

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Wednesday, March 28, 2018

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 3rd Session
Wednesday, March 28, 2018

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro-Rate Reduction Plan

>>MPP Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Good morning. My question this morning is for the Minister of energy. There are a number of contradictory statements made yesterday in the House. The Minister said, quote -- the ieso has assured my ministry that they have made every effort to be forthright and fully responsive to the auditor general's request for information. Ditor general said, quote -- they continually say they're co-operating but they stalled on giving us information. They wouldn't sign the management representation confirming that they gave us all the information, end quote. So someone here, Mr. Speaker, isn't telling the truth., Mr. Speaker, is the Minister of energy calling the auditor general a liar?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, we work with the auditor general on many instances. We work with our system operator, Mr. Speaker, on a daily basis. And of course when this came to light, we spoke with the independent electricity system operator. Our system operator for the province, and they have assured my ministry, Mr. Speaker, that they have made every effort to be forthright and to be fully responsive to the auditor general's request for information. And they have told me time and time again that they have provided over 200 responses and received those responses and have provided those information requests. They make staff. They made specific work spaces for the auditor general staff to be in the --System operator's headquarters, and they even adapted from two weeks to seven weeks. So from the system operator's point of view, Mr. Speaker, they are meeting all of the requirements.

>>MPP Smith: Speaker, somebody's not telling the truth here and somebody's trying to hide something. The auditor general said she was blocked from meetings. You know they can set up all the work spaces they want but if the A.G. Isn't getting what she's asking for and what the officers are asking for, and these are independent, nonpartisan officers of the legislature. You know -- the auditor general said she was blocked from meetings. The A.G. Asked the ieso, when is the board meeting? We'd like to come. They did it without telling us. But yesterday the Minister of energy said, when it comes to the board meetings and when it comes to the audit committee, the ieso accomdated every A.G. Request on this. So, Mr. Speaker, why is the Minister of energy attacking the credibility of an independent officer of the legislature, the auditor general?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We also have an independent arm's lengths body in our system operator, Mr. Speaker, and they have informed the ministry that they have done everything they can, Mr. Speaker, to accommodate the a.g.'s requests. The A.G. Has met with the board, Mr. Speaker. The A.G. Has met with the audit committee. And through their audit the auditor general's staff had direct access to the ieso staff to ask questions. As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, they are making accommodations to ensure that they can answer every question and be as accommodating as possible through this entire process. The auditor general has asked for over 40 meetings, Mr. Speaker. Those 40 meetings took place between the A.G. Staff and the independent electricity system operator, Mr. Speaker. They're going to continue to co-operate with the auditor general just like our ministry does, Mr. Speaker .

>>MPP Smith: I'm sure the auditor general's really looking forward to that type of co-operation continuing when she's getting stonewalled at every request. All you have to do is read the transcript

and then listen to the Minister's remarks. He was on quite a roll yesterday, Mr. Speaker. Again yesterday the Minister of energy said -- Ontario families and small businesses are now paying less by average on their bills than any jurisdiction. He said that yesterday, Mr. Speaker. I tell you, that would be news to the folks struggling with hydro bills all across this province. When you figure in the massive all-in costs of electricity in Ontario. So, Mr. Speaker, I want to know this question from the Minister of energy. What fantasy world is he living in?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are living in a world where we're actually making it better for all Ontario families. Where we reduce bills by 25% but the opposition votes against it. We're living in a world where climate change is real, where the opposition deny it, Mr. Speaker. We're living in a world where we've shut down coal where this party wants to bring it back, Mr. Speaker. We're going to continue to live in a world, Mr. Speaker, where we bring forward caring programs for the people of this province, unlike that side that wants to cut, cut, cut, Mr. Speaker. We will make sure that we look after everyone in this province -- Shake their fist as manic and makes things -- and make things up, Mr. Speaker. Withdrawn neanderthal.

>> The Speaker: The Minister is looking to be warned if he does not withdraw properly. Withdraw.

MPP Smith to Premier Wynne Re: 2018 Budget

>>MPP Todd Smith: Thanks, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. I love game shows. We're going to have our own little game show here this morning. She likes playing with the numbers. I know that. This question -- this question is a multiple choice question -- Thanks, Speaker. It's a question for the Premier. My question is which scandal is the Premier most proud of? Is it "A" the \$8 billion scandal on health? "B" the 2 billion on smart meters? "C" the 1.1 billion calling gas plants? Or "D" the \$4.5 million salary that she handed to the C.E.O. At Hydro One?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I don't see my job as a game. I don't see the job of anyone in this House as a game. Because we're talking about people's lives. We're talking about the ability of people to give their children a great start in education, Mr. Speaker. So what am I most proud of? I'm most proud, Mr. Speaker, that, in this province, a child can start school at the age of sometimes 3, because they are going to turn 4 before January 1st. They start at the age of 3. They have full-day kindergarten, Mr. Speaker. And then that child now can get free prescription medication if he or she needs it, Mr. Speaker. And then that child when he's 17 or 1 and graduates from high school can get free tuition, Mr. Speaker, to go to College or university. And then that child, Mr. Speaker, can find a job in this province because we are bringing jobs -- Bringing business to the province, Mr. Speaker. That's what I'm most

>>MPP Smith: Speaker, I'm disappointed I didn't get an answer to my question. I guess maybe -- maybe the Speaker went with "E," all of the above. Another multiple choice question from the Premier this morning. Which mismanagement does the Premier consider to be the biggest waste? "A" the \$400 million on presto card costs. In case you didn't hear "A" \$400 million on presto cards. 304 million over budget on the pan am games. "C" the \$6.5 million pay cheque to consultants over the sale of ontario which was only sold for \$6 million at a loss of 61 million. "D" \$36 million on bureaucracy at the local health integration networks, or "E" all of the above?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I don't see our jobs here as games, Mr. Speaker. So what am I most proud of? I'm very proud of that child who is graduate -- who has graduated from College or university, has now got a job, was able to attend the pan paran games Mr. Speaker, which are huge success. And came in on budget, Mr. Speaker. I'm most proud, Mr. Speaker, that as that young person ages if he or she -- If he or she needs care for his parents or grandparents, Mr. Speaker, there's home care available for that family, Mr. Speaker. There are personal support workers who are being paid more in this province and are being respected, Mr. Speaker, because we have increased their salaries and we've increased the minimum wage for people across the province. I'm very proud of that, Mr. Speaker. And I'm very proud, very proud that that young person, when he or she retires, is going to have -- retirement security --

>>MPP Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's not doing very well on this test today. But they've lowered

the standards so low, she might still pass. Speaker, back to the Premier. We know the government is about to plunge us into a pile of red ink this afternoon with budget 2018. But just how much will the deficit be today? She said it's modest. This really shouldn't take too long, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier stop me when I get to the right number? How many billions in the deficit? Is it 1 billion, 2 billion, 3 billion, 4 billion, 5, 6, 7, 8? Just how high? Just how high is this deficit going to be? I can't count forever, Mr. Speaker. How high is the deficit going to be?

>> Premier Wynne: So, Mr. Speaker, you know the -- Mr. Speaker, the contrast between the position of the opposition and our government and our party is it's actually becoming clearer, Mr. Speaker. As they talk about the cuts and the social deficit and the damage that they think should be done in this province, Mr. Speaker, and on this side of the House we're talking about 100,000 child care spaces, Mr. Speaker. Free tuition, Mr. Speaker, for young people. The fact that millions of children will have free med -- have already had free medication, free prescription medication. 3 million prescriptions, Mr. Speaker. Those are the investments that we're making because we believe, Mr. Speaker, that -- A deficit in care is actually much more problematic --

MPP Gelinas to Premier Wynne Re: Pharmacare and Dental Services

>>MPP France Gelinas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier. The question is quite simple. Does the Liberal government believe in universal access? Does the Liberal government believe in universal programs?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I think if the member opposite looks at the way we have introduced ohip plus, Mr. Speaker, it is universal for all of those young people, Mr. Speaker. Access to 4,400 medications on the formulary, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite looks at the seniors plan, Mr. Speaker, that we will introduce today to make sure that seniors' prescription medication are completely free, universally free, all 4450 medications on the formulary, Mr. Speaker. Yes we believe in universality. Look at our preschool child care plan, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we believe in universality.³

>>MPP Gelinas: Yesterday the Liberal government voted to support the NDP Plan to ensure that every Ontarian, no matter their age, can get a prescription and every Ontarian, no matter who they are, can see a dentist. Will that be in the budget today?

>>Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the budget will be read this afternoon and I trust that the third party will see that is a Progressive budget that supports care in this province and that they will stand up and vote for it.

>>MPP Gelinas: Thank you, Speaker. Everyone should be able to fill a prescription, and everyone should be able to see a dentist. Does the Premier believe in that?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, yes, I do, but I do not believe that 110 drugs, when there are 4,400 on the formulary, is universality, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't work. Yes, I believe in universal pharmacare. We've taken major steps towards that and we know there's more to be done, Mr. Speaker, but 110 medications is not, is not pharmacare, Mr. Speaker, and it's not universality

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MPP French to Premier Wynne Re: Universal Pharmacare and Education

>>MPP Jennifer French: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. The government has had 15 years to create universal pharmacare. They've had 15 years to create dental care for everyone. Can this Premier explain why her government has ignored these issues for a decade and a half?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have been working on expanding the healthy smiles program, Mr. Speaker. We have been working on and creating access to dental care. We understand that it's a gap, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the member opposite why it's taken until this week for them to even raise the issue in this legislature.

>> MPP French: Thank you, Speaker. The Premier says she believes in making sure that Ontarians have dental care. But in 2014 she tried to make it harder to access the healthy smiles program for low-income kids. She says seniors should have easier access to their medications but she tried to raise fees for seniors who need prescription medication two years ago. Her newfound interest in these issues is just another cynical election ploy and Ontario families know that. Why does it -- why does it take an election and your government's impending end to finally notice people's needs?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows full well that we have been working on expanding access to dental care. The healthy smiles program has been expanded across the province, Mr. Speaker. We know that there's more to be done, and I ask that the member opposite pay close attention to the budget this afternoon and then stand up and vote for a Progressive budget in this legislature.

>>MPP French: Thank you, Speaker. And even if it pays pretty close attention. And if a government believes in investing, it invests. If a government believes in cutting, it cuts. And, Speaker, the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour and I would like to remind us of what this government has done. This government let child care fees become the highest in the country. They've ignored dental care for a decade and a half. They've ignored universal pharmacare. They've cut health care. They've cut education. They've privatized hydro. Premier, your legacy is 15 years of cuts. Cuts and privatization and we won't let you do more damage. Premier, Ontario is worse off because of your government. How can you possibly be good with that?

>> Premier Wynne: You know, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud that I'm part of a party that has always had education in their platform, Mr. Speaker. I don't remember one word about education, Mr. Speaker. And if present action or future action can be predicted by past action, Mr. Speaker, \$600 million is going to come out of health and education according to that party. Mr. Speaker, we have consistently invested in health care and education, Mr. Speaker. The kids in this province are getting an education that is second to none in the world, Mr. Speaker. People come from all over the world to see how we run our education system. When we came into office under the previous Premier, the

graduation rate in this province was 68%, Mr. Speaker. It is now 86.5%. Kids are graduating and they are going on to postsecondary, Mr. Speaker, and they're accessing free tuition because of the actions that this government has taken.

MPP Walker to Premier Wynne (MacCharles) Re: Disabilities Services

>>MPP Bill Walker: Thank you very much. My question's to the Premier. Your pre-election throne speech included big promises to voters but shamefully none to the accessibility community. In fact the word disability and accessibility were mentioned zero times in the throne speech. Premier, is accessibility for 1.9 million Ontarians with disabilities that far off your radar? Or did you just forget to include them in your vote-buying scheme?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that the Minister will want to comment in the supplementary, but I would ask the member opposite again to be in the House and pay close attention to the budget this afternoon and then, and then vote for the supports that we are putting in place to help people care for themselves and the people that they love

>>MPP Walker: Back to the Premier. Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government will say anything and promise anything to stay in power. You talk a lot about care. For 15 years you've talked about care but you have not delivered. It is clearly the only thing you actually care about is clinging to power. So considering the 3,300-word-long throne speech wasn't long enough to include terms of disability I ask the Premier how can the accessibility community possibly trust you after you continue to leave them behind? Is it just another election ploy?

>>Minister Tracy MacCharles: Thank you. The member opposite has been very distracted with the P.C. Leadership race and all that entails trying to figure out where those cuts are coming from. But if he paid attention, Speaker, he would know we've been very active on this file. He would know we introduced an employment strategy for persons with disabilities. He would know we established two new education standards committees under the accessibility legislation --For K to 12 and post secondaries. We had a forum last week on public spaces. He would know stakeholders are heavily engaged, Speaker. He would know we're moving the yardstick on accessibility to make Ontario an accessible province by 2025. I haven't heard from him, Speaker. I would love to talk to him. About all these things I just mentioned and more that we're doing, accessibility inclusion and helping everyone reach full potential --

MPP Tabuns to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Child Care

>>MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. My question to the Premier. Yesterday the Premier announced another part of her last-ditch attempt to hold onto power. Her child care plan leaves out thousands of Ontario families with kids under the age of 2-and-a-half. For years, the Premier and her Liberal government let the price of child care rise in Ontario until it was the most expensive in the nation. If the Premier wanted to make child care more affordable in Ontario, why didn't she do it already?

>>Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I am very pleased to answer this question, Mr. Speaker, because I want to point out that I am the first Minister who was appointed Minister responsible for early years and child care. And so more than a year ago, I was asked to take a close look at this file and transform the way we deliver child care in this province. The first ask was to deliver close to 100,000 spaces in five years. We're actually ahead of the numbers that we were creating and we are now moving on to another commitment, which was to transform the way we deliver child care. Dr. Cleveland's report actually came in to us in February and we are now moving forward with these recommendations. So here's what we're doing. \$2.2 billion over three years to provide free child care for preschool aged children that will save families an estimated \$17,000 per child, Speaker. \$17,000 per child. The reason we are focusing on this age group is because this is where the greatest need is.

>>MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier or acting Premier as the case may be.

Ontarians are desperate for relief when it comes to child care. Lowering costs for anyone would be a welcome change, but this plan is not going to help women who want to return to work after parental leave. Families need a program that helps with more than just those with children from 2-and-a-half to about 4 years old. Why does the Premier and her Liberal government leave families to fend for themselves for the past 15 years? And why are they leaving out many families now?

>>Minister Naidoo-Harris: So, Mr. Speaker, a couple of things. So that question asked a number of different things. First of all the number one -- Number one and number two recommendation by our group that studied closing the gender wage gap was to introduce child care and child care support. And so, by doing this, we are absolutely helping women out there be able to join the work force faster. The second piece of his question had to do with the infant group. Let me just tell you right now in our province there are about 14,000 young people in that infant toddler space. We wanted to make sure we were moving forward with supports where the greatest need was, which was that space from 2-and-a-half to 4 Number one and number two recommendation by our group that studied closing the gender wage gap was to introduce child care and child care support. And so, by doing this, we are absolutely helping women out there be able to join the work force faster. The second piece of his question had to do with the infant group. Let me just tell you right now in our province there are about 14,000 young people in that infant toddler space. We wanted to make sure we were moving forward with supports where the greatest need was, which was that space from 2-and-a-half to 4 The bottom line is our supports are continuing. So \$90 million to support continued expansion.

MPP Potts to Minister Thibeault (Zimmer) Re: Northern Energy Project

>>MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of energy. In the 2013 long-term energy plan, our government made it a priority to ensure that 16 remote first nation communities in northwestern Ontario will get connected to the electricity grid. Known as the watt eye power project. In the 2006 mandate letter the Premier prioritized the need to continue negotiation with the federal government to secure an arrangement in support of this program. In the 2017 long-term energy plan, we support this. Speaker, I know this has also been a top priority for the Minister every indigenous relations and reconciliation and every member of our caucus including Thunder Bay and the former energy Minister from Ottawa West Nepean. Will the Premier please describe the progress that has been made on this file connecting the grid.

>>Minister Glenn Thibeault: I do want to thank the member for that question, and of course his constant advocacy for his constituents and in this sector as well. Last week, Mr. Speaker, I was in Thunder Bay along with the Premier and the Minister of municipal affairs and of course in spirit and in heart with the Minister of northern development and mines to announce that Ontario and the federal government will be partnering with watt aye power and fortis Ontario to connect 16 remote first nation communities to our province's clean, reliable and affordable electricity grid, Mr. Speaker. And many of these communities have had to depend upon costly and dirty diesel generation power, Mr. Speaker. By moving forward, this completed project will connect over 14,000 people Electricity grid for the first time, Mr. Speaker. And in this process, we've greatly improved the quality of life for these 16 communities.

>>MPP Potts: Thank you, Speaker. And I want to thank the Minister for the great work he has done facilitating this agreement and his ongoing work to keep our power clean, green, affordable and reliable. I'm glad our government is taking action in partnership with indigenous communities on this very important issue. And I understand that when complete in 2023 the watai project will be the largest indigenous-led and indigenous-owned infrastructure project in Ontario's history. This is truly a remarkable accomplishment. And as the Premier said at the announcement, reconciliation, fairness and equity are no longer just words in our government. They are actions and we are walking this journey together. Ontario's economy is strong and growing and we want to make sure all Ontarians, including first nations feel the benefits of that growth. So, Speaker, will the Minister tell us more about how our government is working to ensure first nation versus access to this clean, affordable and reliable power and fully participate in economic development in their communities?

>>Minister David Zimmer: Speaker the watapartnership is a sign of partnership with first nations. It's not just a question of jumping on a Tory bulldozer. Speaker, this government is not a bully. We work with 120 first nations to support their purchase of over \$250 million in shares in Hydro One, giving them the opportunity for economic development. This is a plan that the NDP Wants to undo by buying back those shares. Speaker, ourk fair hydro plan and its first nation delivery credit, which interestingly both parties voted against, cuts most on-reserve customers' bills by over 50%. Our \$650 million Aboriginal loan guarantee program. Is an initiative under the green energy act that the Conservatives want to repeal.

MPP Wilson to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Wasaga Beach High School

>>MPP Jim Wilson: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the Minister of education. First I want to thank the Minister for the recent announcement that the government is promising funds to purchase a site for high school in wasaga beach. I don't do that often. Mr. Speaker, officials with the town of wasaga beach and I believe the community has the population numbers to justify a secondary school. The town expects significant growth in the next few years. In addition the town is currently planning a major downtown development project. All signs point towards the community needing a high school in the near future. So I ask, Mr. Speaker, wi the government fund a high school I wasaga beach if asked to do so by the local school board?

>>Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I want to thank the member opposite for this very important question. Mr. Speaker, we recognize that the Wasaga Bach community is growing and so are the adjacent communities. And so the community in wasaga beach would be a good fit for sondary schools in the near future. Now I understand that the Simcoe county District School Board will need to plan for additional secondary kpas tif in the foreseeable future. And I want the member opposite to know that I have been in contact with the town and the board on this very important matter. It is important to note, however, that decisions regarding pupil accommodations are the responsibility of locally elected school boards. And this is also my understanding that the school board currently has a property designated for a secondary school in the development land of the town of wasaga beach. But -- This plan has not yet been registered with the town. And so my ministry is prepared to provide Simcoe county District School Board with provincial funding to assist with this --

>>MPP Wilson: I thank -- back to the Minister. I thank the Minister very much for that answer. Wasaga beach as you know has waited a long time for a high school. A new elementary school for community is being planned right now. We thank you for that. That will give us four elementary schools but no high school. So, Mr. Speaker, the mayor, council and residents every wasaga beach want to know if there's anything else the Minister can do to help make this project a reality.

>>Minister Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again, we know that this community is growing and that's why we have expanded a number of projects the board can submit from 8 to 10 to- better meet the needs of local communities. And we recently announced Han \$10 million in funding for an elementary school and child care spaces in wasaga beach which were so needed and I'm happy to say that we were able to do that. We are open to accepting a proposal by the board for funding of a high school site. My Minister is -- my ministry is prepared to provide the Simcoe county board with provincial funding to assess the acquisition of this designated secondary school site as soon as it is ready. It is my request that the town and the board take all the necessary planning steps to secure the site as soon as possible. And it is my hope that the board and the town --Will work together and have a collaborative discussion in planning for a new secondary school in wasaga beach community and in the future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Armstrong to Minister Jaczek Re: PSW Work Conditions

>>MPP Teresa Armstrong: My question's to the acting Premier. Recently I met with 36 unifor members of local 302 to hear their stories about the mounting pressures they are facingorking as P.S.W.S in long-term care. They social passionately about the myriad of challenges they faced including verbal abuse and physical abuse. One P.S.W. Describes giving a bath to a resident with

dementia. He head butted her leaving her with facial bruises and a split lip. Violence comes with the job. When workers only have 17 minutes per shift for each resident, they just can't do it. The Liberal versus called T throne speech a plan for care and opportunity. Will the acting Premier commit to also planning time to provide that care and implement --Minimum standard of 4 hours per day for each long-term care residence and pass the time to care act?

>>Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly share the concern for our P.S.W.S, working not only in long-term care but in community care as well. They really are essential to what our government is certainly doing, which is providing appropriate care in the appropriate setting with the appropriate type of supports that they need. And certainly our government has shown I think our commitment to personal support workers across the province. We have made major investments. Just most recently at the 2017 budget continued investment of \$250 million in the 2017/18 budget for community and personal support workers. This also included a \$10 million -- Investment to eligible organizations for education and training in this particular part of the health care system through its P.S.W. Fund. Thank you.

>>MPP Armstrong: Speaker, we have a shortage of P.S.W.S in this province. Yet Nancy McMurphy union local 302 president told me the program to train the P.W. -- P.S.W.S are being cancelled for lack of every registration. Staff quit or take mental leave because they are exhausted and demoralized by their working condition. P.S.W.S want to do their best. They want to have enough time to get everyone ready for breakfast in the morning but they can't do it in just 6 minutes per resident. The Premier said she is proposing that we make big changes in the way we support care for each other. Nice words. Does the Premier actually believe that a P.S.W. Can get someone ready for breakfast in just six minutes? And if she does, will this Premier take the six-minute challenge and post her photo after six minutes in the morning to Facebook?

>>Minister JACzek: Mr. Speaker, we recently announced that we will be providing 15 million more hours every nursing personal support and they were Ute ic care annually for residents particularly in long-term care homes. And so we will be increasing the hours of care to an average of 4 hours per day per resident. Clearly the member opposite will be most interested in our budget this afternoon. We remain committed to this type of support for seniors, for those who need that kind of personal support. We are doing everything we can to ensure the retention of P.S.W.S. We want to make sure that they have job satisfaction, that they are able to provide the care that is so valuable to the patients in their care. And we will be addressing the situation very, very soon. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Martins to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Child Care

>>MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question this morning is for the M Minister responsible for early years and child care. Minister, I know that our government is committed to making sure families have access to high-quality, inclusive and affordable child care and early years programs. After inheriting a system until dire need for funding, our government made a clear priority to transform the way child care works. More and more young families are moving to my riding of family so it's not strange that I actually hear so much from these families that they face challenges when it comes to the affordability of child care. And I want to know what our government is doing to address this. Minister, please tell us what yesterday's announcement meant for families struggling to access affordable licensed child care.

>>Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member from Davenport for this very important question. Mr. Speaker, we know that many families face challenges when it comes to finding affordable, accessible licensed child care in our province. That's why our government made commitment to transform the way we deliver child care in Ontario. And yesterday's historic announcement laid out our plan to do just that. Our commitment, Mr. Speaker, is to deliver high-quality licensed child care free for preschool-aged children between the ages of 2-and-a-half and 4, starting in the year 2020. So just think about that. This important step will make life easier, easier for tens of thousands of Ontario families. And our investment of \$2.2 billion over three years will expand access to affordable child care all across the province. And save families \$17,000 per child. Mr. Speaker, our plan will allow parents to go back to work when they choose and give our kids the

best possible start in life.

>>MPP Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for that answer. Arch yesterday's announcement is indeed a historic step in transforming the way child care works in Ontario. And I am proud to be part of a government that cares and is committed to providing support for families that need it. As we increase access and affordability, it is also important that we support the early years workforce. Can the Minister please expand on what yesterday's announcement means for educators in the child care sector?

>>Minister Naidoo-Harris: I'm pleased to answer the member's question. Speaker, in Ontario we have thousands of remarkable world-class early years and child care professionals who are educating and caring for our youngest learners. But we have heard that many of them face challenges in their profession because of low wages. Speaker, that's why yesterday I had the pleasure to announce that we will introduce a wage grid for program staff working in the early years and child care sector by 2020. This wage grid will ensure that close to 20,000 child care workers entering the field will receive a salary in alignment with E.C.E.s working in kindergarten beginning in 2020. This important investment is about fairness and respect. It will support our early years professionals and help attract tens of thousands of talented professionals. Speaker --We are creating jobs, and we're going to add 20,000 more early childhood

MPP Martow to Minister Coteau Re: MotherRisk

>>MPP Gila Martow: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of children and youth services. The failed MotherRisk testing method resulted in Ontario children being ripped apart from their families under scientifically unsubstantiated allegations of parental drug abuse. This government finally commissioned a report, which outlined gross procedural overreach, including testing body samples without written consent. Mr. Speaker, charter rights were violated. Parents will be seeking justice against this government in our courts. Will the Minister tell us if he plans to admit wrongdoing and pay compensation or fight these families in court?

>>Minister Michael Coteau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to start by thanking the commissioner for her work. And all of those that were involved in bringing forward the important recommendations and the recommendations that were brought forward through the commission were accepted by our government, and they will help us to continue to build a child welfare system here in Ontario that puts families and children at the centre of decision making. We want to make sure that when a family and a young person engage in the child protection system, that, you know, that they're placed in a situation where they could navigate through that system and a young person always feels as though their rights are being protected. I know that the Attorney General has --

>>MPP Martow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And again to the Minister. The MotherRisk commission has shattered confidence in our health care system, our justice system and the children and youth services in one fell swoop. Experts believe that if anything the report underestimates the scope of those affected. Mr. Speaker, we have heard nothing specific about what the government plans to do for improving forensic methodology in the future, and the report was released a month ago. Will the Minister share with us what measures are being taken to ensure that all of the investigative forensic techniques are scientifically valid?

>>Minister Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. First and foremost let me say this. What happened to the children and families that were impacted by the flawed MotherRisk hair testing is absolutely heartbreaking. As the Minister for children and youth services said, we thank the commissioner and her commission and those who worked with her for this important report and thoughtful recommendations. Speaker, we have already indicated that we accept all the recommendations. These recommendations offer a path forward. They will guide us as we continue to strengthen, modernize and transform our child care welfare system to children, youth and families at the centre of everything we do. Speaker, as a major first step our government will follow on commissioner Beaman's advice to continue the confidential counselling service offered to families. Through the commission and we will establish a task force of experts, as well as families, indigenous people and the

black community to guide --

MPP Natyshak to Minister Ballard Re: Water Quality Chatham-Kent

>>MPP Taras Natyshak: For the acting Premier. For over 100 years rural families and farms from Chatham- Kent have had access to clean, clear and safe water from ancient aquifers deep underground. That is until water on family farms one wind turbine site became black and undrinkable when Samsung began pile driving into the aquifer to support the construction of turbines. This Liberal government says that the water is safe to drink. When I last posed this question to the government, I was ejected from this chamber for offering the Minister a drink of water to take a sample. Speaker, I don't blame the Minister for not wanting to jeopardize his own health. No reasonable person would. But why does this government refuse to initiate a health hazard investigation for the residents and rural families to protect them from exposure to a known toxin?

>>Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. And thank you to the member opposite for a very important question. Because it is important, Speaker, that government protect the quality of drinking water, just as it does the quality of air and the quality of our land. You know, groundwater quality, it's taken very seriously, and we are the actively, actively, Speaker, holding the company accountable for addressing the complaints related to changes in well water quality. The ministry, Speaker, has undertaken a review of water quality data to ensure that residents -- to ensure residents that their water is safe to drink. Thus far, Speaker, the analysis has not shown a connection between water quality and construction activity. The company has informed the ministry that it's working with homeowners where they are supplying alternative water supplies to provide and pay for a licensed well contractor to inspect their wells and answer any questions they may have, Speaker. We've also had a very productive meeting with representatives from water wells first two weeks ago, about two weeks ago, and the ministry, ministry staff.

>>MPP Natyshak: Speaker, I provided the Premier and Minister a copy of the report by E.B.S. Structural contracted for Hydro One transmission towers that carry the power from the wind turbine in question. In a shocking discovery E.B.S. Structural ruled out the use of traditional deep foundations kson and driven pile as not feasible due to the potential for driven pile to cause issues with nearby active water wells much that's a smoking gun, Speaker. Even Hydro One, Hydro One knew that pile driving would contaminate nearby wells. It's unacceptable that this Liberal government has taken the word of Samsung over Ontario families. Is the Premier inviting a lawsuit from the Chatham- Kent families for the cleanup costs of removing black shale from their House holds? And is her government fully prepared to pick up the costs indefinitely with the associated health costs? And will you follow. All Ontarians that black shale is now safe to drink for all Ontarians?

>>Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. I want to go back and reitete what I said earlier, that we've had a productive meeting with representatives from water wells first about two weeks ago. At that meeting, we shared our results about our extensive testing, Speaker. We're waiting to hear still from water wells first for the data that they say they have. I would be really appreciative of -- if we could get our hands on lto we could look at their data. But the data that has been Collected on our behalf, Speaker, we have shared with water wells first. You know, again, after thorough testing, Speaker, the ministry has found no evidence of any ongoing or permanent impact to water quality related to wind turban construction in the area. And I want to close, Speaker, by reiterating what I said at the very beginning. These concerns very carefully, and we're HOL company accountable to address these complaints

MPP Kiwala to Minister McGarry Re: Ferry Service Kingston

>>MPP Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of transportation. I am incredibly proud to represent the community that includes two islands, wolf and Howe island. Both islands are home to a wonderful arts and culture scene, great local businesses and of course breathtaking views. It is no wonder that so many Kingstonians, tourists and visitors and those from further afield flock to the region. Amber -- amherst island located outside of Kingston and islands is

also remarkable and draws tourists to places like top view farms. Speaker, these communities have different needs. They need different transportation options from communities on the main land. Speaker, they need reliable ferry services so that those who live on the islands can make it to work on time and that tourists are able to make an impromptu trip for a concert or dinner. Speaker, enough to the Minister. Would the minister provide the members of this House with more information on what our government is doing to improve ferry service for island residents and tourists alike?

>>Minister Kathryn McGarry: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member from Kingston and the Islands for that question and for her phenomenal advocacy on behalf her community. And she is absolutely correct. Communities like those on Wolfe and Amherst Islands do have unique needs, and we as a government do have a responsibility to respond. We heard loud and clear that there is a need for more reliable ferry service and that's why we are moving forward with an over \$61 million investment for two new ferries to serve the Wolfe and Amherst Islands. The two new larger ferries will better serve the people and businesses that depend on ferries as part of their daily commute for to get goods and as much as to market. Specifically the new Wolfe Island ferry will be able to carry up to almost 400 passengers and 75 vehicles, and the Amherst Island ferry will carry up to 300 passengers and 40 vehicles. So we know that improving ferry service to the Wolfe and Amherst Islands will better connect these two communities.

>>MPP Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for that answer. This is truly a historic investment for my community, and it builds on investments like our government's \$60 million for the commitment to the third crossing. Over \$1.3 million for community cycling infrastructure and more funding for transit. Speaker, the benefits much these two new ferries are endless. Larger vessels will allow us to move more people and at Wolfe Island the new ferry will ensure two vessels are running during the peak travel periods. The front knack 2 that currently services Amherst Island will become a backup for the eastern ferry fleet which will improve reliability and safety for all ferry services. Speaker, our government, unlike the party opposite, understands the impact every climate change, and we know that we cannot continue on the same path of polluting and leaving the problem to the next generation. We – Speaker, through you. Would the Minister please provide an update on how we are making sure our new ferries help sustain a sustainable environment.

>>Minister McGarry: Thank you to the member for her surplimentry. Our government takes the issue of climate change very seriously, as she said. The transportation sector contributes almost one third of the greenhouse gas emissions that we produce. So there's a clear need for action. And that is why I am so pleased to say our two new Electrified ferries will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions by taking the equivalent of 1,357 cars off the road compared to conventional diesel ferries. And while the Ontario Conservatives refuse to act, our government has a plan to reduce gridlock while also supporting our environment. So whether you live on Wolfe or Amherst Island, depend on ferry as parts of your daily commute. Ferries will be fully electric, noncable vessels, the first of their kind in Canada. Or you're looking to explore all the islands have to offer, our government is absolutely committed to providing convenient and green options to get you where you need to go faster than you do now. Thank you.

MPP Jones to Minister Chiarelli (McGarry) Re: Fracking

>>MPP Sylvia Jones: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure. More than two years after the government adopted portions of my private member's bill to support recycled aggregates, some municipalities and government organizations still do not use the safe and reliable alternative to new aggregates from quarries. According to Aggregate Recycling Ontario, Infrastructure Ontario and Metrolinx are failing to use much recycled aggregates in their infrastructure projects. As the independent Environmental Commissioner of Ontario said, quote -- Metrolinx should be a leader, not a laggard, in green procurement, especially for a high-impact material such as aggregate. Will the Minister direct Infrastructure Ontario to use as much recycled aggregate as possible?

>>Minister Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member for the question. As you know Infrastructure Ontario does a tremendous amount of construction work and procurement. They use the highest standard in

moving forward and certainly I will bring this particular issue to their attention. I realize that the member is concerned about it and I will get back to her with a technical briefing and perhaps arrange a meeting with Infrastructure Ontario to look at this particular issue.

>>MPP Jones: There are no scientific arguments that would suggest recycled aggregate is worse than primary aggregate. The previous Minister of economic development was only able to identify education and outreach as actions the government was taking to promote aggregate recycling. Yet according to aggregate recycling Ontario, quote -- beyond the ministry of transportation, no leadership in sustainable construction practices seem to be provided. The Environmental Commissioner said that, despite being a prime candidate and that Metrolinx is one of the largest parking operators in North America, Metrolinx dollars do not appear to use recycled aggregate in building or maintaining those parking lots. The government is the largest consumer of aggregate in Ontario, so it has a responsibility to use this resource sustainably. It's an easy win, Minister. Will the Minister insure that when public funds are used for infrastructure projects, recycled aggregates are considered and used --

>>Minister Kathryn McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker. And thank you for the question. Certainly as the aggregate resources act was going through this legislature under ministry of natural resource and forestry, there was a lot of discussion about recycled aggregate. And I know that there are several kits that are continuing to increase not only the recycled aggregate supply in their pits, but also there is increasing use for recycled aggregate. Recycled aggregate is not appropriate for all projects. There is a plan to increase it as we can. But in terms of looking at the huge projects at Metrolinx and our government is putting forward in infrastructure, we continue to make sure that the high-quality products that are required for each and every and separate projects are there. Many of the projects have a plan to -- and a formula that they need to use. Sometimes recycled aggregate is not appropriate for those plans. We continue to build high-quality projects.

MPP Mantha to Minister Des Rosiers Re: Radio Tower White River

>>MPP Michael Mantha: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of natural resources and for rest of it. Your ministry is dismantling the radio tower near the township of White River and building a new one. However the ministry has refused to let the township fire department radio be transferred to the new tower. We are two weeks away from the dismantling of that tower. Is this government ready to help the township of White River to protect an essential service for the region?

>>Minister Nathalie Des Rosiers: Monsieur president, I thank you for the question. The ministry does operate some radio towers to support the forest fire operations and we're getting ready for the 2018 session or, you know, trying to prepare ourself. And I think part of the issue here was that there was a safety hazard with this tower and that's the reason why it's needed to be dismantled. So in a sense I think our first duty is obviously to ensure that we protect the safety of people. There was some concern that there was overloaded and that ice could make it fall. So the operations are dedicated to ensuring the safety of all citizens and that's the reason for the choice made by the ministry.

>>MPP Mantha: Again to the Minister. The township of White River is located along the highway on trans-canada highway. Their fire department radio helps provide a system to call out their department for fire as well as automobile extrication indications. Services to the ministry of transportation through the section of northern Ontario. By not transferring the fire department radio to the new tower, this government is putting at risk the lives of Ontarians passing through the section of the trans-canada highway. How is this government going to protect Ontarians if they don't transfer the fire department radio?

>>Minister Des Rosiers: Monsieur president, I'm happy to talk to the member about the details of the proposal and his concerns. Our information, the information that I have in front of me that indeed the services are transferred to another radio tower to provide the similar services. So we can have the conversation maybe after to see whether the information is correct. What I have in front of me is indeed the primary concern was the safety and it continues to be responsive to all the needs of the communities.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Ballard Re: Air-Quality

>>MPP Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, speak. My question is for the Minister of the environment and climate change. Speaker, our government is committed to improving air quality in Ontario. That's why last week Ontario introduced new stricter standards for sulphur dioxide emissions. The new standard is five times stronger than the previous standard, leading to increased protection of the environment and the health of Ontarians. Speaker, can the Minister please ein to the House how the new standard for sulphur dioxide builds upon previous efforts to improve air quality in Ontario?

>>Minister Chris Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker. And thank you to the member from Barrie for that very important question. Speaker, as the member mentioned, we're committed to taking action to improve air quality in Ontario. That's why we're updating sulphur dioxide emission standards to further ensure, Speaker, that every person in Ontario has clean air to breathe. And with these new standards, Speaker, we're working to reduce pollution from industry, leading to further protection of human health and the environment for Ontario. Speaker, the update builds on previous efforts to reduce air pollution and improve air quality in Ontario. Things like putting an end to dirty coal-fired power generation, setting 68 new health-based emission standards. Speaker, we are continuing to take action to ensure that everyone in Ontario is breathing very clean air. Just as I said in the last question, Speaker, this is the key role of government

>>MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that answer. I know this is a very important issue to all the people in Ontario but particularly to my ring of Barrie. Speaker, shutting down dirty coal-fired generation is considered one of the single largest green initiatives in all of North America. Since 2005, we've seen that smog levels have significantly decreased in Ontario. In 2005, there were 53 smog days. In 2017, there were zero. That's a significant decrease. Speaker, our actions to improve air quality have made a real tangible difference in people's lives and have saved billions of dollars for the health care system. Ontarians are now able to breathe easier thanks in part to the work we've done. Speaker, account Minister please explain why Ontario is considered a leader in the global effort to reduce pollution?

>>Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you again to the member from Barrie for that important question. You know while shutting down dirty coal-burning electrical generating plants was an important initiative, we knew it wasn't enough, Speaker. We knew we had to do more. And that's why we implemented our cap on carbon dioxide pollution which caps how much businesses are allowed to pollute. You know, Speaker, we're reinvesting every dollar from that program, that cap and invest program. Every dollar from those proceeds into green initiatives that are further driving down the carbon dioxide pollution that is being emitted. You know, Speaker, I want to say you compare what this side, this government is doing with what the Conservatives are proposing over there. They aren't walking away from climate change, Speaker. They're driving their bus away from climate change, Speaker. They don't even believe in climate change anymore. In fact, Speaker -- I will say that now is not the time to slash investments just when families need it the most. Now is the time to invest, Speaker. Since 2005, we've seen that smog levels have significantly decreased in Ontario. In 2005, there were 53 smog days. In 2017, there were zero. That's a significant decrease. Speaker, our actions to improve air quality have made a real tangible