

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Tuesday, February 20, 2018

From: "Stinson, Jeffrey (CAB)" <jeffrey.stinson@ontario.ca>
To: "@CAB-ProvLegQP" <provlegqp@msgov.gov.on.ca>
Date: Tue, 20 Feb 2018 11:51:29 -0500
Attachments: 20180220 - Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript.doc (121.86 kB)

Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Tuesday, February 20, 2018

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

Table of Contents

MPP Fedeli to Premier Wynne
Re: Job Losses

MPP Fedeli to Premier Wynne (Coteau) (Hoskins)
Re: Youth Mental Health Services

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Hoskins)
Re: Hospital Overcrowding

MPP Horwath to Minister Sousa (Thibeault)
Re: Sale of Hydro One

MPP Yurek to Minister Hoskins
Re: Cardiac Unit in London

MPP Tabuns to Minister Milczyn
Re: Housing Affordability

MPP Potts to Minister Flynn
Re: Bill 148

MPP Harris to Minister McGarry
Re: High-Speed Rail Projects

MPP Gelinas to Minister Hoskins
Re: Long-Term Care

MPP Qaadri to Minister Ballard
Re: Cap-and-Trade

MPP Pettapiece to Minister Sousa
Re: Horse Racing in Ajax Closures

MPP Natyshak to Minister Ballard
Re: Water Quality Southwest Ontario

MPP Kiwala to Minister Milczyn
Re: Homelessness in Ontario

MPP Thompson to Minister Zimmer
Re: Job Growth Rural Ontario and in North

MPP Fedeli to Premier Wynne Re: Job Losses

>> Interim PC Leader Vic Fedeli: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. 51,000 jobs. 51,000 jobs were lost in the month of January. That is the largest number of jobs lost in one month since 2009. This is proof that the economic policies of this government are reckless and unfair. This isn't change that works for families. It's actually hurting families. Mr. Speaker, what does the government say to the 51,000 families who lost their jobs last summer?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to el one of coal everyone back and add my congratulations to the member of Nipissing being appointed the leader of the opposition and thank him for that question. Thank you very much. Because, Mr. Speaker, I know that the leader of the opposition knows that Ontario's economy is growing. And, Mr. Speaker, whenever there is a job loss in the province, the families that are affected, the individuals that are affected, Mr. Speaker, that is a very hard thing to deal W.I understand that, Mr. Speaker. But I know that the leader of the opposition understands that the economy is growing, that in fact our unemployment rate is at a low, Mr. Speaker, a 17-year low, and that Ontario has led the growth in g-7 countries, Mr. Speaker. We have outstripped the growth across the country, Mr. Speaker. And I recognize that, even though all of that is happening, Mr. Speaker, there are still people who are not sharing in that growth and I'll speak to that in the supplementary.

>> Vic Fedeli: Back to the Premier. Years of Liberal policy have led to the worst months for jobs since this Premier took office. The F.A.O. Pointed out entire regions of the province were being unfairly left behind last year. Southwestern, eastern and northern Ontario saw only 1,600 jobs combined, and just look at what economist Phillip cross had to say about these newest numbers. The January drop shows that gushing reports about a booming economy were wildly overstated. He added the underpinnings for the Ontario economy have looked increasingly shaky for some time. But this government will cherry-pick statistics and tell everyone that everything is rosy. Mr. Speaker, everything isn't rosy. Thank you, Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, everything isn't rosy. Will the Premier admit that the cumulative impact. Of her government policy is costing hard working Ontarians their jobs, and that's just not fair?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I agree with the leader of the opposition. We have to look at the whole picture. But we do have to look at the whole picture, so we have to look at the fact that, since the recession, Mr. Speaker, 800,000 new jobs have been -- In the province. We have to recognize since I've been Premier 400,000 new jobs have been -- Having said that, having said that we're seeing that growth. But it is not being shared evenly, Mr. Speaker, which is exactly why free tuition, ohip plus, Mr. Speaker, an increase in the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, which unfortunately all of the leadership candidates in the race for the Conservatives -- Have said they don't support, Mr. Speaker. But those, those initiatives that support people. Deal with global uncertainty, Mr. Speaker. Those are the things that we are putting in place because we're actually fighting for the people of Ontario, Mr. Speaker .

>> Vic Fedeli Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier. The Liberals have been warned by experts that their too-fast too-soon antibusiness policy would put people out of work. The Premier was warned, warned again, warned again and warned again. Yet she ignored the warnings for purely political purposes. Though numbers are staggering. Youth lost jobs at a rate six and a half times faster than the rest of the population. Women saw their employment drop four times the rate of Ontario's men. Single moms and children trying to earn a living have been targeted by this Liberal government's too-fast too-soon antibusiness antijobs policies. Mr. Speaker, account Liberals explain how this is possibly fair for Ontario?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I hear the leader of the opposition say when he says too fast too soon, the sub to that is the minimum wage increase, Mr. Speaker. And what I hear him say is not now. Not ever, Mr. Speaker. To say., Mr. Speaker, the people who are cleaning our institutions,

Mr. Speaker, the people who are serving us, Mr. Speaker, in all of the businesses across this province, it's those people that continued to earn \$11.50 an hour they had to go to the food bank at the end of the month, Mr. Speaker. That is the reality that the leader of the opposition is supporting when he says not now, not ever. We believe that, in a province as wealthy as Ontario, in a province - In a province as wealthy as Ontario where there are so many people who are doing so well, Mr. Speaker, and corporate profits are at an all-time high, it is time, Mr. Speaker, that we make sure that people have what they need to --

MPP Fedeli to Premier Wynne (Coteau) (Hoskins) Re: Youth Mental Health Services

>> Interim PC Leader Vic Fedeli: Speaker, my question again is for the Premier. We heard a common theme at almost every meeting of the prebudget consultations throughout Ontario last month. We heard that this government is not doing enough for mental health treatment. The words of a 17-year-old student in Sudbury left a lasting impression on me and all of us at that committee. He said, quote -- I attempted suicide. I am extremely fortunate to be here today. I felt utterly alone. He told the committee that, quote, most youth are unsure of what to do and where to go when they're faced with depression and low mental wellness. They don't know of resources available to them, and sometimes they can't even access these resources. Mr. Speaker, why has this government failed -- To provide resources for mental health our youth so desperately need?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that the children of in -- Minister of children and youth services is going to want to follow up. Let me just say to the leader of the opposition but to the legislature and the people of Ontario, we recognize that there is more that needs to be done. We have been making huge investments. I just returned from a campus tour, Mr. Speaker. I went across around the province visiting College and university campuses. And at every single stop and a high school stop, Mr. Speaker. Every stop the issue of mental health came up, and I think that is a very good thing in the sense that, Mr. Speaker, people are talking about it. I said to these young people, you know 35 years ago we wouldn't be having this conversation. You would not be raising this issue because there was not the awareness that there is, Mr. Speaker, now. And we have put resources into school boards. We have put resources on campuses but I am the first to agree, Mr. Speaker, that there is more that we need to do to make sure that there's coordination of services, to make sure that there are more services in terms of counselling and professionals. We're setting up youth hubs, Mr. Speaker .

>> Vic Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier. Another youth advocate told our committee about his battle with mental health. He said his battle with depression, quote, that took me down a really dark road for about eight months. I couldn't handle the pain any more and I tried to take my own life. But he added he's here in front of you today to talk to you about a broken system. He went on to say not just a broken system that almost claimed my life, but a broken system that has and will continue to take more lives if we don't start acting now. He was so brave to come forward to this committee. They are very poignant words, Speaker, from a very strong individual. We cannot and we must not let his words ring hollow. The government must act. Mr. Speaker, how much longer will this government accept this broken system?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take a moment to thank the member opposite for the question. We've gone around the province, many members in our caucus here, the Minister of health, to speak to young people, and we're aware that there's more work that needs to be done when it comes to helping young people with mental health challenges. You know, as a government, Mr. Speaker, we continuously invested money into mental health since 2008. In fact \$10 billion more since 2008. And Minister Hoskins and myself and this government and our Premier have said -- and we've made a commitment that we will increase funding to mental health here in the province of Ontario. The party opposite says in a they'll invest \$1.9 billion over ten years. It's simply not enough and it's not just about the money, Mr. Speaker. It's about changing the system. And that's why we've dedicated a lot of time and energy to moving on mental health, which is a new system we're putting in place. Putting lead agencies right across the province to better coordinate

services. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

>> Vic Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier. There were so many courageous individuals who shared their stories and their fight with our committee. However, maybe the most impactful story was about one individual who couldn't share that day. A London health care worker said he has witnessed some pretty tragic instances. He shared this very disheartening story, quote -- we had people turned away from the doors in urgent care department at St. Joe's. Quote: One of those poor souls committed suicide in the parking lot. No services. No psychiatric services that can be obtained in a timely manner. This is unacceptable, quote. That's what we heard at the committee. Mr. Speaker, this is unacceptable. No matter any numbers that we're hearing from the Liberals. Whatever dollar amount they claim to invest is simply not enough. Why are the resources to support these struggling mental health not available?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is such an important issue and I do want to commend the member opposite for raising not only the issue but two very real examples of -- that demonstrate the work that still needs to be done. Mr. Speaker, we, all of us here in this legislature, are so committed to improving mental health in this province. I think all of us understand that mental health and physical health are two sides of the same coin. We need to demonstrate that same vigour and intent and determination on mental health as we do in providing the health services for those with physical ailments and this government, Mr. Speaker, over the past number of years, has been every single year increasing those investments and in fact doing something unprecedented in this country, introducing structured psychotherapy, cognitive behavioural therapy. We're the first province in the country to do that. We're creating a network of youth wellness hubs. Every hospital around this province has -- and this was done together with -- O.H.A., a suicide prevention plan and a plan to address the tragic circumstances of individuals who are in that difficult circumstance, Mr. Speaker. There's a lot more work to be done.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Hoskins) Re: Hospital Overcrowding

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question's for the Premier. On January 14th, Toronto east hospital had 161 agents in its medical unit, but only 135 funded beds. That's a 119% occupancy rate. Now the Premier knows that experts consider a safe occupancy rate for hospitals to be 85%. Clearly the Premier's temporary funding is not solving the hospital overcrowding and hallway medicine crisis that has been decades in the making in this province. When there this Premier acknowledge the damage that she and her Liberal party have been doing to our hospitals?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the leader of the third party for the question. And, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that our hospitals are facing increased capacity demands, Mr. Speaker. That's exactly why we've increased the capacity across the continuum of care by adding 1,200 additional beds, Mr. Speaker. And I know that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care will want to speak to those beds and how those resources are going to continue to be able to be available to our hospitals. But, Mr. Speaker, having said that, we recognize there is more that needs to be done. We increased hospital budgets, Mr. Speaker, by \$500 million in the last budget. We recognize with this particular influx of need that there's more that needs to be done. And we will continue to work to support hospitals across the province.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, in January the Scarborough hospital's birchmount site reached an alarmingly high occupancy rate of 147%.The hospital actually had 25 fewer beds to tend to patients than at this time last year, Speaker. Why is this Premier still ignoring the crisis that we have in our hospital system?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, first of all I want to acknowledge and recognize our frontline health care workers and the health care leadership across this province who have been doing an absolutely exceptional job in the face of what we commonly regularly see during these months, not

only flu but other respiratory ill netses. And it the has been a particularly bad year. We know that both here in Ontario, across Canada and across North America. Mr. Speaker, the reference that was made to Toronto east health network, the Michael garron hospital, in fact their occupancy in -- pardon me Mr. Speaker -- in October was 83%. In November it was 84%. In December it was 83%. In January, Mr. Speaker, it was 88%. And that, in the face of a very bad flu and respiratory season that fortunately, Mr. Speaker, we're over the top of that curve with flu at least with influenza "A." But, Mr. Speaker, part of the reason I think our hospitals haven't been able to accommodate these pressures. Is the 1,200 additional beds the equivalent of six community hospitals that we announced last year.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the crisis in our hospitals have been in the making for quite some time and the responsibility lays at the feet of this government that's been in office for 16 years. 16 years, Speaker. The problem in our hospital system didn't start with the flu season and you can ask any expert in the hospital system and they'll tell you. They have been in crisis for years now. That's why the Ontario hospital association has been begging this government to properly fund our hospital system and they have ignored them time and time again. The last Conservative government, they closed 28 hospitals, Speaker, and they laid off 6,000 nurses. The Premier has continued down a path of cuts and budget freezes in our hospitals, laying on gurneys and makeshift spaces like hospital hallways and waiting rooms is not the place that Ontarians should be, but it is now the norm for patients in Ontario. Why is the Premier ok with that, Speaker ?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, so not only did we add the equivalent of six community hospitals, 1,200 acute care beds last fall through this winter season to the end of the fiscal year, Mr. Speaker, but we just also recently announced even more funds the upcoming fiscal year -- fiscal year. I think it's just under \$200 million. A new investment to maintain many of those beds that were opened you but also to work closely with the Ontario hospital association and all of those hospitals so we allocate them so they make the greatest possible impact. But I would be remiss, Mr. Speaker, - and I not leader of the third party referenced the P.C.S closing I think I think they said 10,000 hospital beds -- 9,600, Mr. Speaker, was the NDP Record. So they closed I think it was 13% of the mental health beds in this province and almost a quarter of all the acute care beds. So I can only imagine if they were in power with their commitment to find \$600 million the cuts. It would be a desperate situation right now.

MPP Horwath to Minister Sousa (Thibeault) Re: Sale of Hydro One

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Our hospitals as well. They also agree that selling off pieces of Hydro One and our hydro system is the right thing to do. But the financial accountability officer in fact disagrees. Just last week the family financial accountability officer said that the sell-off of Hydro One will be costing Ontario families nearly \$300 million a year. Now doesn't the Premier think that \$300 million a year would be better off in the hands of Ontario families funding things, Speaker, like hospitals and schools?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question, recognizing the importance for us to ensure that we continue to support our companies and support the marketplace. Certainly the way hydro was being acted upon, it wasn't providing the proper receipts, the proper revenues and the proper controls and mechanisms. Now we have much more discipline in the operation. We still own over 44% of the company. It still provides tremendous amounts of revenues to the province and more importantly paid down some needed debt in the system. And of course we now have proceeds to the tune of \$5 billion -- \$5 billion, trillion trust to invest in new opportunities to provide even greater revenues and greater opportunities for the people of Ontario. We'll continue to invest where we can produce more value and help the people of Ontario, Mr. Speaker .

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier said she sold off Hydro One to fund her many infrastructure promises, but the F.A.O. Says that the funding of infrastructure in this way will actually

cost Ontarians \$1.8 billion more than had the government simply financed those projects themselves. So can the Premier tell Ontarians who exactly benefits from the \$1.8 billion of Liberal overspending this time?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the reports that are made by agents but they also don't mention and they should with regards to what is being invested and what are the receipts coming back to the province as a result. As you know during that transaction, we have now paid down debt by \$5.1 billion. \$6.2 billion in the trillium trust to engage and to invest. Furthermore the actions of the operations are now enhanced providing even greater value for the shareholders which are the province of Ontario and the people of Ontario. But going forward we're going to continue to invest. We know that the investments we make in roads, bridges, schools hospitals bring back 7 times more value than what was initially invested. That too is critical. Furthermore the opposition make it sound as though we're selling off Niagara Falls. Mr. Speaker, we're talking about transmission and that is all we're doing. We recognize the operations of the. Power generation still continues to be held by public purse and will continue to support those initiatives for the benefit of all people of Ontario.

>> Andrea Horwath: The premier's wrong handed decision to sell off Hydro One means billions of dollars, billions every dollars less for the services that matter the most for families. Revenue from Hydro One should be going directly into patient care in overcrowded hospitals and into our children's classrooms, Speaker. But the Liberals and Conservatives won't bring Hydro One back into public hands. How can this Premier continue to defend the wrong-headed and financially damaging decision to sell off Hydro One?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our goal, as we've always said, Mr. Speaker, is to get the best possible value for the people of Ontario and invest billions in transit, transportation and infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, through the trillium trust. That includes go regional express, L.R.T. Projects in multiple communities and the ring of fire in the north, Mr. Speaker, just to name a few. Looking at the f.a.o.'s report it confirms that as a publicly traded company Hydro One is in a position to achieve efficiencies that will create savings for Ontario ratepayers and a boost to the province's revenues, Mr. Speaker. The NDP's biggest idea is to buy back shares of Hydro One at a cost of billions of dollars using money that would otherwise go to funding hospitals and schools, Mr. Speaker. Maybe they can explain what schools they will close, how many nurses they will fire once again, Mr. Speaker. The worst part is that won't even take one cent off of any bill, Mr. Speaker. It is this government that brought forward the fair hydro plan taking 25% off everyone's bills across the province and building infrastructure, Mr. Speaker

MPP Yurek to Minister Hoskins Re: Cardiac Unit in London

>> MPP Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Speaker, last month London health science centre announced that the cardiac fitness institute will close this spring. It was established in 1981. The C.F. I. provides reliable and fitness education for patients who have suffered from serious heart problems. It serves roughly 1,600 people a year. It only costs about \$150,000 and hospital cites the reason for its closure a funding environment becoming increasingly challenging resulting in their inability to fund the program further. You need look no further than to see how this government has damaged our health care system in Ontario. Speaker, my question's to the Minister. Do you agree with removing this important service from serious cardiac health care?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And of course fundamentally our government is absolutely committed to ensuring that Ontarians receive the highest quality evidence-based care. And we know and I understand and we're monitoring closely that the London health sciences centre has taken a decision, a decision that is based upon, as they say, the best evidence with regards to postcard yak incident care and they've made a decision that as of the end of March they will no longer be accepting, at that particular site, will no longer be accepting cardiac patients that had a cardiac event. But, Mr. Speaker, despite making that decision to end further patient referrals, referrals which amounted to under 10 per month, that we're confident in London health sciences is

currently working with St. Joe's. That the patients currently going to London health sciences will continue to receive their full evidence-based cardiac rehabilitation care through that program at St. Joe's in London, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Minister. The H.O. Program kicks patients out after six months which real doesn't rely on the information that's available from Britain, which shows the advantage of continuing this program. Mr. Speaker, through underfunding over the years, this government has caused many programs throughout the system to become defunct. Through years of their failed funding of the hospital system, patients aren't getting the resources they need. Backed by scientific evidence, the preventative care provided by the C.F.I. Showed the number of heart attacks due to heart problems as well as saving the health care millions of dollars. These services are available in Windsor, Toronto and Ottawa but no longer in London after March. Speaker, will the Minister considering how low cost this program is, how many lives it could possibly impact, will the Minister commit to funding this program?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I know as a fellow health care professional the member opposite appreciates and I would hope agrees that we need to allow our frontline health care providers, our physicians, the entire complement to make the best decisions based on evidence and quality of care. And in fact after March 18th, all of those patients enrolled in London through their cardiac rehab program, will continue to receive, as they do in the entire rest of the province, six months of postcardiac care. I don't know if the member opposite is suggesting that we should create a system which is unbalanced, inequitable for a small minority which runs contrary to the best evidence that exists and the evidence, by the way, endorsed by cardiac care Ontario and present through the entire cardiac system in this province.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Milczyn Re: Housing Affordability

>> MPP Peter Tabuns Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question from the Minister of housing. Housing and rental -- sorry, housing and rental costs in Toronto have reached a tipping point. Families are being priced out of their neighbourhoods and many have lost hope that they'll be able to raise their children in the communities that they know and love. Premier Wynne had the opportunity to ease this affordable housing crisis with inclusionary zoning and satisfied an adequate number of residential development to become affordable housing. But instead the Premier decide today cap the number of affordable units to just 5% compared to the 30% recommended by experts. Will the Minister reverse this shortsighted developer-friendly cap and instead strengthen inclusionary zoning to help people put a roof over their heads?

>> Minister Peter Milczyn: Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question. Under our fair housing plan we've taken a number of steps to make housing more affordable for Ontarians. Whether it's increasing the rebates for first-time home buyers on the land transfer tax, extending rent control to all Ontario tenants, capping abilities of landlords to evict tenants when they're simply pretending to use it for their own use, and most recently introducing a standard lease. We're making important steps to improve the affordability of housing. On inclusionary zoning, we released a framework for consultation with Ontario municipalities and all stakeholders. I'm having ongoing discussions with stakeholders on a daily basis on how to implement that at a local level, which is where it will be implemented, by municipalities to create thousands of new affordable units across this province.

>> MPP Tabuns: Speaker, again to the Minister. Speaker, these are just empty words from the Minister. The actions of his Premier, his actions, time and again show where the priorities lie. They lie with big banks, with big developers, with big business. Only new Democrats are committed to strengthening inclusionary zoning and repairing our crumbling social housing needs. Toronto families need action on affordable housing and they need it now, not more developer-friendly regulations from a government that continues to let them down. Will the Minister commit to remove the cap on affordable housing units now so that Toronto families can have an affordable place to live?

>> Minister Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We put forward a framework for consultation. As part of that consultation we're getting excellent feedback from municipalities and other stakeholders. In fact it's not a cap of 5% even in the draft. It was up to 10%, Mr. Speaker, but we are looking at the rate of set aside to increase that. We're looking at how development could be inserted and the purpose of inclusionary zoning is to create more housing and ensure that that additional housing supply is affordable. And, Mr. Speaker, I put that forward as a private member's bill. I've taken the mandate from Premier Wynne on this. Mr. Speaker, we will deliver an inclusionary zoning framework that's going to create thousands and tens of thousands of affordable units across this province.

MPP Potts to Minister Flynn Re: Bill 148

>> MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Minister of labour. Speaker, as we ushered in the new year, we also entered a new area of workplaces in Beaches- East York and across the province. January 1st was a day for our working people and those across the province, because over the number of years that I've served, I spoke with countless families about how the nature of their work has changed in this province and these families are working hard to put food on the table and take care of their children but they often find that the money runs out before the month is over. And while this opinion may not be shared by all members opposite, I firmly believe that everyone who works 35, 40 hours a week shouldn't have to struggle to get by and that's why I'm so pleased, Speaker, that our government has made such prolific places to -- changes to our workplace laws. This includes of course an increase to the minimum wage taking it to a living wage of 14 this year and 15 next year So, Speaker, account Minister please inform the House about these changes and what employees and employers can expect as a result?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Speaker, thanks very much to the member from Beaches- East York for this excellent question. The conversations that he outlines in his question that he's had in his own community echo what we've all heard across the province over the past two or three years. We have worked at a very extensive comprehensive review of employment laws and realized that changes needed to be made to bring those laws up to date to 2018, Speaker. That's why we moved forward with the plan. We made changes so that employees in the province of Ontario will see an increase to the minimum wage. Two paid personal emergency leave days, increased vacation, Speaker. Equal pay for equal work and for those going through the living hell of domestic and sexual violence won't have to worry about their jobs while they're dealing with that situation, Speaker. We didn't have support from everybody in this House, Speaker. I'm so proud that, on this side of the House, we're on the side of Ontario workers.

>> MPP Potts: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to personally thank the Minister of labour not only for his answer but Progressive advocacy on this file. Speaker, we know this province is doing -- economy is doing very well. We have led the g-7 in economic growth for the past three years, and since the recession, Speaker, we've created almost 800,000 new jobs, and our unemployment rate has been lower than the national average for the last 34 months and now stands at a record low of hovering around 5.5%, Speaker. So our businesses are expanding and creating wealth and I believe that everyone deserves to share in that prosperity. And yet those -- there are those across the hall who believe it's still not time for these changes. They keep saying that this is too much too soon. Is \$15 really too much, Speaker ? They believe that the working people in this province should wait, although they won't say for how long. And I know that the families of Beaches- East York can't wait. They want changes now. So, Speaker, will the Minister please explain how his plan will create Ontario and give 15 minimum wage for all workers?

>> Minister Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you for that excellent supplementary, Speaker. Speaker, it's very simple. We increased the minimum wage on January 1st of this year \$14 an hour. January 1st, 2019, Speaker, it goes to \$15 an hour. Speaker, anybody that tells you any different, anybody that tries to delay that, Speaker, is simply denying that to the people in the province of Ontario. Any attempt to roll back, cancel the increase to \$15 an hour, Speaker, takes money away

from Ontario workers. Speaker, that's important money. That's money they rely on for food, for rent, for transit, for buying clothes for the kids, Speaker. I don't think that it's fair. I don't think it's right. Ontarians can't afford to wait any longer, Speaker. We've phased the plan in over 18 months. More workers are benefitting now more thoroughly from Ontario's incredible economic growth. Free tuition, rent control, Speaker. We're standing up for Ontario workers. We've got their backs. We're not backing down from that commitment, Speaker.

MPP Harris to Minister McGarry Re: High-Speed Rail Projects

>> MPP Michael Harris: Speaker, to the Minister of transportation. Speaker, as the opposition transport critic I want to welcome the member from Cambridge to her new role as Minister of transportation. But now -- Now let's get down to business, Speaker. Would the Minister tell me why she used her first opportunity as Minister to go back to the old Liberal playbook and hand out another Patronage appointment to former Minister David Collenette?

>> Minister Kathryn McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker, and thank you very much to the member opposite and my critic in this role, another member from Waterloo region. Thank you very much for the question this morning. High-speed rail is incredibly important to the economy of Ontario. We're delighted to have David Collenette, with all of his expertise, to now be the chair of our new panel advisory committee while we continue to do some of the preliminary work in order to deliver this incredibly important role. While preparing a preliminary business case, special advisor at that point, David Collenette, met with many different stakeholders including indigenous communities, to make sure that the business case was solid for high-speed rail. We have affirmed that there is a really great business case. The high-speed rail will have an immense impact on Ontario's economy. It will be continuing to be built in the coming weeks and months. We will be continuing to -- Provide an initial \$15 million in a comprehensive environmental assessment to finally get some of the routes start under this very important process.

>> MPP Harris: Well, I suppose you all still agree that he is still entitled to Speaker, this is electioneering at its worst. It's the second election in a row that the Wynne Liberals have attempted to lure voters with high speed dreams at of course the taxpayer's expense. Last election they had a U.K. Consultant slap together a report based on Google maps. Four years later they're back at it again. Another taxpayer-subsidized appointment for their old pal David Collenette. High-speed rail share. In fact the same David Collenette who just left his previous Liberally appointed role as high-speed rail advisor. Speaker, as the government spins its wheels will the Minister admit this Liberal high-speed rail sequel is just another taxpayer-funded desperate at the same time to hold or cling to power?

>> Minister McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker. And in his new role, we know that Mr. Collenette will continue to provide -- Thank you. We know he'll continue to provide excellent strategic advice moving forward on this landmark project. We need his exp Erience to move forward and his skills would be very helpful to see this project through. What I would point out is that the member opposite has made sure that any time he has the ability to vote on our government budget, that provides the investments needed to bring a project forward, he is consistently with his party voted against these investments. So let me be clear. I don't believe that his party would ever support a high-speed rail. Or provide some of the infrastructure money in order to move forward with an important project like this. It takes longer than four years to do it.

MPP Gelinias to Minister Hoskins Re: Long-Term Care

>> MPP France Gelinias: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. 91-year-old Godfrey alderl and his 88-year-old wife held guard of Sudbury. They have been separated since August of 2017. Last week was their first ever Valentine's day apart in 67 years of marriage. Now that

they need long-term care they've been separated by a system that doesn't care about keeping couples together and by a government that won't fix it. Hellduard and Godfrey miss each other every day. The Minister says that spousal reunification is a top priority, but it has been six months and nothing has happened. Why won't this Liberal government stop the forced separation of couples needing long-term care and reunite Hellduard and Godfrey today? Plau.

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all I want to affirm and express my concern with regards to this couple. But any couple across this province that, for whatever reason, but particularly when it comes to long-term home placement, where they're unable to receive and obtain those placements together. I find it unimaginable. I can't imagine the stress that they're going through. And, Mr. Speaker, that's why I'm so grateful that the member opposite has raised this today, because in fact today the changes that we made in the legislation last fall, which creates a separate category for spousal reunification and requires long-term care homes to set aside specific dedicated beds for spousal reunification. That legislation and those regulations -- Actually take place and now are in place as of today, Speaker .

>> MPP Gelinias: Speaker, the Minister knows full well that crisis will always take priority and the crisis list in Sudbury will never end. They will never be together. This 91-year-old man and his 88-year-old wife lie alone crying at night. Consider the stress for those two elderly people. Their health is declining. Their mental health suffer. They just want to be together. The Minister says that reunification and long-term care is a top priority, but clearly it is not, because Hellduard and Godfrey have been forced to live apart for six long months. When you're 91 years old, six months is a long time, Speaker. When will this Liberal government stop making excuses and say -- do what they say that they will do. Get Hildegard and Godfrey back together?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, we did what we said we would do. Mr. Speaker, last fall -- perhaps the member wasn't focused on the legislation. But created outside of crisis. This has nothing to do with crisis as opposed to what the member is trying to suggest. Every single long-term care home in this province, for the first time in history, as of today, is required to set aside specific dedicated beds for spousal reunification. So I'm hopeful and I would hope that the member -- I would hope for the first time the member would work together with me and some of her Colleagues on this specific case to see if they can now take advantage of a system, of a law and regulations specifically set up to aid in this very challenging situation. Mr. Speaker, we have an opportunity here. This has nothing to do with crisis designation.

MPP Qaadri to Minister Ballard Re: Cap-and-Trade

>> MPP Shafiq Qaadri: My question is for the Minister of the environment. Concerned and want to see real action on climate change and that's why we've taken the initiative to reduce Green -- greenhouse gas emissions substantially. In 2014 we shut down dirty coal-fired plants, reducing nearly one quarter of the sulphur dioxide emissions in the province and I can attest in a professional capacity about the health benefits of that particular initiative. In 2016 we implemented our climate change action plan that includes our best-in-class cap-and-trade program. Last month the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario recognized we exceeded our 2014 gas reduction goals and are on track to meet our 2020 goal. My question is this, Speaker. Account Minister please further explain what our government is doing to address climate change while making life more affordable for the province of Ontario?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member from Etobicoke North for that important question. And being a medical practitioner like the government of Ontario, you know, he recognizes how critical it is that Ontario tackles climate change head on, Mr. Speaker. We don't take that responsibility lightly. That's why we're limiting the amount of greenhouse gas pollution businesses can emit each year and we're reducing that cap each year, Mr. Speaker. And that's not all. Speaker, last year our cap and trade options generated \$1.9 billion in proceeds. And we're reinvesting every dollar of those proceeds into green programs that are helping Ontario

businesses, Ontario homeowners, to fight climate change and save money, Mr. Speaker. These investments include hundreds of thousands of dollars for bike lanes, energy retrofits for homes, hospitals, soition -- social housing. Would like to make one thing clear, Speaker. All of these important investments --

>> MPP Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker. Minister, I'd like to thank you on behalf of everyone who breathes in the province of Ontario. Speaker, climate change should no longer be seen as a question, a supposition or speculation. On this side of the House, the governing side, we know that climate change is a reality that we can't overlook. We have to face climate change with real solutions at affordable costs. And that's why we've implemented a cap-and-trade program that is recognized by third party experts as the most effective way to reduce emissions. Speaker, in addition to promising to scrap our cap-and-trade program, the current but fluctuating Ross terl of P.C. Leadership candidates would axe the carbon tax, which is the funding basis of those entire program which blows a 9 billion-dollar-plus hole and that's just this week. It's clear the party opposite doesn't take climate change seriously. Account Minister please explain

>> Minister Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker. You know, it's object obvious the P.C.S refuse to take fighting climate change and protecting our environment seriously. Let's not forget that this is the party that voted against our climate action plan, the greenbelt act and the great Lakes protection act, Mr. Speaker. But what's unclear is how they plan to fund their platform promises without money from their carbon tax scheme. Speaker this means that in order to fund what they promised in their glossy magazine, they'll have to make billions of dollars in cuts. We can be certain that if elected the P.C.S would be making billions of dollars of cuts in critical social programs that Ontarians rely on. Speaker, things like ohip plus, things like free tuition and the \$15 minimum wage. Meanwhile, Speaker, our government is investing in Ontarians by funding programs that make it easy and affordable for them to make greener choices.

MPP Pettapiece to Minister Sousa Re: Horse Racing in Ajax Closures

>>MPP Randy Pettapiece: Thank you. Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Minister of agriculture, food and rural affairs about his job loss policy. Last week the Minister let the horse out of the barn. He revealed O.L.G. Will be shutting down Ajax casino threatening the future of horse racing in Ajax downs. This news cost the town of -- caught the town Ajax totally by surprise. The Minister left them to read about it in the Peterborough newspaper. The mayor of Ajax, Steve parish, put out a statement saying -- I think this government has been caught red-handed in their deception. It is amazing how far they will go to cover up their back room deals. Speaker, to the Minister. Why are you putting 1,700 jobs in rural Ontario in jeopardy with a secret deal to shut down Ajax casino?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear the member opposite is asking me a question knowing full well that no decision has been made. We've issued off a release to -- to comment on the fact, to maintain fairness and transparency throughout the entire process. The member opposite also knows the candidate running in that riding is also the former head of the O.L.G. Who himself had initiated modernization process, to remove slots from some of these racetracks. We on this side of the House have been committed and will continue to commit to horse racing in our province. We have a procurement process that must be followed appropriately but we also have an agreement with the racing community to ensure we provide support for these racetracks. And the horsemen especially so they can plan their breeding cycle on an ongoing basis.

>> MPP Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. Perhaps the finance Minister didn't read the Peterborough newspaper. Back to the Minister of agriculture, food and rural affairs. Mr. Speaker, the sudden move to shut down the slots at Ajax downs is the latest example of this government's reckless approach to horse racing and rural affairs. We already know the Liberals secretly planned to kill the slots-at-racetracks programme fully aware it would collapse the industry. Now we discover that the government has apparently cut a secret deal that will likely destroy quarter horse racing in the

province. Speaker, that Minister is big on talk but his actions show a real lack of respect for rural communities. My question, will the government support the town of Ajax's call for an independent, fair public review of the decision? Yes or no?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, absolutely we will Transparency. We said that from the start. But that member opposite and that party voted against the measures to provide full and accurate and sustainable funding for the horse racing industry. We're putting that in place, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite can't say we're not. We're providing those very opportunities, very dollars that the horse racing community requires. And that member opposite also knows that his candidate who's running in that party is a man that masterminded the process from the beginning. We will do what -- Joe Dickson the member of that riding has been fighting hard and --

MPP Natyshak to Minister Ballard Re: Water Quality Southwest Ontario

>> MPP Taras Natyshak Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the acting Premier. Speaker, water is a fundamental element of life. Without water, nothing survives. Rural residents have been able to draw clean well water for their families and for their farms for over 100 years in southwestern Ontario. However there are wells contaminated in Chatham- Kent with sediments that the Minister of the environment and climate change refuses to Collect and analyze. Residents suspect this is as a result of pile driving through the aquifer that has released sediments. So local residents Collected and analyzed the sediments and found them to contain black shale, which is known as an environment AI hazard because it contains heavy metals. Last week the Premier held a counsel hall meeting in Windsor, saw the black shale contained water like black like coffee and told the residents that it was safe to drink without the benefit of a health hazard investigation. Will the Premier back up her claim and direct the Minister of the environment. To Collect and analyze the sediments in order to conduct a proper and impartial scientific investigation?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. You know, the ministry takes concerns regarding groundwater quality very seriously. And we're holding the company accountable for addressing complaints related to changes, if any, in well water quality. We have undertaken a review of water quality data to ensure residents that their water is safe to drink, Speaker. And thus far I will say the analysis has not shown a connection between water quality and construction activity. Further, Speaker, the Chatham- Kent medical officer of health has confirmed, he has confirmed, Speaker, the water particulates do not pose a health risk to residents. The ministry understands that the pile driving has now finished and we're also planning to meet with water well first this week. To discuss their data. We're going to require -- we're going to continue to require the company continue to monitor its well impact.

>> MPP Natyshak: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, these families have been the backbone of Ontario's agriculture sector for over generations and have built and said this province from the land they so proudly steward. As the Minister is aware Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is responsible for public health. Don't you think that public health authorities should know the substances that they are giving opinions on? The safety is affecting -- this issue is affecting the viability of an entire region of this province. Without water, there will be nothing. Will you direct the ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to immediately order a health hazard investigation as the health prevention and promotion act provides for?

>> Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. I want to start by just reiterating what the Chatham- Kent medical officer of health has told us through their testing and what our testing shows, but what that medical officer of health has said is that water particulates did not pose a health risk to residents, Speaker. We're going to be meeting with the group representing the homeowners. We understand they have some data. We have asked them to share with us. We want to be able to talk to them about that data, Speaker, at your upcoming meeting with them and we're going to continue to work with homeowners to supply alternative water, and we're also providing -- the company is providing a licensed well contractor to inspect their wells and answer any question they may have, all of this at

the company's expense, Mr. Speaker. But I'll just end by saying. The medical officer of health has said the water is safe.

MPP Kiwala to Minister Milczyn Re: Homelessness in Ontario

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of housing and the Minister responsible for the poverty reduction strategy. While Ontario's economy is strong, we know that not every person in this province is feeling the benefit of that strength. Homelessness is a complex issue without a one-size-fits-all solution. Addressing homelessness requires input across and between governments to not simply House someone but to help them build healthy and sustainable lives. It also requires that we work collaboratively with all stakeholders and I am again pleased to welcome partners who work in this field to our reception this evening on chronic homelessness. We also know that individuals who have access to stable housing. And wraparound supports have better health outcomes, both mental and physical. Could the Minister please tell us about the investments that our province has made towards addressing homelessness and its causes in Ontario.

>> Minister Peter Milczyn: Thank the member from Kingston and the Islands for the question and her advocacy on this issue. Our government knows that every person and family deserves the security of knowing they'll have a safe and adequate place to lay their heads at night and that's why I'm committed to reaching our goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2025. Since 2013 we've invested nearly \$1.2 billion to our community homelessness prevention initiative. Helping communities across the province tackle homelessness through an integrated people-centred and outcome-focused housing first approach. This funding is only going to grow in 2018, 2019 and 2020, Mr. Speaker. And we're already seeing the benefits of this approach. The chpi helped --32,300 House holds exp Eriencing homelessness obtain housing, and over 125,000 homes that were in danger of losing their homes of preventing that outcome.

>> MPP Kiwala: Thank you to the Minister for that answer. And thank you as well for your dedication in resolving chronic homelessness and poverty in our province. There are thousands of residents in my riding who benefit from the implementation of Progressive provincial programs like rent control, increases to the minimum wage, free tuition and ohip plus. Unfortunately, however, we are not immune from the pressures of the increased cost of living and the hot rental market. This year the vacancy rate in Kingston and the Islands fell to 0.7%.The Minister spoke of some of the initiatives that we are working on earlier in question period. And we need to focus on building community resources and building connections between mental health services and developmental services. Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering if the Minister could please tell this House more about what his ministry is doing to bring more housing be it affordable market price rental online? Thank you.

>> Minister Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the follow-up. We're very serious about our goal to end chronic homelessness, Mr. Speaker. We've increased our funding for homelessness programs by 30% and that supports over 150,000 vulnerable families. Last March we announced our home for good program, a homelessness focused program which will invest up to \$200 million in supportive housing and services to help up to 6,000 families and individuals access affordable housing over the next three years. In 2017 the city of Kingston was able to expand and enhance the services provided to homeless youth through the Kingston youth shelter when we provided them with \$70,000, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, everything we're doing is focused on providing more fairness and opportunity to the residents of Ontario. Fairness in accessing good housing and affordable housing and creating more opportunities to have the kind of dignified life all Ontarians deserve, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Thompson to Minister Zimmer Re: Job Growth Rural Ontario and in North

>> MPP Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation. Last week the F.A.O. Reported that job growth has been uneven across the province's regions. In fact it was reported that the new job gains in 2017, there were only 1,600 net new jobs created in southwestern, eastern and northern Ontario combined, Speaker. That is a meager 1.2% of the jobs created. Chief Clifford bull of laque Seou said he will, and I quote, fight for for better education and employment opportunities for our youth. All of us will do that, Speaker. The F.A.O. Reported whole ranges of the province being completely left behind. Ontario is just not central Ontario and the gtha. Winter, Thunder Bay, it's Leeds- Grenville and keewatin. We want to hear from the Minister

>> Minister David Zimmer: Thank you for that question. We take economic development seriously in Ontario. We take it particularly serious as it relates to indigenous peoples in Ontario and particularly first nations and indigenous peoples in northern tomorrow. With that in mind, I can tell you that we have something called the indigenous economic development fund. It's continuing for another seven years. It began in 2017/18. It's an additional investment of \$70 million. That's a combined investment of \$95 million over ten years. We're going back to the 2014 budget. We introduced indigenous economic development fund and that was an investment of \$25 million over three years. As a part of the fund Ontario provided \$15 million to an entity called Aboriginal financial institutions over three years. They provide grants and loans for promising indigenous projects. Speaker, we take the development of economic life as it relates to our indigenous people very, very seriously. It is a priority because that's how --