

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Wednesday, April 25, 2018

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
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The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Fedeli to Premier Wynne (McMahon) Re: AG Pre-Election Report

>> Vic Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. And thank you. My question is for the Premier. The opening centres of the auditor general's blistering report says it all. The numbers from the Liberal government are, quote, not a reasonable presentation of Ontario's finances. There you have it, Speaker. Auditor Bonnie Iysyk revealed that Ontario's deficit this year is actually \$11.7 billion, up 5 billion from the numbers the Liberals just reported. They're off by 75%. Next year, they're off by 85% and the deficit grows to 12.2 billion. And the year after that the Liberals understate the number by almost 100% as the deficit hits 12.5 billion. The Liberal government cannot be trusted, Mr. Speaker. Will the government finally come clean about the true state of Ontario's finances?

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate the question from the opposition member. I know that the Minister responsible for the treasury board secretariat is going to be happy to respond in supplementary and I've already answered the question in the public realm with the media today, Mr. Speaker. Thank the auditor general for her response to the pre-election report. I know that the treasury board secretariat and the ministry of finance have been working closely with the auditor general of Ontario, Mr. Speaker, on a wide variety of issues. There are issues that the auditor general has raised in her response, Mr. Speaker, that she has raised before and these are ongoing conversations and, you know, we have worked closely with accounts. We've been very, very careful, Mr. Speaker, as we made the decision as a government to reduce people's electricity bills by 25%, Mr. Speaker. We knew that that was necessary and we worked very, very hard to make it clear that that would mean a cost over a period of time. We worked with accountants to create that plan, Mr. Speaker.

>> Vic Fedeli: Thank, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Premier. The auditor general's scathing report is an indictment of this Liberal government. Auditor Bonnie Iysyk said, quote -- the government did not properly record the true financial impact of the fair hydro plan. She said, quote -- neither the expense to pay power generators nor the interest on the funds borrowed has been included. There's billions in cash going out the door, but they're not listing it as an expense. They're borrowing money to pay the bills but not reporting the cheque. So it appears there's money in the bank when there isn't any. Only Liberals think they can get away with that. Mr. Speaker, why does this government present numbers that are off by 100%?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, all of that -- all of those numbers are reported -- recorded. And there is an accounting disagreement, Mr. Speaker, and -- Mr. Speaker, all of those numbers are recorded. They are clearly laid out as definitely carried in the electricity system, Mr. Speaker. We made a decision that people need today have relief on their electricity bills, Mr. Speaker, and we are spreading the cost -- the billions of dollars of investments that we have made over -- A longer period of time, Mr. Speaker. And carrying that within the electricity system where it appropriately resides, Mr. Speaker. And it is done in other jurisdictions. There is an accounting disagreement that has been going on, Mr. Speaker. I recognize that. We acknowledged that and we will work with the auditor general.

>> Vic Fedeli: Back to the Premier. I have to say, Speaker, that is 100% wrong. It is not recorded. It is recorded as an asset, something they legislated, Speaker. Only a Liberal would legislate a debt as an asset. As if that isn't enough, the government then recorded pension revenue that wasn't there and listed insufficient pension expenses. The auditor said, quote, it should not have been done. She added, quote, the incorrect reporting of pension revenues and expenses is an understatement of expenses. Speaker, the government's books are off by up to 100%. They simply cannot be trusted. Nothing they ever tell us should ever be believed again and the auditor has proved that. Mr. Speaker, how can the people of Ontario ever trust one word from this -- this government says?

>> Minister McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to have the opportunity to respond to the auditor general's pre-election report and start by thanking the auditor, Speaker. As an

independent officer of legislature, the auditor general brings a value to an incredibly important perspective to our work as government. We work closely with her and her officials and I do want to take this opportunity to thank the outstanding officials in our government, Speaker, who have worked so closely with the auditor in her work. Our government passed the fiscal transparency and accountability act in 2004, Speaker, precisely because it was under a previous government we woke up to a \$6 billion surprise and we have fixed that, Speaker. Why? Because on this side of the House, we believe that transparency and accountability are foremost in our thinking, Speaker. And that is why - We are delighted to have this pre-election report today as an opportunity to once again be accountable to Ontarians. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

MPP MacLeod to Minister Sousa (McMahon) Re: AG Pre-Election Report

>> MPP MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question back to the Premier. The auditor said perception is created that the government has more money available than it actually does. The real deficit numbers are astounding and they are double what they told us in this House. \$11.7 billion next year. \$12.2 billion the year after that. \$12.5 billion the year after that. After they promised us that they would balance the budget. The deficit is out of control and the government -- They can heckle all they want but what they really want to do is pull the wool over the people of Ontarians' eyes. Will the Premier come clean and admit that the real numbers in her budget are double?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the work the auditor general has done and I recognize that, throughout her deliberations, and we did ask yesterday for some time. She says this, Mr. Speaker. The pre-election report provided, which is the one that we presented just at the time of the budget, are reasonable and if cautious underpinning a fiscal forecast. She reaffirms that our track back to balance is actually prudent. She recognizes that the forecast to look forward is actually cautious. And, Mr. Speaker, furthermore, she is again referencing two issues that the accountants, professional accounting firms is in dispute with the auditor general in his reflection of those requirements but is fully transparent the debt is reflected. The amount of transactions are apparent. There for all to be seen. And furthermore, it's reaffirmed and reinforced by the investors who are making the loan in respect to those very issues, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP MacLeod: Speaker, you can tell their numbers are bogus because they're playing musical chairs to answer over there. What the auditor actually said is that the election report is not a reasonable presentation of Ontario's election finances. How can this government be trusted? The actual deficit will be double at \$11.7 billion. The auditor is here to hold the government accountable, and they -- her aside like she's a nuisance. She's here for the good of the public. The Premier is only there for the good of the Liberal party. So I ask, Speaker, why is this government so intent on avoiding accountability, and where is the secret hidden ledger?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, attacking the public service. The accounting of this organization. She's attacking KPMG, who actually performed the audit forieso. She's attacking deloitte, who's reaffirmed the process that's been made. She's attacking, Mr. Speaker, e&y, who's audited the work of O.P.G.. Clean audit on both cases, Mr. Speaker ,. Furthermore she's attacking deloitte -- She's attacking deloitte who is also reflected on the issue of pensions. Let me be clear, we slay the deficit based on the work we've done. We balanced the budget. We have a \$600 million surplus and going --

>> MPP MacLeod: The finance Minister would be still at the bank would be fired. This government is intent on hiding the truth from Ontario taxpayers. When the real deficit -- Withdrawn. But I'm not attacking our valued public servants. I'm not attacking outside auditors who don't have the full picture the auditor general does but am attacking this government for withholding -- Ontario taxpayers. \$6.7 billion deficit when in fact it is double and they're going to continue to double it over the next three years. The deficit and that's going to hurt future generations including your kids, including your grandkids, including my daughter. So where is the secret ledger? Why won't you provide it to this legislature today?

>> Minister McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, Speaker, I know

that on days like today, when tensions can be high in the House, things can be said, Speaker. But I want to join the Minister of finance in outlining the fact that the member opposite has just cast aspersions on our professional public service. And I think -- Speaker, these are people who work hard. They are among the best public servants in the country. They are also working incredibly diligently with the auditor general, Speaker. That's what we know. That's what we expect, and the member opposite should actually be taking those comments back, Mr. Speaker. I will say this. The auditor general has said that our books are prepared with accordance of prudence and Assumptions.

MPP Gelinas to Premier Wynne Re: Healthcare Funding

>> MPP Gelinas: [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. [End of Translation] Hospitals, because they said there was not enough money to fund our hospital in our community health sector. Is that fair?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not the case. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that we have increased funding to hospitals in every budget, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that there's a need for an increase and last year, Mr. Speaker, we put in place 500 million more dollars for hospitals. This year \$822 milli Mr. Speaker. We have openeurse practitioner-led clinics around the province, Mr. Speaker. We have continually increased funding and will continue to increase funding across the system, including to home care, Mr. Speaker, including to mental health, including to pharmacare. Those are all parts of the health care system, and we are continuing to increase funding and support the needs of the population in Ontario.

>> MPP Gelinas: Well, while Liberal government was cutting funding to our health care system in our hospitals, there was something else that they were cutting. They were cutting corporate tax rates, to the point where they were lower than the state of Alabama, to the point where we're talking 5 percentage points lower than Mike Harris last day as Premier of this province. Why did the Premier choose to create a crisis in our health care system instead of asking the richest people and the most profitable corporations to pay their fair share?

>> Premier Wynne: You know, Mr. Speaker, this question from the member of the third party really -- really is reflective of fund amountal difference between a Liberal philosophy and the NDP. And that is -- that is, Mr. Speaker, that is that we believe, we believe that industry, that corporations, that the business world, Mr. Speaker, has a role to play in creating wealth in this province. The NDP Will tell you the government can do everything and we can just denigrate the private sector over and over again, Mr. Speaker. We don't believe that. We believe that we need to be competitive. I've spent days talking to governors in the United States, the congress people, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that we have a -- Works for Ontario and works for Canada, Mr. Speaker. But that party doesn't think the private sector has a role to play. They're wrong, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Gelinas: Under the Liberals, just like under the Conservatives, the wealthy few got a whole lot. While many people throughout Ontario were admitted into overcrowded hospitals. We have reached a point where our hospitals are full, where theirlways are full, where people are being admitted anywhere that isn't a door or an exit. Why does the Premier think that it is more important to have a tax rate lower than what Mike Harris had settled for than it is to end the overcrowding crisis in our hospitals?

>> Premier Wynne: Speaker, one of the things about government is you have to do more than one thing at a time. In fact, Mr. Speaker, in our first budget we increased taxes on the highest income earners in this province, Mr. Speaker. Exactly what the NDP Says they think should be done of we've already done it, increased taxes on the highest income earners in this province, Mr. Speaker. We also believe having a competitive business sector, having businesses that can thrive and can compete with other jurisdictions around the world, we think that's important, Mr. Speaker. And you know, when I travel to China or to India and businesses are looking at increasing their footprint here, creating more jobs, Mr. Speaker, bringing that wealth to the province. They're looking for a

competitive environment. We've created that, Mr. Speaker, and we think that's important for economic growth in this province.

MPP Gelinas to Premier Wynne Re: Healthcare Funding

>> MPP Gelinas: Voice of Translator: My question is for the Premier. One more time. [End of Translation] Count on our health care tem. Medicare is one of our greatest competitive advantage. But the Premier has refused at every turn to ask the wealthy few to pay their fair share in order to ensure that we have a health care system that functions the way that we know it can. Why is the Premier more interested in helping her rich connection than in ending hallway medicine?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, Let me just go over what I said earlier. We increased taxes on the highest income earners in this province, Mr. Speaker. We have already done that. And let's look at what has happened as a result of the competitiveness of Ontario business, Mr. Speaker. We have created in this province, in partnership with the private sector, 820,000 new jobs since the recession, Mr. Speaker. And 400,000 of those have been created since I was the Premier, Mr. Speaker. So that has led to -- that has led to the fact that we have the lowest unemployment rate in 20 years in this province, Mr. Speaker. You know what? That is very good for the people who have those jobs. But it's also good. For the health care system, Mr. Speaker, because that means that we can invest in the health care system and, yes, it is a huge advantage and it's one of the reasons that people come here, businesses come here and those jobs have been created.

>> MPP Gelinas: I know that the Premier got into politics because of Mike Harris's cuts. But she's had 15 years to undo that damage. Actions speak louder than words. The Premier's action was lead us to believe that she got into politics to make life better for the wealthiest few. And to cut more into our health care system that all of us depend on. Who knew? The NDP Believe in fixing our health care system and asking the richest people and the wealthiest corporations to pay their fair share so that it can be done. Why is the Premier more interested in corporate giveaways to the wealthy few than in ending hallway medicine for the many?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, when I became the Premier, aid to the people of this province that I would work to get better retirement security for them. I said that we would invest in education and health care and I said that we would build infrastructure around this province. We have done every single one of those things, Mr. Speaker. The fact is -- the fact is that I'm in politics because I believe that government exists to do the things that people can't do by themselves. I don't come from a wealthy background, Mr. Speaker. I don't know where the NDP Gets that idea. I don't know where they get that notion. I know they want to play that up, Mr. Speaker. It's not true and, you know, I can -- I can bring out all my mortgage payments and all of the pictures of my small semi-detached House in north Toronto. We can play that game. But the fact is, Mr. Speaker, I'm in politics because I believe that people need the support of government. They need pharmacare. They need health care. They need free tuition and --

>> MPP Gelinas: Mr. Speaker, we can have in Ontario where the richest people pay their fair share, where the most profitable corporations pay their fair share, and where corporate tax rates are still below national average. We can end hallway medicine. We can add 2,000 new beds to our hospital system. Can the Premier explain to everyone who has been treated in a hallway, a bathroom, a TV room, a patient lounge. Why is it more important that she helps the few at the top rather than give people the dignity afternoon the care they deserve?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, we need people to be able to find jobs in this province. We need people to be able to look after themselves and their families, and having a job, having a decent job is a really important part of that. Of course there are things that government has to do, and we recognize that, which is why we have stepped up year after year to put those supports in place and we know that there's more that we have to do. But the fact is, Mr. Speaker, government has to do more than one thing at a time. We have to invest in our health care system which we are doing and

we have to have a competitive business environment, Mr. Speaker. Our unemployment rate has dropped to 5.5%, Mr. Speaker. It's the lowest level in two decades, Mr. Speaker. For the past three years, Ontario has led all G-7 nations which it -- when it comes to economic growth, Mr. Speaker. That's a good thing. Now the NDP may think that's a bad thing. The fact is that's jobs. That's a high quality of life for people of this province, and that's services that we can deliver. Because of that --

>> Voice of Translator: My question is for the premier. One more time. [End of Translation] Count on our health care team. Medicare is one of our greatest competitive advantages. But the premier has refused at every turn to ask the wealthy few to pay their fair share in order to ensure that we have a health care system that functions the way that we know it can. Why is the premier more interested in helping her rich connection than in ending hallway medicine?

MPP Fedeli to Minister Sousa (McMahon) Re: AG Pre-Election Report

>> Vic Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. This government had been warned for well over a year that what they were doing with our finances was not right. The financial accountability office warned that because of the hydro scheme, MPPs should obtain assurance from the auditor that the province's accounting meets the public sector accounting standards. They were that worried, Speaker. The F.A.O. Also stated that, beyond this year, expect a, quote -- significant increase in the budget deficit due to growing impact of the fair hydro plan. They knew, Speaker. The government knew that they were jeopardizing Ontario's fiscal position. They were told over and over. Speaker, why does this Premier and this government think they're above the rules?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite makes reference again to the principles of accounting, which all lead to the accountants. Deloitte, KPMG, e&y, all of whom had prepared and provided for the structure that we have before us and affirmed by them. And the member opposite talks about the concerns that would happen with the investment community. Well, Mr. Speaker, it was them who was actually proposing and investing in these very issues. Furthermore, a rating agency just confirmed our double-A rating as stable, Mr. Speaker, in light of all of these situations as well. We're moving forward with the appropriate accounting principles that's approved by world-renowned accounting firms, Mr. Speaker.

>> Vic Fedeli: Back to the Premier. The government didn't listen to the financial accountability office, and now they won't listen to the auditor general. This is from the auditor, quote -- it is clear the government's intention in creating their accounting to handle the costs of the electricity rate reduction was to avoid affecting its fiscal plan. She's onto them. Quote -- the intention was to avoid showing a deficit in the province's budget and consolidated financial statements and to likewise show no increase in the provincial debt. Quote -- and by the way they finance it could, quote, cost Ontarians \$4 billion more in interest. So, Speaker, why is this Premier and this government putting the province's finances in jeopardy just to cling to power?

>> Minister McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, at the core of this issue -- and again we thank the auditor general for her report, Speaker -- is an issue about accounting differences of opinion, Speaker. The IESO is a rate regulated agency, Speaker. Rate regulated -- and thus uses rate regulated accounting. The change in the IESO's accounting practice has done a couple of really important things, Speaker, and I'll get to those in a quick second. Thank you, Speaker. Before I get to that, Speaker, I just want to remind the member opposite of a couple of important things. Number one, we took \$1.5 billion, Speaker, off the tax base and we put it onto the rate base, Speaker. Which we saw a very important issue regarding fairness. You know, the IESO accounting practice that we adopted has eliminated a second set of books, has brought greater transparency to \$17 billion. Worth of transactions, Speaker.

MPP Vanthof to Minister McMahon Re: AG Pre-Election Report

>> MPP Vanthof: Thank you. My question is to the Premier. First of all I'd like to thank the auditor general for her work on behalf of the people of Ontario. Today she reported that the government's pre-election -- that the government's pre-election report is, quote, not a reasonable presentation of Ontario's finances. And that's pardon only because the government is using a complicated private financing scheme to keep billions of dollars of hydro debts off the government's books. Not only does this scheme cost \$4 billion for no other purpose than to hide this debt. It clearly violates public accounting standards as the government knew it would. Why is the Premier hiding the truth about what his \$40 billion hydro borrowing scheme -- I withdraw. Why is the Premier, um -- Why is the Premier involved in this \$40 billion hydro scheme which will cost the public even more money?

>> Minister McMahon: Speaker, thank you very much to the Honourable member for his question. And I think it's important, Speaker, to just remind, the pre-election report really is an important opportunity for the auditor general to give us some very important advice, Speaker. The accounting practices that the member opposite talks about have done some really important things for our economy and for ratepayers, Speaker. Because this change in the IESO's accounting practice has eliminated a second set of books that was previously kept, has brought greater transparency to \$17 billion worth of transactions. Furthermore it's consistent with the accounting practices every IESO's predecessor the O.P.A.. We respectfully disagree with the auditor general on this, Speaker. We made a significant policy decision to lower the cost of energy for Ontarians, Speaker. And that is a decision that will stand. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Vanthof: Again to the Premier. The Premier's \$40 billion hydro borrowing scheme does not permanently lower bills for Ontarians. Over the long run, it will add \$40 billion in hydro debt and interest onto bills, which will have to be repaid once again by the people who use hydro. The government is needlessly wasting \$ billion on private financing schemes whose sole purpose is to keep that debt off the government's books. Instead of violating public sector accounting standards, why won't the Premier just tell the Ontario public the truth, that their hydro bills have not really gone down, but over the long run will skyrocket higher than ever before?

>> Minister McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to go back to the premise of this report, Speaker, and remind the member opposite that the auditor general actually, in issuing her report today, underscored the fact that our government has prepared our books with a degree of prudence that she underscores as being extremely important. So that's an important piece of context. You know, Speaker, when the public accounting standards, as Deloitte pointed out, are silent on the question of how to account for the impacts of rate regulation, it is appropriate for a public sector entity -- and this is their opinion, Speaker -- to select accounting policies that would result in the recognition of the impacts of rate regulation. This again, Speaker, is an area of disagreement with the auditor general that we have another area of disagreement with her as well on pensions. We are please today have a report today. We respect her opinion. And we, again, you know, underscore the fact that this is an act of transparency on our part to publicize this pre-election report, something Ontarians previously didn't have. Thank you.

MPP Fraser to Minister Mauro (Des Rosiers) Re: Wood-Based Construction

>> MPP Fraser: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of municipal affairs. Minister, Ontario's building code establishes standards for construction in the province. One of the things the building code speaks to is the construction of buildings with wood frames and materials. Building with engineered wood products is structurally comparable to concrete and steel buildings and strength. It stores carbon and lessens the impact of climate change. It lowers greenhouse gas emissions by not using energy intensive materials and it C lower buildg costs with cost-effective materials and shorter construction times. Mass timber structural framing system versus high strength-to-weight ratios and are dimensionally stable and are quickly becoming the systems every choice for sustainably minded designers. I know that the Minister of municipal affairs has been advocating for wood construction for a number of years. So Minister, could you please tell us a bit. About the work you and your ministry and the government have done on wood-based

construction?

>> Minister Mauro: Speaker asks to the member for the question. In 2012, Speaker, I did introduce a private member's bill to allow for six-storey wood frame construction in Ontario, to increase the use of wood in Ontario's construction industry by requiring its use in provincially funded buildings. The goal was achieved in January 2015 when the building code was updated to support the construction of mid rise wood frame buildings up to six storeys. I should also mention, Speaker, mass timber buildings over seven storeys could also be built under our current building code. However projects were not being brought forward. In an effort to further support the use of wood in building construction last year, we released the tall wood reference, which will assist architects, engineers, building and fire officials and developers in the development of safe alternative solutions for taller wood projects. We also Coe funded with the federal government to test the performance of mass timber building systems. Speaker, the research and tests. Change action plan. Funding which the leader of the party opposite has proposed to cut. These projects will provide valuable transferable knowledge that can be used. To all wood construction projects.

>> MPP Fraser: Thank you, Speaker. We all know how important the forestry sector is here in Ontario. Forestry is a way of life for hard working Ontarians across the province with \$15 billion in revenue and 172,000 direct jobs relying on the sector. Mr. Speaker, wood products use less energy than steel or concrete and produce fewer emissions. Wood products also function as carbon storage units, storing carbon that would otherwise be emitted into our atmosphere. Speaker, I also know that tall wood buildings are an effective efficient and sustainable way to build communities and help support Ontario's important forestry sector. So, Minister, how does the mass timber program benefit Ontarians?

>> Minister Des Rosiers: Thank you. I want to thank the member for Ottawa South for his great question. I'm very happy to talk about the mass timber program, which promotes the use of mass timber in construction and help reduce the effects of climate change. This program offers direct benefits to the people of Ontario, particularly people from the north, because it includes the creation of new jobs in the forestry and also in construction and also it advances low carbon building science, which is important for our innovation in the sector. I'm very pleased to stand here and talk about four tall wood projects that have been funded through our cap-and-trade program, a program that the party opposite wants to eliminate. The four programs are the academic tower at the University of Toronto. Tower at George Brown College, and office space in Toronto, condominiums in North Bay. [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: These are all innovative projects. [End of Translation].

MPP MacLeod to Minister Sousa Re: AG Pre-Election Report

>> MPP MacLeod: Thanks very much, Speaker. My question goes back to finance Minister. Just like at Enron the secret hidden ledger was finally revealed, and when it was, the real deficit and the deficit figures are now accounted for. The net debt per Ontario resident is \$23,670 per person. Let me bring you back to 2003, when they were brought into office. It was only \$11,324. That figure is going to rise by \$24,950 per person next year, and \$26,240 per person the year after that. So this government is leaving my daughter and the next generation with an unsustainable amount of debt that is going to hurt our very core and valued public services. So I want to know why is this government, including that Premier, content with leaving our children over \$26,000 worth of debt because of their mismanagement?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I have three kids of my own and I want to leave them with opportunity in the future. And let me be clear. The member opposite is talking about one side of the ledger. There's something else that's extremely important here, extremely worth noting, and that is Ontario is indeed one of the largest subnational economies in the world, Mr. Speaker. Over \$800 billion. We're going to be up to a trillion soon, Mr. Speaker. That strength of our economy, that work that is also important that calculation. And we take into account the degree of debt as a percentage of that

overall value, the people of Ontario have a huge net worth, Mr. Speaker, of close to \$40,000 each. My children are going to benefit because of the investments we make in transit, in schools, in hospitals. In the economic growth. They'll have opportunity. They're denying them that right. We'll continue to invest in Ontario.

>> MPP MacLeod: What we really are is the largest subnational debtor in the world, Speaker. And that Minister over there -- \$78,000 to pay for his share but most Ontario families, the people of Ontario don't have an extra \$80,000 kicking around to pay for their mismanagement. Under the Liberal government immediately will owe -- a child born -- will owe \$26,000 thanks to that Minister. I care about the future. I care about my daughter. I care about the kids on our hockey team. I care about the pages. But they are putting all of that at risk with unsustainable and reckless spending. I want to know from the Minister, is he ok with saddling every single child born in 2018 with \$26,000 of additional debt? Because I can tell you, me, vic fedeli and Doug Ford certainly aren't.

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, in 40 years, there's been only 8 balanced budgets, three of them by the Conservatives, the rest by us. Mr. Speaker, the largest deficit in Canadian history was over \$15 billion by the Conservative government, Mr. Speaker. Not by anybody else. Furthermore this is all about choice. The member opposite is talking about what they choose to do. We have no idea because they have no plan. But we know what they are going to do. They're going to cut. We want to support child care for people. Mental health and addictions. More supports for hospitals. More supports for our seniors. More supports for our children and our students, Mr. Speaker. To put them at their best going forward in our future. We're investing in those programs. They are going to cut those programs. They're putting at risk the future of Ontario, Mr. Speaker. We're fiscally strong and we're going to continue to be strong. Because the people of Ontario deserve that, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Fife to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Child Care

>> MPP Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This question is to the acting Premier. After 15 years of neglect and empty promises on child care investments from Liberal governments, it is clear for families in Waterloo region the change for the better can't come soon enough. This week I spoke to Bonnie ze the executive director of Emanuel Brighton child Carol and she told me the story of one family new to Waterloo, whose both parents have finally found work but they can't find child care. They cannot find affordable accessible child care anywhere in Waterloo region like 80% of the families in this province. The only thing that they can find are wait lists. They've been on a growing wait list for three months. There are 600 families on that list and staff must tell families that the wait list is two years long. This family has no support network in the region and their professional success and quality of life are directly affected and connected to finding affordable child care. Does the Premier understand how stressful and how challenging it is to find quality child care in the province of Ontario?

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I actually want to thank the member opposite for asking this very important question, because absolutely we recognize that we need affordable, accessible child care in this province. And that's why the Premier tasked me to make sure that we are on track. So here's what we are doing. We have been working diligently and tirelessly over the last year and a half to make sure we're building the foundation, creating more spaces, creating more actually affordable spaces, and ensuring that we are on track to free preschool child care for families of children. And so, Speaker, let me just tell you about some of the things we've been doing. We're planning on investing \$2.2 billion over three years to ensure that there will be free -- Child care for preschoolers. That will save families an estimated \$17,000 per child. And that's in addition to what they'll be saving in full-day kindergarten which is \$6,500 per child.

>> MPP Fife: Thank you. Speaker, after 15 years, after too many photo alms and too many child care centres across the province Why should families believe that this Liberal government will -- We hit a nerve. Why should families believe that Liberals will take action to deliver on child care? Speaker, families who are excited to finally qualify for subsidies are only disappointed again when they learn that there are no child care spaces to access. We are the child care wait list wonder of Canada.

Congratulations. Speaker, we have a plan that invests in E.C.E.S on the front line. We have a plan that ensures families have will high quality spaces because we are committed to not-for-profit care. You can't fill the system without Cal funding, and our plan will make child care. Free for those who need it most because that's where the return on investment is. Why has your government still not created a plan based on needs of the families in the province of Ontario –

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, let me just give you a quick summary of some of the things that we're doing. We're investing in child care \$1.4 billion in operational funding. \$1.6 billion in capital funding. What does that mean? We're creating spaces. We committed to create one hundred,000 spaces over five years. We're actually not just on track but we're ahead of it. What have we created so far through our track to create 31,000 more spaces? Those are the photo ops that the member opposite is talking about. We're actually going out there will and announcing the spaces. And 60% of the spaces that we're creating now are subsidized. So we're actually increasing the number of spaces that are subsidized. But, Speaker, that's not all. We're also building towards the future and that's where free preschool child care comes in. As of 2020 -- Families will be getting free preschool child care. The NDPlan sounds good but apparently Gordon said it's completely unreali they're not building the foundation. We're building that solid foundation recognizing the work force --

MPP Sandals to Minister McGarry Re: CycleON Action Plan

>> MPP Sandals: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of transportation. Speaker, safe to say the way people move around our communities is constantly changing. I know one Chae that has caught my attention is the growing interest in and demand for active forms of transportation. This demand for improved cycling infrastructure in particular is significant and I consistently hear from my constituents in Guelph who are looking to government to make investments that will make cycling a safer, more convenient way to get around. I also hear first hand from my daughter Allison, who just happens to own a bike shop in bracebridge. So, Speaker, I know that this month marks the annual bike summit. Can the Minister please share the tup date. Provided at the bike summit on the steps our government is taking to support cycling around the province?

>> Minister McGarry: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member from Guelph and also welcome her daughter Allison from ecclestone cycling shop in the members' gallery today. And yes, I was very pleased O join oario's cycling community a few weeks ago to celebrate the progress we've made towards creating a more bicycle-friendly Ontario but also to look at the significant work that remains ahead. Er releasing our first cycle on action plan, we didn't slow down. In my time as the P.A. To the Minister of transportation, I was actively involved in the cycling file. And now as Minister I see we've made remarkable progress. Much of this work has culminated into the cycle on action plan 2.0, W I was so pleased to present to the bike summit. The updated action plan includes 37 proposed action items and five key strategic directions. Including designing healthy ae prosperous communities, improving cycling infrastructure, making highways and streets safer, promoting cycling awareness and creating behavioural change and increasing cycling tourism.

>> MPP Sandals: Yes. Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the Minister for her answer. It's clear that we a taking an active approaco meet the needs of the cycling community here in Ontario. I was very pleased to announce recently that our government's new Ontario municipal commuter cycling program is providing Guelph with nearly \$1.2 million to support local commuter cycling projects. I can't wait to see the new bike lanes that will happen in Guelph but of course I know if the Conservatives are elected there won't be any more of this because it's funded by our carbon program and clima change. But, Minister, would you tell us some more about your important initiatives like the new cycle on action plan? The new plan is sure to build on our government's ongoing collaboration. Cycling advocates. And if you could elaborate on what that action plan contains, we would definitely appreciate the deed tails.

>> Minister McGarry: Thank you, Speaker. I want to again thank the member from Guelph for her

oing support of the cycling community. Our action plan includes 37 unique action items including our commitment to a provincewide cycling network. The fact is that our government has and continues to be a strong partner for the cycling community with advocates like the president of the treasury board at the table, this shouldn't come as any surprise. We've made consistent investments including bike rooms at G.O. Stations, bike lockers at carpool lots and introducing a safe cycling education fund. While our Liberal government remains committed, we know that the Conservatives would scrap the cap-and-trade program which this year alone is supporting commuter cycling projects in nearly 120 municipalities across the province. This is the party opposite with a leader who has consistently spoke -- Unlike the party opposite we not it is the right move. It supports our environment --

MPP Martow to Minister Jaczek Re: Residency Spots for Medical Students

>> MPP Martow: Thank you very much. My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Today an advocacy group of medical students #spots for docs, are protesting at queen's park. They're protesting the state of physician services planning, specifically the low ratio of medical graduates to residency spots. Mr. Speaker, 800,000 Ontarians are without a family doctor while many medical school graduates are unable to practise medicine. In 2015, this government drastically cut residency positions. Ontario taxpayers invest \$200,000 for each student. Yet they are blocked from finishing their training. Instead of creating permanent residency positions the ministry of health announced temporary res spots, which only help presently unmatched medical graduates. Will the Minister please explain why she's turning her back on future medical graduates?

>> Minister Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, thank you so much. Of course our government recognizes how important it is to match the physician supply to the need across Ontario. And as a physician, a former medical student, I still remember the stresses not only of medical school but of the matching process that I went through many years ago. So we fully understand the issue. We do know that between 2003 and 2016, we have a large supply of physicians practising in Ontario. Some additional 38%. But we do understand that there are challenges for new medical graduates, and this is why our government is funding more residency positions for medical school graduates who have completed their undergraduate training at an Ontario medical school. This is a pan-canadian problem and so we're working with our medical schools to create more specialized residency spots. Obviously this upcoming school year, everyone will find a spot. Everyone who is not matched will be offered a residency position.

>> MPP Martow: Thank you. Again to the Minister. This government's plan is a band-aid solution which only addresses the issue in the short term. A desperate attempt by desperate government to quickly deal with a crisis of their own making. What is needed is a long-term comprehensive strategy to plan for all medical resources across Ontario. The hundreds of students that are right now protesting in the rain took time away from their study and clinic work to advocate for better health care for all Ontarians. Will the Minister commit today to support the recommendations of bill 18, the careers in medicine advisory committee act, and strike a panel of medical experts to take the first steps towards a comprehensive plan for medical resource planning in Ontario?

>> Minister Jaczek: Speaker, the issue that I think is really important in terms of what we have announced this year is that we will be requiring these new residents in these new additional positions to provide a return of service to underserved communities across the province. And so we will be specifically targeting those areas where we know we need more specialized service such as emergency medicine, pediatrics and psychiatry. And so this investment will also ensure a stable supply of physicians in communities across the province. And of course we're going to continue to work across the country with our medical schools to ensure that the matching process is enhanced as we go forward. And certainly we're going to be reviewing the outcomes of this particular year's matching process. And work with relevant stakeholders and ensure that we have every success on the part of the graduating physician.

MPP Sattler to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: EQAO Test

>> MPP Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Speaker, yesterday a report was released recommending that large-scale eqao testing continue for every Ontario student in grade 6 and 10. Speaker, 67% of Ontarians agree with new Democrats that eqao census testing is not working for students. People for education points out that 20 years of eqao results have done nothing to close the education equity gap. Instead eqao allows schools to be ranked against one another, creating winners and losers and primarily benefitting real estate agents. At a cost of millions of dollars that could be used in the classroom. Will the acting Premier listen to parents, educators, students, trustees, education experts and others. Instead of making changes to eqao, will she commit to eliminating eqao altogether?

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm -- I'm pleased to answer this question. Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the party opposite is so interested in education now when actually in their 2014 platform they had no mention of education. I just want them to know, on this side of the House, we have been making investments in our education system for many years. And these investments are ones that I'm proud of. Mr. Speaker, our world is rapidly changing and our classrooms need to keep up with that change. Absolutely we need to make informed decisions and we need to ensure that whether our gaps in challenges in the system that we are on top of them so we can give our system and our educators and our students the supports that they need. That is why we commissioned an independent review of Ontario's student assessment and reporting. Led by the highly respected Dr. Carol Campbell and her five advisors. The review's recommendations suggest that the status quo is no longer working well enough. I'm happy to explain more in the --

>> MPP Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, ask any parent and they will tell you, they look to report cards and teachers' feedback to let them know how well their child is doing, not eqao results. Parents understand that teaching to narrow tests in literacy and numeracy takes up too much teacher focus, creates undue stress on students, and diverts resources away from student learning. Speaker, this Liberal government has had 15 years to address long-standing concerns about eqao. They've had 15 years to replace eqao with an effective random sample testing model that will provide a true check on the Ontario curriculum while helping to identify the supports that students need. Is this government's newfound interest in changing eqao another last-ditch attempt to try to win back support before the June election?

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to remind the member opposite that we're actually the ones that embarked on this review. And it is a comprehensive review. I also want to ensure that the member opposite has actually read what the recommendations were. And if she had, she would know, actually, that the advisors and Dr. Carol Campbell actually talked about -- She actually made a real distinction between what was happening in the classroom and also eqao. And in fact she said that what was happening in the classroom was extremely important. And was actually a very good way forward in terms of assessing and actually recommended that we strengthen classroom assessment and reporting and that we do further consultation. On E.Q. A.O..

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Damerla Re: Seniors Community Grant Program

>> MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of senior affairs. Speaker, I'm sure the Minister is aware of the good news that seniors like myself are living longer and in better health than ever before. With this comes -- With this comes new challenges for how our government to provide the necessary care and support for the rapidly growing demographics. One of those challenges is social isolation, which can affect the mental and physical well-being of those without the opportunities to engage in their community. Among the many wide ranging initiatives and program commitments that were announced in last year's aging with confidence action plan was our

commitment to expand a successful seniors community grant project. With a focus on community oriented -- To K seniors active engaged, this program has already supported over 1,600 projects. Speaker, would the Minister tell us this -- tell this House about the expansion of the seniors community grant program?

>> Minister Damerla: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member from Barrie for the question and wish her many, many, many years of aging with confidence here in Ontario. And, Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, I was along with the member from Ottawa centre, I was in Ottawa at the good companion centre where I had the pleasure of announcing this year's successful project applicants for the seniors community grant. Our government is investing \$4.1 million, Mr. Speaker, to support nearly 250 projects. Run project in particular that I'm very excited about is somethi we call seniors without walls. It's going to allow us to create virtual seniors community centres across Ontario to ensure that our seniors are not socially isolated and have a place to make friends. Regardless of geography. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Minister, for telling this House about our commitment to investing in programs and initiatives aimed at reducing social isolation. I'm glad that our government is providing resources and supports to foster existing innovative programs across this province allowing them to benefit even more from the seniors of Ontario. However that's not all, Speaker. As I believe that just last week our government announced yet another way, how it is reducing social isolation and keeping our seniors engaged and socially connected with their communities. Last week the Minister of seniors affairs and the member from Brampton West were at villa polonia in brampton where they announced 40 new seniors active centres. Account Minister of seniors affairs please inform this House about this expansion?

>> Minister Damerla: Mr. Speaker, you can see that our government is continuing to invest in seniors. Every week we have something to announce for our Speaker s -- for our seniors, sorry. Yes, the member from Barrie's correct. Last week I did have the pleasure of announcing, Mr. Speaker, 40 more seniors active living centres. That brings the total to 303 total. Thank you. And so, Mr. Speaker, this means we have 40 more centres with thousands of seniors across Ontario have a place to come together, to meet friends, make new friends, learn new skills and continue to live lives of purpose. I'm really proud of this announcement, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Oosterhoff to Minister Jaczek Re: Opioid Crisis

>> MPP Oosterhoff: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Recently niagara regional associate medical officer of health Dr. Andrea fellow reported 155 pus -- suspected opioid overdoses in 2016 soared by 225% in 2017. That means that niagara emergency medical services paramedics responded to 520 suspected overdoses in 2017. The opioid crisis is hurting families and youth across niagara. And my question is what is the government doing to respond to this crisis?

>> Minister Jaczek: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course the opioid crisis is something that was well recognized by our government over the last year. And certainly the numbers are alarming. And I'm very pleased that the associate medical officer of health is informing the community has -- as to the situation in niagara region. And so this is of course precisely why we are investing over \$222 million over three years to combat the opioid crisis in Ontario. Especially in the issue of expanding harm reduction services. Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to visit the queen street community health centre where they offer a safe injection site. This is one of many that we're introducing and opening across the province. They're doing excellent work. They're saving lives. At the same time referring people for counselling. I'll elaborate in the supplementary.

>> MPP Oosterhoff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's back to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Unfortunately I would say that some of the action the government has taken has not done enough in the niagara region. Sandy of beamsville recently spoke of her son Scott, who plays hockey. Took karate and swimming lessons and ran marathons. At one time he owned his own

House had a beautiful fiancée and a bright future. Then fentanyl got its claws into him and he lost it all. Speaker, how does the Minister ensure mothers like Sandy do not have to bury their children because of this government's lack of action on the opioid crisis?

>> Minister Jaczek: Our initiative is absolutely clear in terms of what we're doing. We've established an opioid emergency task force. Making naloxone kits available to pharmacies, public health units, police, fire services. We're working with stakeholders. I had an extremely useful conversation yesterday at the safe injection site with the stakeholders and the frontline workers. I guess the question is what on Earth are you going to do on the other side of the House? As far as we know Doug Ford is going to close safe injection sites.