

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Tuesday, May 16, 2017

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
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MPP Brown to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of energy. Yesterday the Premier said of the leaked Liberal Cabinet document, I quote -- not the document on which our plan was built. Mr. Speaker, if this is the case, will the Minister release the document that their plan was built on? The people deserve to know. Yes or no, will they do that?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The plan was introduced in the assembly last Thursday, Mr. Speaker. The leader of the opposition has already come out and said that he's going to vote against making sure that you know families and farms and small businesses in this province are going to get a 25% reduction. He also said he's going to vote against giving rural and northern families a 40 to 50% reduction, Mr. Speaker. You know, when it comes to making sure that we're acting in the short term, our fair hydro plan is going to bring that relief for families, for small businesses and for farms once we can get this legislation passed, Mr. Speaker. It has been 76 days since they've said that they would have some sort of idea on how to do something, Mr. Speaker. They've actually done nothing since that time. We've brought forward a plan that's going to work. For every single family in this province, Mr. Speaker. We look forward to getting this bill passed through the House .

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of energy. My question was about the document, the Liberal Cabinet document, a graph that showed hydro rates are going to skyrocket in Ontario. We got an answer that was completely irrelevant to the question. So I'm going to ask again. We have the Premier saying the document was out of date, that their new plan was built on something else. This is a recent Liberal Cabinet document saying that their plan is going to skyrocket hydro rates. So I would give the Minister of energy another chance. If this was not recent, if this was not the plan -- Speaker, this document was not the one they built their plan on, like the Liberal Cabinet document says. Will the Minister release the graph that will show this is not the case? The people deserve to know. Yes or no, will you release the document?

>> Minister Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, the 2013 long-term -- Our government, with consultation with stakeholders and energy experts, showed where we believed prices were going to go. But what we've done, Mr. Speaker, is we've pulled costs out of the system. The \$3.5 billion renegotiation of the Samsung agreement, the cancellation of Irp2, Mr. Speaker, both took significant billions of dollars out of the system. So, Mr. Speaker, when you look at what the 2013 long-term energy plan said where we were going to be, we've actually reduced that number significantly. This plan that we have brought forward, Mr. Speaker, and are hoping to get passed through this House, we want to see that passed because we're going to bring 25%, on average, a reduction on every single electricity bill for families, small businesses and farms, Mr. Speaker. 76 days, they've done nothing. It just shows, Mr. Speaker, they have no plan for --

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of energy. The Minister of energy quoted a 2013 long-term energy plan. I'm talking about a Liberal Cabinet document for 2017. Let's talk about what we're talking about right now. And right now the Liberal Cabinet have a graph that shows hydro rates are going to skyrocket and skyrocket and go through the roof. And I know they're doing damage control right now because a whistle-blower from this government exposed this government, that once again every time they touch hydro, they make it worse. Now a third time to the Minister of energy. If the Liberal Cabinet graph is wrong, if hydro rates are not going to skyrocket, will you do -- will you at least be fair to the people of Ontario and provide us a new graph, a new document that your plan is based on? Will we have that disclosure, yes or no?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course. Just like we did with the 2010 long-term

energy plan and the 2013 long-term energy plan. We'll be bringing forward the 2017 long-term energy plan, Mr. Speaker. That will show where we were going to project where prices are going to be. And you know where they're going to be right now, Mr. Speaker ? 25% lower than where they were last year and that's thanks to this government, Mr. Speaker, bringing forward a plan going to make sure that we help every single family, farm and small business in this province. Where's their plan, Mr. Speaker ? The last I heard they were joking it was in policy development. But now we know, Mr. Speaker, that they're going to conjure something up on that magic weekend in November. But what we're doing, Mr. Speaker, is we're making sure 40 to 50% is coming off for 800,000 families as we make sure that we're helping those in rural and remote parts of our province and 25% coming off for every family, 500,000 small businesses and farms, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Brown to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of energy. Based on the Liberal Cabinet document leak that shows hydro rates are going to skyrocket, I want to ask a very direct question to the Minister of energy. What will hydro rates be in Ontario in 2022? The document says they're going to skyrocket. Please correct the record. Tell us what hydro rates will be, what type of increase are we going to see in 2022?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again we've been talking about what we're going to do in the short term which is bring about 25% reduction. Oh, I know, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to the medium term --Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the medium term for the next four years, we're holding our thoughts and rates of increases, Mr. Speaker, to the rate of inflation. The 2017 long-term energy plan. By 2022, Mr. Speaker. I'm hoping we might see something from them that relates to a plan because I think it will take them that long, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of energy. And he had a very revealing remark there. He said we're only focused on the short term. Surprise, surprise, Mr. Speaker. What's happening next year, it's an election and that's what costs Ontarians every time. They come up with gimmicks. They come up with games to create a House of cards and Ontario ends up paying more. Remember when we had the gas plant? Every time they're concerned about elections and not the long-term costs for Ontario, Ontarians pay more. So, Mr. Speaker, according to this Liberal document, this Liberal Cabinet document, by 2024. Electricity prices will reach a record high in Ontario. So my question to the Minister of energy, this document says we'll reach a record high in 2024. Is that correct? 2024 your document. This government's document says it will be a record high. Please tell us otherwise.

>> Minister Thibeault: That's incorrect, Mr. Speaker. The 2017 long-term energy plan is still being worked on, Mr. Speaker. We're still making sure that we're going to pull costs out of the system. And I know they have a hard time understanding anything about the electricity, Mr. Speaker, because they don't even have a plan. They first started talking about a five-point plan, then a three-point plan. And then a zero-point plan, Mr. Speaker. I not people of Ontario can't wait for a magic weekend in November. That's why we're bringing forward legislation, if passed, will reduce rates by 25%. That will help families, small businesses and farms. We got oesp program, Mr. Speaker. We have a first nation on reserve reduction, Mr. Speaker. These are things that are helping families. They've got nothing in their plan, Mr. Speaker. They don't even have --

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of energy. This Liberal Cabinet document that shows hydro rates are going to skyrocket is so disappointing. I think many Ontarians hope that when the Liberals said they're finally going to address their own hydro mess that maybe we would have seen executive salaries be reined in. Maybe we would have seen the government say we were wrong to Collect \$1.3 million in donations from the 30 magna renewable contracts. That was bad policy. Maybe they would have apologized to Ontarians. Instead right now we've got an election gimmick. As the Minister of energy said himself, this is about the short term. I'm concerned about the long term. I'm concerned that our hydro rates are going to continue to skyrocket, and their own document says that. Actually, 2022 it goes up.

2024 it goes up. In your own document, in 2028 it's going to jump 10%. Mr. Speaker, families can't afford this. When are we actually going to address the structural problems in hydro? When will this government actually clean up their own mess?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A, structural changes are being done right now by our system operator with market renewal, market reform and a capacity option, Mr. Speaker. We're already two steps ahead of this party on many things, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the electricity file, we've even got a plan bringing forward serious reductions for all families. You know what, Mr. Speaker, a 25% reduction in the short term and in the medium term is something that families in this province want and need, and we're delivering, Mr. Speaker. A 40 to 50% reduction for families that live in the rural and northern parts of our province. That is something they need in the short term and in the medium term and we're delivering, Mr. Speaker. And when it comes to the long term, Mr. Speaker, the only thing that is going long term right now is we're 76 days without them putting one iota, one idea on the table about what to do. We've got a long-term plan coming. The 2017 long-term energy plan will continue to address and pull costs out of the system.

MPP Horwath to Minister Matthews (Thibeault) Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> NCP Leader Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my question's for the acting Premier. The Premier is trying to sell the public a bill of goods here. Leaked documents show that she knows that her hydro plan will end up causing hydro rates to soar, Speaker. But in a few months that she's been bragging about this plan, she's never mentioned that fact, know a once. Why is the Premier trying to hide the real cost of her hydro plan, Speaker ?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: You know, Speaker, we really want an Ontario where everybody has an even chance, where there's a level playing field. And we know, Speaker, that when you're worried about your hydro bill, you're not able to focus on those other things, Speaker, that will make your life better. So that's why we are reducing electricity prices by 25%, Speaker. We have a plan. It's an important plan. It will provide relief for people. We are still waiting -- Speaker, we have had a plan, if you want to call it that, from the NDP And I'm happy to see that they're actually starting to execute that plan because one piece of that plan, Speaker, was to get the federal government to pay for -- Hydro prices. Now we're one step closer to having the member from Bramalea- Gore- Malton elected leader. Elected Prime Minister and then --

>> Andrea Horwath: I saw the Deputy leader over there prepared to vote for Jagmeet Singh for the leadership of the NDP Who knew she was a closet new Democrat, Speaker. She certainly doesn't act like one. Look, we know that this document was leaked last week, Speaker. It's a document that this government continues to claim is a document that's out of date. In fact the Premier uses that language. The Minister uses that language but I have to say that sounds more like, and I quote, the gas plant will only cost \$40 million, or I promise we won't sell Hydro One. Or nobody tries to bribe everybody in the Sudbury by-election. So that how the Premier and her Liberal party govern. They move from one scandal to the next, Speaker. Will this Premier stop the cycle of scandal and just come clean with the people of Ontario about the real cost of her borrowing scheme. That the people cannot afford?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise and talk about our fair hydro plan and of course, Mr. Speaker, the plan that is actually going to bring forward a 25% reduction to help all families, all small businesses, 500,000 of those small businesses and farms across the province, Mr. Speaker. And that's why we've acted to make sure that we have this legislation to get through this House because, if it passes, we're also going to help 800,000. 800,000 families in rural and northern parts of our province, Mr. Speaker. And I know the NDP And the P.C.S have already said that they're going to vote against this, Mr. Speaker. They're going to vote against giving families relief now, relief in the midterm, Mr. Speaker, and relief in the long term. Mr. Speaker, our plan is making sure that we build Ontario up, make sure that we create jobs, build the infrastructure we need and at the same time find ways reducing rates for all people right across this province.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker the bottom line is that the people of Ontario deserve the facts. They deserve the facts. The Premier needs to tell families and businesses what the real cost of this borrowing scheme will be, and they deserve to know how much Premier Wynne intend to increase the hydro bills, and they deserve to know now. They deserve to know now, Speaker, before the next election. That's when people need the information. So will this Premier and this Minister do the right thing and tell Ontario families and businesses, tell everyone that's sitting in this chamber right now what the real cost of their plan is going to be?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So let's talk about facts. 25% reduction for all families. 500,000 small businesses and farms in this province. Another fact, Mr. Speaker, 800,000 families in rural or northern parts of our province will see a 40 to 50% reduction, Mr. Speaker, once we can get this legislation passed. The Ontario electricity support program, fact, Mr. Speaker. Increased by an additional 50%. New line items including more people to qualify for that. Fact, Mr. Speaker, 192,000 families are currently on the oesp program. Nor fact, Mr. Speaker, is that we've reduced the delivery line for first nations, on reserve first nations. That's an \$85 savings, Mr. Speaker, to those families. That's a fact that we're making a difference in their lives. Another fact, Mr. Speaker, is both the NDP And the P.C.S have said they are voting against this, Mr. Speaker. The other fact is that's going to hurt every family in this province.

MPP Horwath to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My next question's also for the acting Premier. Last week I was in Sault Ste. Marie where I met Steve and Lucy Fronzy. Steve and Lucy are business owners, Speaker. They have a number of country style doughnuts and m&m meat shops. At each store their monthly hydro bills are now costing \$2,000. They spend over \$10,000 a month just on their hydro bills. They've done everything that they can do to reduce costs. They've changed all the lighting. They extra work on their freezers to make them more energy efficient, but nothing is bringing their bills down. How can the Premier implement a hydro plan that will end up costing this hard working family even more in a couple years' time?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we've said, the fair hydro plan applies to small businesses. Many of these small businesses that the leader of the third party has mentioned will qualify for the fair hydro plan and that 25% reduction. So these businesses and these family-run businesses will see that 25% reduction if passed, Mr. Speaker, and that is making sure that we are helping these small businesses keep more money in their pockets so they can continue to expand and grow just like we've been seeing other businesses like outspoken do that in Sault Ste. Marie, Mr. Speaker. We're going to continue to find ways to help our small businesses in this province, and when it comes to electricity concerns, we've even addressed toast that don't qualify for the 25% reduction. We changed the I.C.I. Program once again, Mr. Speaker. This will actually reduce the rates of qualification to ensure that thousands more businesses. Will qualify again, Mr. Speaker, saving businesses in this province thousands of dollars on their electricity bills.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the congys employ over 50 people in the Sault. They pride themselves on being able to offer good jobs to Sault residences. But with their exorbitant hydro bills they're worried they have to cut back on staff. Why is this Premier, why is this Liberal government forcing good community-minded employers like Steve and Lucy to choose between providing jobs in Sault Ste. Marie and paying hydro bills?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again as I said, these type of businesses will qualify for the 25% reduction, Mr. Speaker, so that's good news for the 500,000 small businesses that actually qualify for this program. We're also working with the Ontario chamber of commerce to make sure that we can get all of the programs that are out to help many of these businesses lower their consumption. When they lower their consumption, Mr. Speaker, they also lower their bills. The I.C.I. Program that I know many of the businesses in the Sault are actually seeing, Mr. Speaker, this will actually help them lower their bills boy up to a third. For those that weren't qualifying before, Mr. Speaker, for this program, we lowered the threshold from 1 mega watt to 500 kilowatts or .5

megawatts, Mr. Speaker. That opens up this program for thousands of businesses right across the province. We're going to continue to work with the chamber of commerce. We're going to continue to work with small businesses to make sure that they can continue to grow and make Ontario prosper.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, Steve and Lucy are not alone. All over Ontario, businesses that were promised relief are now reeling from the truth that the Liberal hydro plan is a borrowing scheme that is designed to make Liberal friends rich at the expense of hard working Ontario families. Why is this Premier punishing, punishing Ontario families and businesses with this wrong-headed hydro scheme?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only two parties that are punishing Ontarians are the opposition parties, Mr. Speaker, by voting against this bill. How can they say, Mr. Speaker, that a 25% reduction today is punishing? It is actually helping families, small businesses and farms right across our province. Not only this year, Mr. Speaker, not only next year and not only the following year but the year after that, Mr. Speaker. And then the 2017 long-term energy plan will kick in and you know what, Mr. Speaker? We're going to continue to take costs out of the system that will see rates even drop more, Mr. Speaker. We found ways to make sure that we can help Ontario families. We're going to continue to do that. They can talk about magic weekends in November and coming up with policies or ideas that's pie in the sky, Mr. Speaker, that don't do anything and don't even take a single cent. Neither party has talked about how they can take a single cent off any bill. We're taking 25%, Mr. Speaker, and we're proud of that.

MPP Pettapiece to Minister McGarry Re: Resources for Wild Animal Control

>> MPP Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of natural resources and forestry. Late last Friday, Toronto police were forced to shoot and kill a bear that had wandered onto city streets. Police spokesman Mark Pugash said that they called the ministry of natural resources but no one was able to come and help it. They were told that there were not any resources to assist them. Mr. Speaker, why was no one from natural resources able to help and trap the bear?

>> Minister Kathryn McGarry: Thank you very much. And thank you very much to the member for the question. Public safety is the most important thing in cases like these. Local police made the decision based on the swigs unfolding in front of them. My ministry was contacted that night by police and they provided some advice. They were unable to -- for public safety reasons -- it is not safe to attempt to tranquilize a bear at night. The Toronto police made the decision, they were the ones on the ground making the decision. They reached out to my ministry for advice. So they had provide -- so they provided the information. I agree it was an unfortunate situation but these are wild animals. The police and my ministry have a duty to ensure that the public is protected.

>> MPP Pettapiece: Back to the Minister, Mr. Speaker. You know, Don Cherry had this to say. I don't blame the police -- I don't blame the police because they didn't have the equipment or backup. It's a dark day and we have to learn from this. Mr. Speaker, the government refuses to learn because these dark days aren't all that rare in Ontario. June the 2nd, 2015, after a bear was shot in Newmarket, the former Minister said that nuisance bears were not the responsibilities of the M.N.R.. And the reason the police had to act was the M.N.R. Couldn't work weekends. This time M.N.R. said they couldn't work at night. It sounds like the Minister doesn't seem to give her staff the resources at all. Mr. Speaker, when will this government take responsibility? These bear deaths are a direct result of their cuts.

>> Minister McGarry: Thank you, Speaker. We have a protocol that we follow in Ontario when working with local police in these situations. We would never second-guess law enforcement's decision regarding public safety. And I want to give a shout-out to our officers across Ontario that protect the public. Both police and conservation officers of M.N.R.. We were on the phone that night to provide advice. Our ministry officials will go out in the daylight hours to tranquilize a bear. Let me reiterate, it is not safe to try and tranquilize a bear at night. We would also like to take a moment

to reiterate that if you see a bear that poses a threat to the public safety, you need to call 9-1-1 and your local police. My ministry's always available for advice and support when need be, but I would never second-guess. A police decision to make sure that public safety is the most important thing and that they provided public safety that night.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Sousa Re: Auto Insurance Rates

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question to the acting Premier. The Premier promised before the last election to lower auto insurance rates for Ontario drivers by 15%. After the election, she said it wasn't actually a promise. It was a stretch goal. We know the Premier's hydro borrowing scheme is the same as her auto insurance promise. A political calculation designed to confuse Ontario voters into voting for her party in the next election. Will the government finally admit that this is the case?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you for the question from the member opposite. Usually something that the Deputy leader of the opposition third party would ask and I recognize that he's not available now. But hopefully in time he'll be able to also act and provide some assistance as we move forward, Mr. Speaker, as we are with Ian Marshall's report to make sure we curb the increasing costs within the system to enable us to reduce premiums, and they have been reduced over time, around 8 to 9% now, Mr. Speaker, and we're further doing more in order to achieve our goal, Mr. Speaker, and that's an ongoing situation.

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the acting Premier. I hope this time they'll listen to the question. The Premier needs to figure out another way to get votes. She needs to understand that toying with people's lives for political advantage is not acceptable, and it doesn't work. Ontarians need -- Relief from skyrocketing hydro prices that the Premier has helped create. When will she offer the people of Ontario a solution that benefits them, not the Liberal party?

>> Minister Sousa: The member opposite knows a report has been issued. David Marshall has come forward with a number of important recommendations. It's up for public debate, part of which would reduce the costs to the system. I hope the member opposite will take it into account to initiate some of this to reduce those costs to then enable us to have further reductions in our premiums. Mr. Speaker, it's an ongoing thing we always have said we would do and we are doing it. And there are about 20 odd companies that have now reduced their rates by more than 15%. It's a competitive industry and we'll continue to move forward and working with the industry to achieve our goals. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Martins to Minister Albanese Re: Not-for-Profit Sector

>> MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Minister of citizenship and immigration. Minister, our government and the not-for-profit sector share the common goal of healthy and vibrant Ontario communities. In my riding of Davenport, a significant number of constituents rely on local not-for-profit organizations like South Asian women's centre that increase self awareness of women and to empower women to develop their social and cultural potential. Minister, it is crucial to my constituents that they can access organizations that assist to develop their full potential by increasing their economic, social and political standing in society. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister share what the government is doing to strengthen the not-for-profit sector so that Ontarians can continue to access the supports they need to succeed?

>> Minister Laura Albanese: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the dedicated member from Davenport for advocating for immigrant women and the not-for-profit sector in her community. Mr. Speaker, Ontario's home to more than 55,000 registered not-for-profits. Not only do they contribute to every aspect of our society, but they also positively impact our economy. The not-for-profit sector contributes close to \$67 billion to Ontario's economy. Mr. Speaker, our ministry supports nonprofits

through our partnership grants program. Since 2011, we have invested almost \$18 million to help 67 organizations program evaluation, inclusive leadership and volunteer management capacity.

>> MPP Martins: Mr. Speaker, I want the safety Minister for her response. Our government is committed to strengthening ties with the not-for-profit sector so that Ontarians can access the resources they need. I'm sure the Minister would agree that the work of local not-for-profit organizations is critical to the success of constituents. Minister, it is important that we continue to support the not-for-profit sector to build capacity by investing in projects that support interest vector co-operation, communication and networks. I understand that the Minister earlier this year was joined by the member from newmarket- Aurora at the blue hills child and family scene to make a funding announcement. Speaker, account Minister tell us how our government is enhancing support for not-for-profit organizations so that they can continue to assist Ontarians?

>> Minister Albanese: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member from Davenport recalls well. Earlier this year I was joined by the member of nymarket Aurora to annoyance -- nouns an investment over two years of \$4 million for 21 grants across the province to support and strengthen organizations so that they can continue to serve the people of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, this program is essential to building capacity within the not-for-profit sector. The projects being funded will reach over 200 organizations, which in turn will assist thousands of Ontarians. The member from Davenport will be pleased to learn that the south Asian women's centre in her riding will be receiving up to \$129,000 to develop a diversity and inclusion leadership strategy and provide essential training to -- Mr. Speaker, our ministry recognizes that nonprofit organizations play a crucial role in maintaining the well-being --

MPP Thompson to Minister Zimmer (Coteau) Re: Aboriginal Group Homes

>> MPP Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation. On Saturday, may 6, 17-year-old Tammy kiorb failed to make curfew at her Thunder Bay group home. Tragically her body was discovered in the floodway. Between Saturday and Sunday no one in her family or the north caribou first nation community or nishnawbe ask nation was notified she had not returned home. Nobody, Speaker, was looking out for this young woman. Sadly, in total, four indigenous youth living in group homes have died in the last six months. Why, Speaker, is the Minister sitting idly by and letting this happen under his watch?

>> Minister David Zimmer: Thank you for that question. We take these issues very seriously. I can tell you that, yesterday afternoon, the Minister of children and youth services and I spent the afternoon at the native centre on Spadina road. From about 1:00 to 5:00, in which we discussed the issues specifically surrounding first nations children ant issues they have in care, being taken into care, how they're dealt with in care. At that meeting, as I've said, Minister of children and youth services, myself and the leadership from first nations communities across Ontario. They shared with us their very frank and their very poignant stories. But more than their frank and poignant stories, they threw solutions out. They placed solutions on the table. About how to deal with these and I would be happy to deal with that in the supplementary.

>> MPP Thompson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that update but we have to remember, June 28th marks the one-year anniversary since the Thunder Bay inquiry resulted in 145 recommendations on how to better support indigenous youth in care. One recommendation dealt with the development of policies dealing with missing students. Specifically the timely filing of missing person reports. A year later, though, Speaker, indigenous youth are still dying and their families and communities have no safeguard. Speaker, today we've seen more calls for action. So I ask the Minister will you support the call from the Ontario children's aid society and and leadership and call a coroner's inquest into these recent deaths?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I want to thank the member for the question, because this is a really important issue, and like the Minister who is responsible for indigenous affairs and reconciliation said yesterday, we had a very -- a very meaningful conversation with the leadership with chiefs right across the province here in Toronto, and in addition to that, Mr.

Speaker, I've been to many different jurisdictions across this province and spoken to young people and to leaders and elders within communities. And we have a plan moving forward when it comes to group homes and children in care. A new blueprint we will be bringing forward very shortly with some substantial changes. But, Mr. Speaker, the most important piece here is -- Back to indigenous communities and making sure that those communities can care for their children and that's the direction we're moving in. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Gelinas to Minister Hoskins Re: Pharmacare

>> MPP France Gelinas: Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [End of Translation] For the acting Premier. Yesterday I participated in the Ontario roundtable organized by diabetes Canada. Their number one issue was access to medication and supplies. Diabetes an expensive disease to manage and high out-of-pocket costs compromise people's ability to access the medication they need. Charlene is 60 years old. She buys her insulin in vials, mixes them herself before she injects with a needle in order to save money. She told us that the essential medicines that she needs, including her insulin, is costing \$1,000 a month and with no public drug coverage, that money comes straight out of her pocket. Like millions of people in Ontario, the 1.5 million diabetes patients need universal pharmacare. That covers everyone no matter how old you are. Why doesn't the Premier do that?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, since we developed a provincial Ontario diabetes strategy roughly a decade ago, we've made important changes so that all Ontarians with diabetes will have access to the necessities that they need. Out of that 1.5 million individuals that the member opposite referenced, my sister, for almost 50 years -- in fact she was diagnosed in her teens, as insulin dependent so this is an issue that I know extremely well. Despite the heckling actually that I'm receiving from the leader of the third party. Mr. Speaker, and that includes -- that includes -- well, my sister, who is that age and has had diabetes. Since 15, Mr. Speaker. So we provide for children and adults ensure Lynn pumps, Mr. Speaker. We provide for diabetic -- We provide for those who are of limited means as well, Ontario works or odsp additional support so they can manage their diabetes effectively.

>> MPP Gelinas: Thank you, Speaker. Well, with universal pharmacare, every Ontarian would have drug coverage no matter how old they are. Universal pharmacare would save the lives of 830 diabetic patients each and every year in Ontario. Ontarians should never be forced to skip their medications. They should never have to go into credit card debt just to fill their prescription. Shouldn't have to worry about whether she can afford the essential medications she needs to manage her diabetes. Universal pharmacare is for everyone. It is the right thing to do. So why won't the Liberal government do it?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would implore the third party to stop describing their program as universal pharmacare because it's anything but. So what was -- what would that member, Speaker, say to the -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And in the over 4,000 days that the leader of the third party has been in this legislature, she -- prior to a couple weeks ago, she mentioned the word pharmacare three times. One reference informs reference to an op-ed -- One was in reference to an op-ed I wrote on pharmacare. The second was in reference to trans-pacific which is likely erroneous reference.

MPP Wong to Minister Coteau Re: Supporting Children, Youth and Families Act

>> MPP Soo Wong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Minister children and youth services. Minister, this past weekend marked a youth in care day across Ontario. May 14 every year is a time for all of us to recognize these young people's contributions to the province. As well as the strength, bravery and resilience. These young people have our government's full support, and I know the Minister has a long history of advocating for children and youth in this province, to help with success and also help them to thrive. As my neighbour, Speaker, the Minister is quite familiar with

my riding of Scarborough- Agincourt and have met with many children and youth to hear about their concerns on safety, access and child welfare issues. Speaker, through you to the Minister. Can he please provide some insight on how the government is helping young people -- And children and youth in care?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from Scarborough-Agincourt for this question, but I also want to thank her for her advocacy on this issue. In fact it was her private member's bill that established this day to be recognized here in Ontario. So thank you so much for all the work you've done. As the Minister responsible for children and Ewing services here in the province of Ontario, it is an absolute privilege for me to get out across the province and meet young people. And there are so many young people that I've met who are in care with lived experiences that are working towards building a better Ontario for the next generation of young people who live in care. So, Mr. Speaker, we're currently working on a very comprehensive piece of legislation, which members of the House know about, to reform child welfare -- Here in this province. So every single young person that has the opportunity -- has the opportunity in this province to reach their full potential.

>> MPP Wong: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the Minister. I'm very pleased to see that bill 89, many young people have added their voice before going through the legislative process of this House. We just finished committee stage and is now coming back to the House for third reading. Our government knows how important this legislation is and we want to get this right, Mr. Speaker. I also know the minister has listened closely to the feedback from bills appear before the standing committee, especially young people, sharing their experience both at the public hearings and throughout the consultation process. Our government's amendment to the bill also reflects some of the amendments in the bill. Minister, can you please share with the House how bill 89, as amended, would impact youth in care should the bill be passed?

>> Minister Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct that we had the opportunity to get out there and engage with a lot of young people and they've provided a tremendous amount of insight into the changes that they thought were necessary at the beginning stages to the consultation over the last few years to build the initial legislation but also through the committee amendment process. This bill, Mr. Speaker, is such an important piece of legislation. One of the pieces I think is so important is that it raises the age every protection and will now protect 16 and 17-year-olds who may be vulnerable and need support. In addition to that, it will improve oversight for service providers including children's aid societies so that children and youth receive consistent high-quality services right across this province. And it will affirm the rights of children. And require service providers to -- providers to uphold them. Mr. Speaker, most importantly it upholds Caitlyn's principles that every child has the right to be heard and respected.

MPP Barrett to Minister Leal Re: Processing Vegetable Market

>> MPP Toby Barrett: Minister of social service and rural affairs have now seen 10 months of turmoil in Ontario's processing vegetable market. It's incumbent on government to work through a process consistent with the needs of both growers and processors while supporting regulated marketing and supporting the growth of Ontario's processing vegetable industry. 2017 crop negotiations are wrapped up. There's more work to do. When will we see your government's promised economic impact study? It's been 10 months now and when will we see the establishment of the industry advisory committee?

>> Minister Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member from Haldimand- Norfolk for a very thoughtful question this morning. We of course have issued regulation 440, a process that we're working through. We had a particular challenge this early spring with the tomato crop in the province of Ontario. We appointed one of the most distinguished people in the province of Ontario. The former agriculture Minister, the honorable Elmer Buchanan, who served so well in this House from 1990 to 1995, to act as a trustee. And now, Mr. Speaker, there is a court case that is potentially pending. Because that court case is potentially pending, I can't comment any further.

>> MPP Barrett: Well, look. The process with the ministry, they've invested thousands of dollars in land and labour and plant and equipment, machinery and information. We mentioned regulation 440. The growers, the processors negotiated the minimum price, the terms and conditions of agreement for the coming season. However, planting, irrigating, harvest is looming for the attendant need of oversight of grading, filling contracts, adjusting contracts, ever mindful of the vagaries of weather and other externalities. Minister, growers need their elected and trusted organization back to ensure orderly marketing. They need the representation, directors, committees, support staff. When will we see the election of directors and the appointment of staff to make the required decisions during harvest?

>> Minister Leal: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for supplementary question. We were faced with a situation that we haven't to make sure that we protected a crop in 2017. We wanted to protect family farms and we want to protect the processing industry which is so important to agriculture in the province of Ontario. We appointed as I said one of the most distinguished people in agriculture in the province of Ontario today, the Honourable Elmer Buchanan. He acted as a trustee. He was able to negotiate contracts to make sure that we got those crops planted in the ground and potentially harvest for a robust sector of that part of Ontario's agriculture. I take the member's representation this morning but there is a pending court case and I can't comment any further, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Fife to Minister Flynn Re: Minimum Wage

>> MPP Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the acting Premier. One out of every ten workers in the province of Ontario makes a minimum wage, which has not kept pace with the rising cost of almost everything. 70% of Ontarians want to see a \$15 minimum wage. Yet there was nothing in the budget and the Minister has made it clear there's nothing in the changing workplaces report. New Democrats listened, Speaker. That's why we have committed to increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour for over a year now. Will the acting Premier commit today to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the member for this question. There obviously is discussion right throughout the North American continent on minimum wages these days. What we've done is the go -- as the government, Speaker, we want to make sure that every family in this province is able to benefit from the economy of this province, Speaker. The economy is robust. We're leading in economic growth amongst the G-7. Speaker, Ontario's doing well. We need to ensure that every sector, every person from the high income earners to low income earners are earning their share in that economy, Speaker. That's why we implemented the changing workplaces review to make sure that we took a look at all the labour relations aspects, all the employment standards, Speaker, that have been raised by organized labour, by business, by poverty advocates throughout the province of Ontario. I hope to come back to the House after the report is released once the public has seen the report and is able to digest it, Speaker, with some changes that I think really meet the needs of those hard working Ontarians, Speaker, that rely on a sense of decency in Ontario's workplaces.

>> MPP Fife: For over a year now new Democrats have been committed to the \$15 minimum wage. Again last week, we asked this Liberal government will you commit to this wage? And we asked again on April 25th and we asked again on March 8th and we asked again on February 23rd. And any time this Liberal government has been asked, if they'll raise the minimum wage. Answer has been the same and I quote -- Ontarians want predictable. No they don't, Speaker. They want change. And hard working Ontarians deserve a \$15 minimum wage. Will this be another stretch goal or will this government commit today to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour?

>> Minister Flynn: Speaker, I want to thank the member again for that question. Obviously, as I said at the start of the previous answer, Speaker, this is a topic that is being discussed all over North America. When you look to our Neighbours to the south, you're seeing changes implemented on a

city basis, on a state basis. When you look to our own country you're seeing changes being made on a provincial basis, Speaker. It's about protecting people's wages. It's about protecting their ability to earn a good living, Speaker. Speaker, we've gone through a review that has looked at employment standards. We've looked at labour relations in the province of Ontario to make sure we fully understand the ramifications of what we do. What the Premier asked me to do in the mandate letter was to take a look at the workplaces today. Make sure that the legislation is up to date and do it in a way that Ontario -- Can remain competitive, Speaker. The NDP's referred to this as a waste of time. I could not agree more, Speaker. It's very important.

MPP Potts to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Child Care Spaces

>> MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister responsible for early years and child care. Minister, I'm proud of our government. It's committed to ensuring families have access to quality and affordable child care all across the province. But I hear over and over again from my constituents about the struggle to find child care for their children. There is some acute shortage and while we have addressed the issue of nonrefundable wait list fees that I raised at a private member's bill, more supply of affordable spaces is required. And as the MPP For Beaches-East York I want to ensure that we are providing child care options for all of the families in need across the province. So, Speaker, will the Minister responsible for early years and child care please tell us all what the government is doing to make sure families' needs are going to be met?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank -- thanks to the hardworking member from Beaches- East York for this important question. Speaker, it's vital for families to have access to quality, affordable child care and we know that this can be a challenge for families. That's why I'm proud that our government has a plan to modernize the way we are delivering child care. The 2017 budget reaffirmed our government's commitment to help 100,000 more children access affordable quality licensed child care and we're starting immediately with an investment of \$200 million for the 2017/18 year. This funding supports the creation of 24,000 more spaces for children. It will provide immediate relief for families, reduce wait lists, encourage reduced fees and increase subsidies. This investment will be felt by thousands of parents searching for affordable, accessible child care.

>> MPP Potts: Oh, there it is. Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for her excellent work in trying to provide more day care spaces for constituents right across the province. It's encouraging to know that our government is working to address the needs of Ontario families and I know that I'm working very hard with local day care providers like Deb Biv Viscotti, executive director Centre 55 to identify new locations in Beaches- East York for affordable day care in Beaches- East York. I know families in my riding are excited to see new nonprofit day care spaces are being created. And I recognize there's a lot more work to be done. People are involved in the child care and early years sector are keen to see how the system will be mother-in-lawized. We've heard about the 100,000 new spaces being created and our government with swift action will help provide families with access to child care that they need right now. But, Speaker, will the Minister please explain to us and tell us more about the way in which our government. Plans to transform child care in the long term?

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to answer the member's question. My ministry and I have been working hard to support the needs of families when it comes to early years and child care in Ontario. We know that providing space is not enough, which is why we are developing a renewed early years and child care framework to help transform the entire system. Speaker, we want to help families get the support they need whether they choose to stay at home with a young one or use child care. And this framework will include an affordability strategy to create long-term solutions. As you know we held consultations in 20 different Ontario communities and heard from close to 8,000 people. The needs of families in this province are diverse and I'm pleased to say that we will be sharing the details of our framework in the coming weeks. The 2017 budget commitment. Is just the start.

MPP Nicholls to Minister McGarry Re: Rondeau Provincial Park Cottages

>> MPP Rick Nicholls: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the Minister of natural resources and forestry. Speaker, it's been over five years and four mnr Ministers since I first asked about the future of Rondeau cottages. Now, there's less than a week to go before the Rondeau cottagers return to see what repairs are needed after the winter. Their leases are set to expire in less than eight months. If no decision is reached, the Liberal government, Minister, will force them to tear down their cottages at their own expense after December 2017. These cottagers need to know answers now. Cottagers are in need of -- cottages are in need of repair. Minister, you've delayed this decision far too long. So, Speaker, to the Minister. Will the Minister in it today to extending the leases for the cottagers.

>> Minister Kathryn McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker. Thank you to the member opposite for the question. As he knows, the 20-year lease was set to expire December 31st, 2017. And that our government's been taking steps to allow existing private cottage lots in Rondeau provincial park to continue until December 31st, 2038. But a final decision will be informed by consultation, environmental and economic studies and an environmental assessment. And that's where it rests right now, with the ministry of environment, who is doing an environmental assessment. There -- it's an approach that's intended to balance the interests of public cottagers and demonstrate fiscal responsibility while protecting the environment in Rondeau provincial park. So we will continue to work with the cottagers. We understand time is of the essence but at the moment the file rests with the Minister for environment and climate change.

>> MPP Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, wow. How many more environmental assessments have to be done. Years ago I was told that the ministry was waiting for the last environmental and economic study to be finished before they could make a decision. And I don't think that it's fair to compare Rondeau to Algonquin. Rondeau is a sound and solid community for excellent stewards of the land. The studies are done, but still no answers, Minister. After many years the deadline is fast approaching and the government seems no closer to making up its mind. These cottages have been in families for decades. So, Speaker, with the lease deadline fast approaching, these cottagers need answers now. So, Speaker, to the Minister, why are the Rondeau cottagers still waiting. For an answer from this government? Precedence has been established for a 99-year lease, you might know that, too.

>> Minister McGarry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And this is a very complex topic. There is many different stake holders that some are for keeping cottagers in the park and yet there are other organizations and other stakeholders that are against keeping cottagers in the park. My ministry has been working alongside the ministry of environment and climate change to be able to see some of the conditions that will be required if the cottagers have an extension past December 31st 2017. We have requested an independent third party peer review of the environmental reports that have been prepared by the ministry to ensure the findings are accurate and balanced. The reports were revised to address comments received, and the conclusions of the report don't change. The environmental reports indicate that cottage lot stretchers and activities contribute to pressures on the park. Values such as rare and sensitive habitats, species at risk and --

MPP Taylor to Minister Coteau Re: Aboriginal Group Homes

>> MPP Monique Taylor: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of children and youth services. In February, fire swept through a foster home near Lindsay, killing 14-year-old Cassie Timbeau and Andrea Reid, one of the caregivers. This tragic event highlights several serious concerns about foster and group homes. Four Aboriginal youth living in group homes in Ontario have died in the past six months. Canina Sue Turtle, Courtney Scott, Amy Owen, Tammy that, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation has called for inquest as well as the provincial advocate for children and youth. The Ontario association of children's aid societies has done a full understanding of prevention strategies that need to be implemented is required. Speaker, this is a crisis with our most vulnerable children. Will the Minister institute mandatory inquests into the deaths of all children in care?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the member for asking this important question. Last week I had the opportunity to go up to Timmins and I met two of the families who have lost children in care. You know, Mr. Speaker, any time a young person here in the province, we experience a death of a young person, it saddens everyone here in this legislature. But to answer specifically the question that the member's asked, whenever a child dies in care, we want to make sure that we take the appropriate steps necessary to prevent similar tragedies from ever happening again. And that's why, Mr. Speaker, our ministry and the office of the chief coroners have joint directives in place so that an investigation is conducted whenever a child does die in care. Based on the findings of this investigation the coroner provides recommendations. Which then ensures that each children's aid society has to follow. So, Mr. Speaker, there are steps in place and the member knows otherwise. When we actually --