

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Wednesday, February 22, 2017

From: "Stinson, Jeffrey (CAB)" <jeffrey.stinson@ontario.ca>
To: "@CAB-ProvLegQP" <provlegqp@msgov.gov.on.ca>
Date: Wed, 22 Feb 2017 12:01:33 -0500
Attachments: 20170222 - Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript.doc (123.9 kB)

Transcript of Provincial Question Period

41st Parliament, 2nd Session

Wednesday, February 22, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

Table of Contents

MPP Brown to Minister Sandals

Re: BPS Executive Salaries

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne

Re: BPS Executive Salaries

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne

Re: Eliminating Winter Disconnections

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne

Re: Hydro Costs

MPP Clark to Premier Wynne (Sousa)

Re: Budget and Economy

MPP French to Minister Thibeault

Re: Hydro Costs

MPP Qaadri to Minister Coteau

Re: Anti-Racism and Islamophobia

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault

Re: Windstream

MPP Taylor to Minister Coteau

Re: Nipissing Parry Sound CAS

MPP Anderson to Minister Naidoo-Harris (Naqvi)

Re: Combatting Human Trafficking

MPP N. Miller (Fedeli) to Minister Coteau

Re: CAS and Child Protections

MPP Horwath to Minister Thibeault

Re: Hydro Costs

MPP Fraser to Minister Murray

Re: Water Protections

MPP Oosterhoff (Jones) to Minister Duguid (Thibeault)

Re: Hydro Costs

MPP Armstrong to Minister Hoskins

Re: Eye Surgery

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Hunter

Re: Anti-Bullying

MPP Brown to Minister Sandals Re: BPS Executive Salaries

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The C.E.O. Of hydro-quebec makes 400,000. The C.E.O. Of Hydro One makes \$4 million. My question is straight forward and simple. Why?

>> Min. Liz Sandals: Yes. Thank you very much. And our government salaries for the broader executives. Those salaries will remain frozen until people have -- Until people have made up -- Yes, thank you. Those salaries will remain frozen until the organization has submitted a compliance framework. If they don't submit a compliance framework, they will remain frozen and we'll send them back to the drawing board.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The government defence for a \$4 million pay cheque is it's frozen. You've frozen it at 4 million? People are struggling with their hydro bills and that's your defence? Let me try this again. And I will ask the Premier -- I hope the Premier will actually defend her own decisions rather than pass the buck. In B.C. The C.E.O. Of B.C. Hydro makes 400,000. In Ontario, you've decided that it's appropriate to pay the C.E.O. Of Hydro One \$4 million. So my question, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier is will she answer and be responsible for her own decisions? How is this, how is this appropriate in Ontario when people can't even pay their hydro bills?

>> Min. Sandals: Yes, thank you. So in order to be compliant with the framework, organizations have to submit a list of realistic comparators, and if they don't have a realistic list, then we'll send them back to the drawing board. They have to only have modest salary increases. If they don't do that, we'll send them back to the drawing board. Obviously \$4 million is a very generous -- Obviously there's already a very generous compensation level there. We would not be looking to have any further increases. But I think -- It is important to remember, when we look at all our executives across the broader public sector, is that they have been under --

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier, maybe for the third time I can have the Premier answer the question from the leader of the official opposition. That is the Normal practice here. This government has decided to give a \$4 million salary to one of their hydro execs. Mr. Speaker, maybe the Premier does not wants to defend the \$4 million salary. So I'll try a different angle. This government has decided to hide the salaries of hydro execs. This year they're not going to be on the sunshine list. This coming from a government that says they're transparent? We've never seen this level of secrecy. So my question, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier is will you make sure we have disclosure of these salaries? Will you promise the legislature that you will not hide these salaries from the public?

>> Min. Sandals: So let's be a little bit clearer here. Is what the leader of the opposition is quoting is the maximum possible compensation. In fac the base salary that the C.E.O. Of Hydro One earns is not \$4 million. So let's stick to the facts. There are some incentive programs for --

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne Re: BPS Executive Salaries

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, the government defence is that -- Mr. Speaker the question is to the Premier. The government defence is that the base salary doesn't start at 4 million but they got paid \$4 million and people can't pay their hydro bills, and it's not just Hydro One. What we have is we're seeing -- Across the board getting out of control. The Liberals are going to allow Ontario power generation to more than double the salary of their C.E.O. Before they got caught. The Premier back tracked and said come forward with something more reasonable. Since you won't answer about Hydro One, will you at least

answer about O.P.G.. What do you consider, Premier, to be reasonable? Mr. Speaker ,, to the Premier.

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The president of the treasury board has been very clear about the process that has been put in place. And you know, Mr. Speaker, the only reason that we're talking about caps on salaries, that we're talking about ranges is because we've put that policy in place, Mr. Speaker. We have initiated that process because, under previous governments, there has been no such process. There's been no such transparency. So what we have said is that the increases must be reasonable. The salaries must be reasonable. If they're not, if the comparators that the organization is using are not fair comparators, then as the president of the treasury board said they will have to go back to the drawing board. They will have to start again and come forward with a rationale that is –

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The Premier said if they're not fair comparators, they'll be sent back to the drawing board. The C.E.O. Of Hydro One makes \$4 million. In B.C. It's 400,000. In Québec it's 400,000. This is completely out of whack with comparators. Premier -- Mr. Speaker to the Premier, will you have the hydro C.E.O. Come back to the drawing board to see compensation that's appropriate when people can't pay their hydro bills?

>> Premier Wynne: So, Mr. Speaker, first of all let's deal with the facts. As the president of the treasury board said, the \$4 million number that the leader of the opposition is using is the outside amount, Mr. Speaker. In fact the B.C. -- The C.E.O. In B.C. Hydro took home \$1 million last year, Mr. Speaker, not 500,000. So as long as we're dealing with facts, that's a good thing, Mr. Speaker. Our focus is on reducing electricity prices for people across this province, Mr. Speaker. It is very clear that we have made some changes. The 8% reduction is in place now but there's more that we have to do, Mr. Speaker. Our focus is finding those ways to take costs out of the system to help people with their electricity bills every day. That's what we're focusing on

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is applauding it's only four times the amount the hydro C.E.O. Gets paid in B.C. The only thing this government is looking at is ways to avoid disclosure and hiding these salaries. I can't get an answer whether you think it's appropriate or reasonable. I can't get an answer from this government on actually allowing these salaries to be disclosed on the sunshine list. So let me try something new. Maybe the Premier will answer this. It's not just O.P.G.. It's not just hydro. It's metrolinx. This government decided it's appropriate to give \$100,000 pay bump to a guy that built a bridge upside down. You're actually giving pay bumps to individuals that aren't even doing their jobs properly. So my question to the Premier, Mr. Speaker, is can we have a commitment that we're actually going to rein in these executive salaries. That are completely out of whack with the rest of the country? Yes or no?

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know this is an issue that is of concern to people. I had a conversation with a gentleman yesterday and we were talking about electricity prices and he raised the issue of C.E.O. Salaries, and I talked to him about the reality is that we are putting caps on, that we are working with organizations to make sure that there are comparators that are reasonable. But, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that, as I said, the B.C. -- The C.E.O. Of B.C. Hydro took home \$1 million last year is my understanding, Mr. Speaker. And so there is a range of salary for highly qualified people who we need. We need highly qualified people to run these organizations, whether it's metrolinx, which is overseeing the largest investment in transit, investments in more than a generation, Mr. Speaker. Or whether it's our electricity system. We need those people in place. At the same time we are focusing on helping people with their electricity bills.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne Re: Eliminating Winter Disconnections

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Premier. The Premier told Ontarians that she was planning to get a deal with every local hydro utility so she wouldn't need legislation to stop winter disconnections. This morning she introduced legislation, which means she couldn't get the deal, Speaker, so which companies said no to the Premier?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is that there will be -- there's a law that has been passed, a bill that's been passed in this legislature, which will mean that all distribution companies across the province will have to reconnect or cease disconnections, Mr. Speaker. So that's the reality. And I actually don't know which L.G. T.s were not in a position by midnight last night to make that decision. But, Mr. Speaker, they will all now have to comply.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, yesterday the Premier told Ontarians she would get a deal with local hydro utilities so she wouldn't need legislation to stop people from having their power cut off. Today, her Minister said that the Premier couldn't get a deal because the utilities couldn't stop cutting people off, quote, in a timely manner. It looks to me like -- that the people, everyone, like the Premier is pass ago bill her Minister says can't be enforced. Is it more about good-news Liberal press releases, Speaker, than it is about stopping people from having their hydro cut off?

>> Premier Wynne: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm trying to follow the logic of the leader of the third party. UT I think -- I think what she's saying is that even though there is a bill that has been passed and our expectation is that we will have Royal assent today, even though that will be in place, I think what she's saying is that there are local distribution companies that won't comply. That is a ridiculous assertion, Mr. Speaker. I have every expectation that every distribution company in the province will comply with a law that is in place. And if the leader of the third party has information to the contrary, I think she should share it with this House, Mr. Speaker .

>> Andrea Horwath: Just asked her energy Minister, Speaker. It was him that said the companies said they couldn't make this happen in a timely manner. So she just needs to ask her own Minister, Speaker, to get the answer to that question. But look. Here as Liberal logic, Speaker. Last year 50,000 people had their power cut off. Last year it didn't matter to the Premier that kids went to bed cold, seniors were in the dark. The difference is now the Premier seems to be in political trouble and there's an election looming. Can the Premier explain to people why this wasn't a problem until it became a political problem for the Liberal party and this Premier of Ontario?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, you know, I just do not accept the premise of the question. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that I and my government care deeply about what people are dealing with every day in their lives, Mr. Speaker. I care deeply about families who are struggling with costs, Mr. Speaker. We started -- we started to try to lower electricity costs more than a year ago, Mr. Speaker. We understand that there are challenges that people are dealing with. And as far as the disconnections go, Mr. Speaker, we have moved. We brought legislation in in June. We had hoped that it would be passed earlier, Mr. Speaker. It is now -- it has now been passed and all local distribution companies across the province will have to comply. That's the bottom line. That's what's important, Mr. Speaker, to people across the province.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro Costs

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My next question's for the Premier. Yesterday the Premier said and I quote -- we're confronting the reality that people have across the board seeing unacceptable increases unquote on their hydro bills. If it's unacceptable today, why has the Premier caused this unaffordable hydro crisis in Ontario hydro system?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know I'm really happy to talk about what has happened over the last number of years to improve the electricity system in Ontario. When we came into office under the previous Premier in 2003, we inherited a system that was degraded, Mr. Speaker. This actually is less of a partisan comment than the heckling from the opposition would suggest, because government after government, of different party stripes, Mr. Speaker, had not made the necessary investments in our electricity system. Had checked dirty coal running, Mr. Speaker. Had not invested in transmission lines, had not invest under new, clean, renewable energy, Mr. Speaker. That, as I said, that is not a partisan comment. That is something that was a reality. We inherited a system that was sorely in need of investment. We have made billions of dollars of investment, Mr. Speaker, and we -- Are now seeing the impact of that. People across the province have had a steep increase in electricity prices, and that's why we've been working to take those costs out of the system.

>> Andrea Horwath: What this Premier and her government have done is systematically break our electricity system in the province of Ontario, Speaker. That's what they have done. Yesterday the Premier said that hydro rates were unacceptable, but she accepted it when she signed off on the decision to cancel the gas plants. When she signed off on the decision to cancel the gas plants. She accepted it when she decide today privatize Hydro One -- decided to privatize Hydro One. She accepted it when she watched the cost of electricity has risen by ... % in the province of Ontario. This is a Premier, Speaker, that just doesn't get it and hasn't been getting it for far, far too long. If the hydro bills are too high, if they're unacceptable, why has she been causing them to go up for 14 years?

>> Premier Wynne: So, Mr. Speaker, let's be perfectly clear, what the leader of the third party is saying first of all is that she would not have made the investments that we made in this province. She would not have jump start add renewable industry in this province. She would not have shut down the coal-fired plants. She would not have invested in ten -- thousands of kilometres of line, Mr. Speaker. She would not have built new generation in this province. She would not have made those investments. And, Mr. Speaker, today, today what she would do is she would cancel, she would cancel the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One, which would not take one cent off the electricity bill in this province. That is the solution. That the leader of the third party is putting forward, a solution that would not take one cent off one electricity bill.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I don't think it's acceptable that in a province like Ontario people have to choose between paying their rent or having their power cut off. It is not acceptable now, Speaker. It wasn't acceptable last year or the year before that. Families are at a crisis point all across this province. For people who have to choose between child care or hydro, paying their rent or their hydro bill, filling a prescription or paying for hydro. What does this Premier expect people to do?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, on this weekend grid it is unacceptable. That is exactly why we started last year making changes, Mr. Speaker. The 8% reduction is -- I understand. It is not enough. It is something but it is not enough. And that's why we are working -- the Minister of energy is working day and night literally with his officials to find ways to reduce the costs. But, Mr. Speaker, to suggest that those investments in the electricity system to make it clean, to make it renewable, to make it one of the leading clean grids in North America, Mr. Speaker. To suggest that that was not a reasonable investment, to connect people in the north, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that we had a reliable grid, to suggest that that was not a good investment, I think that's irresponsible, Mr. Speaker. That would have been an irresponsible -- We need to lower people's electricity prices. We are looking for more ways to do that, Mr. Speaker. But we have a reliable clean grid in Ontario.

MPP Clark to Premier Wynne (Sousa) Re: Budget and Economy

>> MPP Steve Clark: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the Premier. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Premier on the award she received today. The lifetime achievement award from the Canadian taxpayers association for the government's C.T.F. Government waste award. Congrats, Premier. Would you like to offer an acceptance speech?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, you know the 8% reduction on electricity bills, I would have thought it would be something the Canadian taxpayers federation would have agreed with, Mr. Speaker. I would have thought the Canadian taxpayer federation would have thought that was a great idea. Free tuition for young people who are going to College or university or who are trying to get their way back into the system. I would have thought that the Canadian taxpayers federation thought that was a good idea. The fact is -- Mr. Speaker, the fact that we have one of the most competitive tax regimes in North America, Mr. Speaker. I would have thought the Canadian taxpayers federation would have thought that was a good idea.: I look forward to the Canadian taxpayer federation having those conversations with me, Mr. Speaker

>> MPP Clark: Well again, Speaker, back to the Premier again. Another award. It's a banner day for Ontario. Ten provinces, one winner and that was Ontario who won the teddy award for provincial waste. This one's for Ontario's electric vehicle incentive program that provides \$14,000 cheques to those who buy vehicles that cost \$100,000. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier take the stage and accept her award and acknowledge the waste?

>> Min. Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member opposite recognizing what's happening in Ontario. He failed to talk about the fact that we're coming to balance. Our economy is growing. We're outpacing the G-7 countries. The conference board of Canada has cited that Ontario leads all of Canada in that growth and as a result our revenues -- as a result of economic growth, jobs are up 700,000 net new jobs since the recession. The lowest it's ever been since the recession at \$1.9 billion as of third quarter and going forward we're doing everything possible to ensure that we balance the budget, ensure that we continue to invest and make everyday life easier for Ontarians by ensuring we can afford even more support systems, including mitigating electricity rates, Mr. Speaker.

MPP French to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Costs

>> MPP Jennifer French: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Speaker, families in my community are fed up with paying for this government's mistakes on their hydro bills. Last week I heard from Matt, who got a \$50 hydro bill for a yet-to-be completed basement apartment. Now \$50 might not sound so bad, but when you look at the bill and realize that the electricity used was 000.000 kilowatt hours and a \$50 charge was for the delivery of literally nothing. So I would ask, does 50 bucks for nothing seem like a fair deal to the Premier?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand and rise and answer this

question, Mr. Speaker, because what we're talking about, Mr. Speaker, is distribution. And actually, when you look at distribution, Mr. Speaker, is come -- it comes from generating plants on the wires and into the L.D.C. And into that home, Mr. Speaker. We're working hard right now on making sure that that's equitable across the province. As the Premier has said often, Mr. Speaker, we need to ensure that we find ways to lower rates for everyone. That's one of the things that we're doing, Mr. Speaker. But we will make no apologies, Mr. Speaker, for investing in a system that actually -- Mr. Speaker, we'll make no apologies for investing in a system that was actually a mess that needed repair that. Actually needed to be green, Mr. Speaker. And now we are saving \$4.3 billion in our health care system because deaths are down 23% and 41% of hospitalizations, Mr. Speaker. We invested in the system and we're proud of that.

>> MPP French: Thank you, Speaker. I'm sure that Matt appreciates that wonderful explanation. But again to the Premier. Matt paid \$50 to have nothing delivered, nothing. That's like giving the U.P.S. Guy 50 bucks to send an empty box. Fortunately this bill won't break the base for Matt but it might for others. The only relief he saw with your call free provincial rebate of 2 whole dollars and 41 cents. So, Speaker, is the Premier so out of touch that she thinks that this is ok?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So it sounds like the NDP Wants us to go back to coal as well, Mr. Speaker. They want cheap electricity rather than invest in a system that's renewable and green. They want cheap electricity, Mr. Speaker. That's kind of appalling, Mr. Speaker. Knowing the investments that we've made. We recognize, Mr. Speaker, that we need to ensure that we find ways to actually help people that are having a hard time with their bills, Mr. Speaker, because we understand, Mr. Speaker, that the investments that we've made are costing others more, Mr. Speaker. So -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're going to continue to invest in finding ways to lower rates for all Ontarians, Mr. Speaker. We're going to continue to do that on top of the 8% and \$60 reduction we've seen for the triple R.P.. Thank you Mr. Speaker.

MPP Qaadri to Minister Coteau Re: Anti-Racism and Islamophobia

>>MPP Shafiq Qaadri: Mr. Speaker, my question is for -- the minister responsible for anti-racism. Welcoming people from all walks of life. For decades, generation upon generation of families worldwide have been welcomed here and now call Ontario home. However in this tide of growing xenophobia, which includes, speaker, unfortunately rendering 17 children fatherless in Quebec city, there are fears that immigrants may not be welcomed into Ontario. Multiculturalism and open-heartedness are our strength and we must continue to be accepting and Progressive. Minister, what are we doing to uphold our commitment to openness, acceptance and inclusivity?

>> Min. Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from etobicoke north for his question. I think this is an important question and I want to thank him for his advocacy he does in his community in regards to this issue. Mr. Speaker, Ontario is a welcoming province built on the principles of openness and fairness. And I think now more than ever we need to ensure that the rights of people in this province are respected across government we work to ensure that our policy also live up to the ideals of openness and fairness. A year ago, Mr. Speaker, the premier of this province established the anti-racism directorate to continue to build on the inclusiveness within our province by addressing and preventing systemic racism. I've had the opportunity to visit 10 communities across this province and I meet with thousands of people and I heard firsthand about the painful realities that racism plays here in the province of Ontario. These public meetings provided input for us to build strategic plans to stop system, racism here in the province of Ontario, Mr. Speaker. I'm quite proud to report that. Will be able to release --

>> MPP Qaadri: Thank you, minister coteau. Not only do I appreciate your personal commitment but also the personal stories that you and I have shared in our corridor consultations. It's been more than inspiring, speaker, to see under premier Wynne's leadership Ontario continues to be a province that welcomes so many newcomers, immigrants and refugees. From the purely economic point of view, immigration into our province builds Ontario up. Immigrants have contributed greatly to our richness, the tapestry, culture and prosperity of our communities. Amongst the many diverse groups in Ontario, speaker, you will know that there are over 600,000 muslims. Our province has been a welcoming place for many muslims. We must admit unfortunately that islamophobia's still a reality. Just last Friday not too far from this legislature we saw a protest outside of a mosque with hateful, demeaning and regressive signs. It's unbelievable to me, speaker, to witness such things. In Toronto in 2017. How is our government responding to these acts of racism and intolerance?

>> Min. Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I want to thank the member from etobicoke north for the question. I also want to take this opportunity to thank the member from ottawa-vanier, because I know she'll be bringing forward a motion this Thursday in regards islamophobia. Thank you for your leadership on this file. , Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear that as the minister responsible for anti-racism here in the province of Ontario, we don't tolerate, we will not tolerate any form of racism here in the province of Ontario. I want the Muslim community- in Ontario to know that we have their back and we believe that they should be able to live in the province where they feel free, where they feel respected and where racism should not exist. And, Mr. Speaker, we're going to come forward with a plan here in Ontario to work on anti-racism policies and processes and we'll bring forward a plan in regards to islamophobia. We want to make sure that we stop its devastating effects. Here in the province of Ontario, and again I just want the community to know that we're here to support them and I hope that all members in this legislature are here to do just that.

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault Re: Windstream

>> MPP Todd Smith: My question's for the Premier this morning. Speaker, yesterday another mind-numbing example of Liberal mismanagement on the energy file. Speaker, yesterday we learned that wind stream energy would like the government to pay the \$28 million the nafta court said that they were owed after the government cancelled their offshore wind project. So my question to the Premier is, has the federal government asked your government for the money to pay wind stream?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So we have been working with our federal counterpart to ensure that we rectify this payment, Mr. Speaker. We're continuing to work with our federal counterparts and we hope to have that done in very short order, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Smith: I think the thing that everybody wants to know, Mr. Speaker, is how much more is this going to cost the ratepayers and the people of Ontario? The Premier has two options on this file, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's either going to pay wind stream or she's hoping that the electricity crisis that her government has created will blow over. I don't see that happening. And then she can announce that the government is actually going to go ahead and build its \$5.2 billion project with wind stream. Either way, Ontario families are on the hook for millions or billions of dollars. So is the Premier going to make them pay now for this project, or are they just going to make Ontarians pay for the next 20 or 30 years for this project?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I think I answered that question earlier. We're working with our federal counterparts on that, Mr. Speaker. But based off of wind stream's and the

offshore wind turbines, Mr. Speaker, we're relying on the science coming from our Colleagues in moecc, Mr. Speaker. But the one thing I find very interesting, Mr. Speaker, from a party that has no plan on how to deal with the energy crisis, Mr. Speaker, the only thing that they can offer, Mr. Speaker, is ripping up contracts, which would actually cost us billions of dollars more in litigation, Mr. Speaker. I kind of find this a little ironic, Mr. Speaker, that they're saying one thing from one side and then another thing, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

MPP Taylor to Minister Coteau Re: Nipissing Parry Sound CAS

>> MPP Monique Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the minister of children and youth services. On December 23rd, two days before Christmas, the management at nipissing parry sound children's aid society looked -- locked out their workers. Those workers are still locked out. For the past eight weeks vulnerable children and families have been at an increased risk in their absence. This is become ago pattern, minister. The lack of funding for child protection, coupled with the management digging in its heels is putting children at risk. Will the minister act to get a resolution to this situation and ensure that children and families get the services they need?

>> Min. Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for the question. I want to start off by saying that the safety of children and youth and families here in the province of Ontario is something we are always concerned with. In fact all the members in this legislature are concerned with. I had the opportunity to meet with the men and women from the C.A.S. From nipissing parry sound earlier today and to listen to some of their children, and I just want to say thank you for the work you do, because you're the men and women who are making a huge difference for families here in the province of Ontario. [Applause] , Mr. Speaker, this government's always been committed to making sure that young people in the province of Ontario are set up for success. In fact earlier today I spent almost 40 minutes speaking about our new piece of legislation for child protection here in the province of Ontario. And I do believe that it's something that we believe is necessary for change and is something that I believe is going to help position the sector for more success in the future.

>> MPP Taylor: Speaker, the minister's right. When he spoke to bill 89 this morning, he recognized the responsibility that he has to vulnerable children. But he can't look the other way when those children are not getting the service that is they need. [Applause] There are reports that a ministry audit has shown mismanagement of funds at this society. If this is the case, children and families should not be paying the price for that, and neither should these workers. What does the minister plan to do to ensure that these workers get back to the work that we need them to do? And more importantly vulnerable families and children need you to do.

>> Min. Coteau: Speaker, if you go back a few months ago, the member opposite probably asked the exact same question when it came to our peel children's aid society. And the question was for me to do something to intervene. We allowed a process to take place and they found a solution. Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows that there's processes in place, and every single time we have a labour disruption here in the province of Ontario you doesn't want a minister or anyone from government intervening. I believe in the process. I've listened to the folks from nipissing parry sound and I have -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll work with the minister of labour, the ministry of label and our ministry in the event where we believe there's no runway left to actually have them -- Come to their own solution. But until that point, Mr. Speaker, we have to let the process take place.

MPP Anderson to Minister Naidoo-Harris (Naqvi) Re: Combatting Human Trafficking

>> MPP Granville Anderson: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for status of women. Many Ontarians and members of this House recognize the traumatic and painful human trafficking inflict upon many women and girls across this province. Mr. Speaker, human trafficking is a heinous and deplorable crime that robs the safety and livelihood of those who are being exploited and abused. Last year I was extremely pleased to hear our government was taking action to invest up to \$72 million in an Ontario-made human trafficking strategy. Our government has also appointed Jennifer Richardson to be the director for the new human trafficking coordination office. The director was recently in my riding of Durham to consult with frontline service providers. I understand that -- Meaning and many of my constituents hear what work is on the way. Can the Minister please provide the House with an update on the strategy to end human trafficking?

>> Min. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the MPP From Durham for this very important question. And I would also like to thank the member for his great work in his community. Speaker, as you know, human trafficking is a deplorable and inhumane crime. Human traffickers prey on the most vulnerable in our society and survivors often experience serious and long-term trauma. But, Speaker, I want you to know that work is under way across government to protect Ontarians from this brutal crime. As part of our strategy to end human trafficking the -- director of the antitrafficking office has consulted extensively with antitrafficking coalitions to find solutions. The director also is working with survivors to develop a community-based supports fund and in addition we have increased funding by 6.6 million to 47 community-based service partners delivering support to survivors. We have also expanded the victim quick response program. By 1.9 million to allow victims of human trafficking to access benefits. Mr. Speaker, these are just some of the key initiatives under way to get rid of this terrible crime.

>> Min. Anderson: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to ask the Minister for the status of women for her answer -- thank. I think many people in my riding, as well as across this province, would agree that if a survivor needs support, we deserve to be there will for them as one community. I am pleased that our government's strategy included the launch of a community-based supports fund and indigenous LED initiative front to expand and improve access to services for survivors. It is also great to hear that our strategy also include more investments and partnership with our law enforcement partners. But our government heard that we need to do better. We need to make sure survivors can feel safe. Can the Minister tell us about our government proposed legislation to tackle human trafficking in this province?

>> Min. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Minister. I want to thank the member from Durham for the question. He also want to thank, Speaker, our frontline support workers, law enforcement partners, partner ministries like the Ontario women's directorate, the ministry of community and social services and the ministry of community safety and correctional services. Speaker, I would also like to commend the member for Haliburton-kawartha lakes- Brock for her advocacy on this very important issue. Speaker, our government is working hard to create a province where all Ontarians can live in safety, free from the threat, fear or experience of exploitation and violence. And that is why, Speaker, today our government will introduce legislation to combat this crime. If passed, this bill will allow survivors to apply for restraining orders against human traffickers, will make it easier for survivors of human trafficking to get compensation from those who traffic them, and also. February 22nd of each year as human trafficking awareness day. Speaker, I hope that all members will support this legislation because it will ensure that all victims of traffickers. Have a way to move forward and build a better life.

MPP N. Miller (Fedeli) to Minister Coteau Re: CAS and Child Protections

>> MPP Norm Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the Minister of children and youth services. Speaker, today at queen's park we are joined by representatives from Nipissing and Parry Sound children's aid societies who provide essential local services. They've travelled all the way here to queen's park to have their voices heard. There are 48 of them here today. They've been locked out since mid December. I met with workers this morning. They have serious concerns that the mandate to protect children is not being fulfilled. Speaker, would the Minister explain to this House what the government is doing to support these workers and to get better outcomes for those who are in dire need of their services?

>> Min. Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'm happy to take this question. As the member mentioned, I do realize the C.A.S. Workers travelled quite early, left their home at 4:30 in the morning to be here today. Gone I want to thank them for being here to talk to not only myself but other members in the legislature. The member knows opposite and all of the members know on the Conservative side in the legislature that there's a process for negotiation. You know you stand here today and you say, Minister, what are you doing? Are you going to intervene? The other side you say respect the Collective bargaining process. We know that there's a process in place that works in Ontario and we know that overall when it comes to the process and having the bargaining unit reach a potential solution. Now we have massive success here in the province of Ontario. Committed that we will work to ensure that, at the end of the day, the process is respected and that we work to put in the supports necessary to make that process law.

>> MPP Victor Fedeli: Thank you and good morning, Speaker. Back to the Minister of children and youth services. For years many organizations and stakeholders have pointed to the ongoing serious issues within the child welfare system. In fact the auditor general has detailed the problems with this ministry's accountability in three separate audits over the last decade. She has expressed grave concerns over and over and over. For too long there has been serious deficiencies in the system, which have let our most vulnerable slip through the cracks, and in some cases have died., Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister, why does it always take the auditor general, the financial accountability officer or an OPP investigation to get to the facts in Ontario?

>> Min. Coteau: Mr. Speaker, if we look at the child protection sector here in the province of Ontario, we know we have less children in care today than we had, you know, several years ago. We have more young people being adopted here in the province of Ontario and the member knows opposite that we have the most substantial, most Progressive changes since 1985 coming forward through this legislature. In fact I introduced second reading this morning with some massive changes in child protection. The member knows opposite that WRE raising the age of protection here in the province to 18, which aligns with other provinces and ensures that 1,600 more young people are brought into protection here in the province of Ontario. We're making sure, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about young people in care that we're putting in culturally sensitive programs to ensure that their culture and their identities. Through the process. Mr. Speaker, we're working with indigenous communities throughout Ontario to ensure that customary care and other processes are put in place. So they have more say in where their children end up.

MPP Horwath to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Costs

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the Premier. The spokesperson of the Sault Ste. Marie electricity utility, the public utility, doesn't want to see families' electricity cut off. He says the solution is to bring down the actual cost of electricity. Is the Premier going to do what's right for families in the sioux as well as families across Ontario and start to actually address the cost of electricity so people can start to afford their electricity bills?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleased to rise on this question. Of course, Mr. Speaker, we've already brought forward the 8% reduction actually helping every family in Sault Ste. Marie, Mr. Speaker. For those that are in and outside of Sault Ste. Marie on Hydro One, Mr. Speaker, as an r2 customer within those regions they're seeing a \$60 reduction on their bill, Mr. Speaker. But you know what else the folks from Sault Ste. Marie are seeing, Mr. Speaker ? Actually a clean grid, one that they can rely on. One that was in a mess back in 2003, Mr. Speaker. We've made sure we've invested billions and billions of dollars to make sure that families like in Sault Ste. Marie, in Sudbury and northern Ontario, have access to an electricity grid that is reliable and clean, Mr. Speaker, and that's something that we have done as this government invested in electricity system to make sure that it's clean, reliable. Mr. Speaker, we're going to take it to the next level now and make it as affordable as we can for all families and businesses right across the province.

>> Andrea Horwath: Jordan Zimm, the spokesperson at the Sault p.u.c. was very clear I quote -- if you want to solve this problem, solution is in controlling the commodity price of electricity, end quote. The Premier knows as well as I do, Speaker, that private contracts lock Ontarians into paying private profits for years. But we can actually direct public companies to charge less. It's why power is a powerful tool, Speaker, that benefits families, businesses and the province as a whole. When a spokesperson of Sault Ste. Marie p.u.c. is telling the government it needs to reduce the cost of electricity, the question is, is the Premier actually listening?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier has been listening, Mr. Speaker, for years. We've actually invested, Mr. Speaker, and renegotiated the Samsung agreement saving \$3.7 billion. Reduced fit prices by \$1.9 billion. Created competitive L.R.P. Process. Suspending the L.R.P. 2 project, Mr. Speaker, 3.8 billion dollars. Mr. Speaker, we've been investing in making sure we find ways to have downward pressure on rates while building the system up for a decade, Mr. Speaker. One thing we should also talk about when it comes to Sault Ste. Marie this government has been listening, Mr. Speaker. For example ongoing provincial support for the city of Sault Ste. Marie will be more than \$30 million in 2017, Mr. Speaker. That's where -- in the neighbourhood of \$1,200 of provincial support per residential taxpayer. Timmins for example, Mr. Speaker, \$1 million. So this government gets it, Mr. Speaker. We're listening and we're acting.

MPP Fraser to Minister Murray Re: Water Protections

>> MPP John Fraser: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of environment and climate change. Minister, I know that ensuring Ontario's water resources are protected in good health is a priority for you and I know that, like myself, many of us in this legislature heard from people in our communities with concerns over permits to take water. I know you acted to address some of these concerns in the two-year moratorium that place as freeze on new and expanded water taking permits. So, Mr. Speaker, can the Minister please explain to the House what this moratorium will achieve?

>> Min. Glen Murray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I want to thank the Premier for her leadership on this. Her direction was that we look at a way to start protecting our water supply. As you know the area around Guelph and Kitchener- Waterloo is one of the high stress water areas in Ontario and we know that, Mr. Speaker, because we just completed the last year all 22 source water protection plans developed and being managed by local communities for the first time in Ontario's history. So that water is now protected. The moratorium puts a stop on expansion of those water facilities and allows us to take the next step within the international trade rules to protect water sources further and to secure and protect the jobs in the sector as well.

>> MPP Fraser: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. And again my question's for the Minister of environment and climate change. Engaging our communities, providing our communities with the opportunity to voice their ideas and concerns is an important part of protecting our water. As we move forward in our effort to protect vital resources, we will need to continue to engage the communities most impacted by groundwater taking. So, Minister, I understand that the government is considering or implementing a new fee on permit to take water so, Speaker through you, account Minister provide the House with details on the new measure and how it will further support our efforts in groundwater protection?

>> Min. Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will be doing two things. One, we're moving to raise the fee which was -- to say low would be an understatement. It was \$3.71 per 100 litres, Mr. Speaker. That's raised now to 500, the highest water taking fee in Canada, which we think is a strong step forward to promote conservation, Mr. Speaker. We also, as the House has passed, passed bill 151, which deals with the issue of plastic waste and the micro plastics that are in our Lakes and rivers, Mr. Speaker. It -- many people don't realize that taking 500 millilitres of water from the tap is much more energy efficient. It takes 2,000 times as much water to take that same amount of water out of a plastic bottle. So as my friend David Crombie used to say, Mr. Speaker, everything is connected to everything else. About taking strong action on water protection. We're also taking issue on packaging so we're seeing a major cleanup of the environment and reduction in water use, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Oosterhoff (Jones) to Minister Duguid (Thibeault) Re: Hydro Costs

>> MPP Sam Oosterhoff: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. In December I had the opportunity to tour Stan pack in Smithville. Originally founded in 1949 in Burlington when Steve Whitt bought the manufacturing company in 1971, it had only two employees. With hard work and innovation, Whitt built the business up and today Stan pack employs over 300 people in Smithville. They provide good well-paying jobs but Stan pack also run as plant in Texas with close to 200 employees in that space. When I toured their plant in Niagara West-Glanbrook, I was told that it cost them \$1 million in Ontario for hydro that would cost them only \$400,000 in Texas. That's a 150% increase in hydro costs. My question is to the Premier. Why does her government insist on doing everything it can to kill manufacturing jobs here in Ontario?

>> Min. Brad Duguid: That's a real question, Mr. Speaker. Is Ontario competitive with the United States and the rest of the world? And the answer is unequivocally yes we are. In fact we're not only competing with. We're outcompeting the US We're outcompeting the U.K. We're outcompeting Germany. We're outcompeting Japan. We're outcompeting Italy. We're outcompeting all of the G-7 nations because we're leading them in growth. We're up 700,000 -- Mr. Speaker, we've worked in partnership with companies like Samtech to make investments that that side of the House said we shouldn't make. In fact you look at the manufacturing sector. You look at the \$2 billion we've seen in auto invested in this -- If they had their way, Mr. Speaker, we wouldn't even have an auto sector in this province.

>> MPP Sylvia Jones: Speaker, back to the Premier. In December my office opened 20 files to help people pay their hydro bills. People are angry that they're paying delivery charges that are greater than the cost of their electricity. The people like Mrs. Greenly, who have to choose between putting food on the table or keeping the lights on, or the senior who wants the Premier to explain how \$108 in electricity is costing her \$252. People in Dufferin-Caledon are angry and they want answers. When will you finally act to make hydro affordable for my constituents?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for bringing up those situations, Mr. Speaker, because it is one of the reasons why the Premier has tasked me since I had took over this portfolio in June with finding ways to lower the electricity bills for all people in this province, Mr. Speaker, and we did the 8% come January 1st and there is the triple-rp, Mr. Speaker. We do have the Ontario electricity support program that is in place to help seniors. I not Honourable member mentioned, Mr. Speaker. But we do recognize that that isn't enough, because we did have to clean up a system, Mr. Speaker, that was a mess, that relied on dirty coal, that was in shambles, Mr. Speaker, and we've said enough of that and we built a system that we can now rely on and be clean but we recognize, Mr. Speaker, that it's actually getting unaffordable for some and that's why we're acting, Mr. Speaker. We have a plan. We're working on the fine details, Mr. Speaker, and we'll be bringing forward that plan to help all Ontarians. In the very near future, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Armstrong to Minister Hoskins Re: Eye Surgery

>> MPP Teresa Armstrong: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. When people need health care, they should be able to get it. My constituents went Kyle McKay was shocked to learn that his stepson's eye surgery will not be covered by ohip until he goes blind. This government has been studying CARA takonas surgery since 2011. Pilot funding was provided in 2012. But now, in 2017, when people need surgery to stop their eye disease and restore their vision, it's still not covered by ohip until they go blind. What does the Premier say to Kyle, his stem son and every Ontarian who is being forced to go blind or to pay thousands of dollars for eye surgery that they need?

>> Min. Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. Frankly I'm looking forward to the opportunity to speak with the member opposite to have a better understanding of this individual's case. I'm not familiar with it. Although of course familiar with the condition. It's absolutely a priority of this government, Mr. Speaker, that we invest in those procedures and processes and interventions that in many cases are critically important to Ontarians and follow evidence based decision making by the best experts in the field. We don't take those decisions as a government. We make sure that we allow our experts, our clinicians, our researchers, academics to make those decisions on our behalf as front-line physicians but with regards to eye surgery specifically, I know that we have a dramatically increased our funding through a pilot project which may be in reference. I'm not sure, through the kensington eye clinic which has made this procedure available to numerous countless dozens more individuals that will benefit from it, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Armstrong: Speaker, the problem is this surgery is out there. The ... is a surgery that's proven that actually prevent blindness. I'm really concerned, Speaker, because the constituent is wondering why his son has to worry and go through this stress and hardship and wait until he's blind before ohip will actually perform the surgery. This is a preventable surgery, Speaker. There has been a pilot project along studying this surgery and it's shown that it actually helps. People need to make sure that we have health care that prevent blindness, not waiting until they're blind before the surgery will be covered. Speaker, when will this government take this seriously and fully fund this surgery in order to prevent blindness rather than wait for it to be covered when they go blind?

>> Min. Hoskins: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again I know the member opposite hasn't brought this case to my attention. I look forward to having the opportunity because that's how I can really intervene and make a difference if there is an issue, a challenging one and I can't imagine how challenging this would be for the family. If in fact she's referring to the pilot project that has been under way for the last several years through kensington for eye surgery where we've tripled the funding during a pilot phase which actually was created specifically so we could know that answer, if it is evidence based. If it does have a positive impact, we received the report from that pilot study last fall. I expect that the ministry, along with health quality

Ontario and others and our clinicians are going to be able to provide us with best advice. But until that pilot project, which we funded and tripled the funding for making it much more widely available. Until that was -- We don't know the evidence that she's looking for, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Hunter Re: Anti-Bullying

>> MPP Ann Hoggarth: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of education. Minister, as you know today is pink shirt day. Pink shirt day began in nova Scotia when a grade 9 boy wore a pink shirt to school. He was bullied by schoolmates for looking gay. It is a staggering fact that almost three quarters of kids report hearing homosexual slurs at schools every day. Minister, bullying in our schools and in our society is a real problem with devastating results. As a teacher, I can testify to how debilitating bullying can be to students. Sometimes resulting in deadly consequences. This must stop. I know this is an issue all members of this House feel strongly about and I'm proud to be a member of this House as we work to stand up to bullies. Minister, can you please tell the House what the government is doing to combat bullying in schools?

>> Min. Mitzi Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member from Barrie for this important question and for her voice on this issue. Mr. Speaker, two high school students, David Sheppard and Travis Price did not stand by when they saw a grade 9 student who was being bullied for wearing a pink shirt. Mr. Speaker, they went out. They bought pink shirts, too, and they stood with their Colleague. I am very proud to be a member of this legislature, and Premier for your leadership and your vision on inclusive and equitable education. Mr. Speaker, our government has introduced the revised legislation on the health and physical education curriculum. We have policies, processes and procedures in place in schools to ensure that our schools remain safe and inclusive and welcoming environments for all students. And, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to see, as so many members in this legislature today. Wearing their pink shirts standing with our students. Mr. Speaker, if kids need help, kids help phone is there 24 hours a day 7 day a week with a hot line that they can call.