean Energy Projects

>> MPP Jim McDonnell: Thank you, Speaker. To the Deputy Premier. The government is no stranger to the nation rise wind project in the township of north Stormont. If it has been paying any attention it would know the municipality doesn't want it and the local residents don't want it. The Minister has admitted that the province doesn't need the power of the nation rise or any other wind or solar contracts are still being offered, signed and imposed on unwilling communities will generate. Nation rise scored zero on all the ieso's rated criteria yet still offered a contract. It is unwanted, unneeded and unjustifiable. What is this government waiting for? Why will it not cancel?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of energy and the previous Minister of energy have put in place a process now that very much takes into consideration the local concerns about these projects. But time and time again, Mr. Speaker, the Peter opposite, their true top colours come out. Any time there's any resistance at all to any renewable project, they're up on their feet talking about how they don't support renewable clean energy. Mr. Speaker, we do have to start thinking of the big picture here. We need to start thinking of our kids and the health of our population, and that's why, Mr. Speaker, while local concerns are very, very important and we've taken measures to ensure in a voice is heard, we're very proud to be the first jurisdiction anywhere in the world to eliminate coal and move to cleaner sources of power. These going to help our kids live longer. That's going to save lives in this province. Mr. Speaker, it is helping to build a very strong clean tech sector here in the province of Ontario.

>> MPP McDonnell: Speaker, back to the Deputy Premier. It's clear that we just don't need the power. All the independent experts who have taken a look at this government's energy record have gasp under dismay over the total mess that you've made. Only this government can force enclean, green Bruce power the best team to reduce generation. Still renewable water resources over advance. Paid wind and solar companies more than the power's worth, cause an 8 terawatt surplus in generation, sell the surplus for a loss and then proclaim that everything is just fine. We already have a surplus of power today because nation -- before nation rise is even built. This province doesn't owe the owners of nation rise a contract. But does owe the citizens of north Stormont a duty to listen and represent them. North Stormont is an unwilling host. Which part of unwilling does this government not understand?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. And thank you for that important question and the ability to once again stand up and defend green energy in this province, Speaker. Because I'm not sure if the party opposite actually believes in green energy, Mr. Speaker. You know this government, this government takes concerns regarding the environment and human health very seriously. Let me say that our ministry adheres to a very strict renewable energy approvals process. There's not -- Speaker, there's not a single renewable energy project that the P.C.S have ever spoken in support of here in this House. So neve no plan to help Ontario families and businesses make sustainable choices and lower --

MPP Gretzky to Minister Milczyn Re: Income Support Programs

>> MPP Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the acting Premier. Speaker, last week the daily bread food bank released their annual who's hungry report, and Toronto families were shocked by how dire the situation has become. Food bank visits in Toronto are at the highest level since the

2008 recession, with seniors listed as the fastest growing group of food bank users, up 27% from last year. The average lengths of dependence on food banks has gone from 12 to 24 months, with Scarborough families seeing a 30% increase in food bank visits. Mr. Speaker, these figures are heartbreaking. People are skipping meals so they can pay the bills and keep a roof over their heads. When will this Premier take off her blinders and see that this province is in crisis?

>> Minister Peter Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from Windsor West for the question. Mr. Speaker, all Ontarians believe that no one should have to make the choice in this province between feeding themselves or their child or paying some other bill. We have a moral responsibility to ensure that all Ontarians have access to safe and good food. Mr. Speaker, we know, through the research that we've done, that there's a number of initiatives that need to be done. We've worked on improving income support programs. If approved, the increase in the minimum wage is going to provide Ontarians a better living wage so they can pay for those needs that they need to. We're working on preventing homelessness in this province. To ensure people have a safe place to stay, which includes supports that assists them with all their other daily needs, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to answer more on the supplementary.

>> MPP Gretzky: Again to the acting Premier. Mr. Speaker, this government can say that they are taking steps to address inequality with \$15 an hour minimum wage and basic incomes. But the Liberals have had 14 years to make life better in Ontario, and they have failed. In fact daily bread food bank explicitly states while on paper the economy may be doing well, but in the real world many people are not. We know what the Conservatives have said when times get tough. The last Conservative government told low-income families that they could just buy dented cans and eat baloney sandwiches to save money. In eight years they never once raised the minimum wage from \$6.85. New Democrats will not stop fighting to raise families up, even so this Liberal government keeps pushing them down. When will the Premier -- Get her priorities in order and actually start fighting for Ontarians?

>> Minister Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I want to thank the member from Windsor west, reminding the House about the damage the Conservatives did during their time. Mr. Speaker, I'm working in my ministry on the food security strategy which we'll be consulting on later this fall. Last week I met with the director of the daily bread food bank, which is actually in my riding and she said her number one ask on food security is affordable housing, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, we've extended rent control to all Ontario tenants to make sure all Ontario tenants are treated fairly, for investing in the homelessness prevention initiatives across the province, Mr. Speaker, to make sure people have a place to stay and other supports including -- Access to food to have a dignified life. Mr. Speaker, we've been taking action for 14 years and we will continue to deliver on fairness for all Ontarians.

MPP Des Rosiers to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Child Care

>> MPP Nathalie Des Rosiers: Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister responsible of children and day care. [End of Translation] Our government has been a real champion of child care. Taking action to make sure that we all have access to quality and affordable child care. And we know that there was a lot of work to do because this file was not a priority when the party opposite was in power. And I know as a working parent how important it is to have good child care options. And I think I want to know exactly how much these investments have contributed to the life of families in Ontario. Can the Minister tell us what are the plans and what the government has been doing to meet the needs of families in this province?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the hardworking member from Ottawa- Vanier for this very important question. Speaker, when we came into office, the party opposite had no real plan for child care, had made no real investment and had made no real commitments to improve child care for Ontario families. Speaker, we have been making child care our top priority for 14 years. For 14 years we have been investing in early years and child care.

In fact, Speaker, when we came into power, less than 10% of the children in Ontario had access to child care spaces. Speaker, we have doubled, doubled the number of licensed child care spaces in Ontario since 2003. And in fact recently we committed to doubling the number of spaces again. We've also doubled child care funding in Ontario to close to \$1.5 billion a year. Speaker, we're transforming the way we're delivering early years and child care, unlike the party opposite, we're working hard to get it right.

>> MPP Des Rosiers: Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [End of Translation] For all the work she does on this file that is so important for all working parents across Ontario. It's very encouraging I think that we are continuing to work so hard on this file to address needs -- needs of all Ontario families. For the last 14 years, I think we've made huge strides in the file of child care. And I know that the Premier is -- it's an important file for her as well. So I think it's important for all Ontarians to know that the party opposite does not really have a plan on child care, and I think it's very important that we all know that. So I'm proud to be a member of a caucus that believes in child care and that believes that working parents have a right to have child care options for them, and my constituents I know in Ottawa- Vanier believe that as well. Many of them are young parents and continue to want to have child care options. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister tell the House about this government's plan for next two years?

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer the member's question. Speaker, when the party opposite was in power, there were no ministries dedicated to child care. When the party opposite was in power, there were scarce funding for child care. And when the party opposite was in power, there were no commitments or investments made to improve child care. Mr. Speaker, that says volumes about the party opposite. They criticize and attack our hard work, but the reality - - No plan or track record, but for us the commitment to our children will never stop. The Premier made a historic commitment to ensure that 100,000 more children have access to licensed child care over the next five years. The party opposite are the last people we take advice from. They've consistently voted --

MPP MacLeod to Minister Hoskins Re: Opioid Crisis

>> MPP Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of health. Yesterday the government announced an opioid emergency task force to deal with the growing crisis around opioid abuse and overdoses. In addition the government announced \$220 million to fight the opioid crisis. Given I've been calling for a task force since last February, I thank the Minister personally. Today the assembly will did he bite Nick's law, a portion of the advertising budget to opioid awareness and education. In just 36 hours we've had over 24 signatures on a petition calling for this law to pass. As a show of good faith I'm hoping the Minister will support this. Can he speak to it?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member opposite's advocacy on this critically important subject, and it is true. We have had quite a number of conversations, and she has been a powerful, appropriate and tremendous advocate with regards to Ontario facing a public health emergency with regards to opioids. And, Mr. Speaker, and I know that she's doing it from the right place in the spirit of wanting to make a difference and contribute to all our efforts to diminish and eventually end this crisis. I look forward to the debate this afternoon on her bill. I applaud her for also focusing on the reality that we, among the many touch points we have to impact this public awareness and education. Critically important aspect of that. So thank you for the question. I look forward to talking more in the supplementary.

>> MPP MacLeod: It was 2,400 signatures we got in 36 hours. Nick's law is named for Nick Cody who was teenager when he died from overdose from what his dad said was just one bad pill. The stories I hear every day would sink your heart. Kids as early as 10 years rolled taking ill pills that could contain a deadly dose of fentanyl. Yesterday I was shocked carfentanil has appeared on the streets of Ottawa. It is 10,000 times more powerful than mar feign and even stronger than fentanyl and it's

being found on the streets in our city so we have to be much more diligent. Will the Minister commit to an immediate public health advertising campaign to warn Ontarians against this deadly and potent drug that is now making the rounds in Ottawa?

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And we have committed to such a public health awareness and education campaign, and in fact we are implementing it, Mr. Speaker. So we're already working with our public health units, providing them with the updated and necessary materials so that, through their ability, including with their partners across Ontario, can provide that critically important information. We're working with the ministry of education, Mr. Speaker, and other ministries to ensure, in the correct way, impactful way, we are able to reach high school students, those in Colleges and universities. We're working with the minister of -- Minister of higher education and advanced education, Mr. Speaker. We're also working with our pharmacists to ensure that, at the point of contact, when an opioid prescription is either provided for the first time or renewed, that that individual also has a requisite information. We're working with our bar owners and our nightclubs so that at that point we're able to reach those individuals appropriately with the right information and most importantly with our harm reduction workers for that same purpose.