

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Wednesday, May 3, 2017

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period

41st Parliament, 2nd Session

Wednesday, May 3, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown to Minister Sousa Re: Provincial Debt

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of finance. I want to read you some lines from economic expert Ben isen's recent op-ed on the provincial budget. I quote -- over the past three years, Ontario's net debt has increased by 34.8 billion. Over the next three years, the province expects to add \$34 billion in debt, almost exactly the same amount. In this context, the government's rhetoric that a balanced operating budget has dawned a new fiscal day and the province can now afford to spend freely, rings hollow. So instead of a new fiscal day, what we have is more being spent on interest payments. \$10 billion more in debt this year, and the crowding out of frontline services. So, Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of finance -- Tell this legislature what did he have to cut to pay for these higher interest payments?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the member opposite, who by the way voted in the largest deficit in our country's history of \$55 billion. It's the same member who by the way had accumulated deficits throughout their time. More than due Canada's overall debt and never once, Mr. Speaker, did they ever pay down debt. Furthermore interest on debt which he refers to now, today in Ontario, is the lowest it's ever been, especially when compared to the Conservatives at 16%. Today it's 8.4% of our overall budget and, Mr. Speaker, it's locked in for 30 and 40 years on many respects. So going forward we are addressing debt, and the first, the first way to address debt, Mr. Speaker, is to balance the books, and we're balancing the books this year, next year and the year after. And, Mr. Speaker, we're investing heavily. On a number of programs and services for the people of Ontario. I ask that member what will he cut going forward?

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of finance. You'll notice he did not answer the question about the skyrocketing debt in Ontario. He chooses to attack rather than defend a budget that is struggling in debt. Those shell games Ontarians can see through. And reality is when they're adding so much debt, it means there's no ability to help. And a good example of that is the city of Toronto. The conclusion from the city manager of Toronto, Peter Wallace, and his words were -- there are no new investments for Toronto. So despite the Liberals telling mayor Tory they were going to invest in the city of Toronto, Toronto is receiving nothing from this government. So, Mr. Speaker, will the Minister come clean? Are the Liberals So, Mr. Speaker, are the Liberals simply attacking mayor Tory because they're embarrassed of their own budget, which is suffocating high debt. And does nothing for the city of Toronto?

>> Minister Sousa: So, Mr. Speaker, I'll answer the first part of the question. We're investing \$11.5 billion more in health care. We're investing another \$6.5 billion more in education, and we're making record investments in infrastructure and transit for the people of Ontario, all of which a good part is going to be supported by increased debt to the extent of those capital improvements and capital investments. What will he cut as we move forward on those very issues that are important to the people of Ontario? Mr. Speaker, we are investing in Toronto, heavily in fact. Toronto set its priorities. We said we will match and support ongoing investments in social housing as well. As in infrastructure. The member opposite has opposed the revenue request. The member opposite has not even agreed to Toronto's conditions. We have.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of finance. And for a third time. For a second time the Minister of finance refuses to acknowledge that we have \$34 billion in new debt over the next three years. Debt is still skyrocketing in Ontario. What it means, we have so much debt and so much interest payments. No ability to invest in. And frankly despite what the Minister of finance says, when the mayor and the entire city council are saying this government does nothing for Toronto, it speaks loudly. And the reality is they have made choices. You know, an example of the lack of support for Toronto, the Liberals cut \$1.4 million from the Toronto public library. Where is this government's priorities? How can this Minister justify \$1 billion to pay for their gas plant scandal but \$1.4 million for the library in Toronto is too much? It's not right, Mr. Speaker .

>> Minister Sousa: So here are the priorities of this budget. Pharmacare, free for every child under 25, Mr. Speaker. Tuition for our children, 210,000 going to school this year, free for them as well, Mr. Speaker. We're continuing to provide for junior kindergarten and we're making investment and working with business to provide for more economic growth. What will he cut? Will he cut pharmacare going forward? Will he cut free tuition for our students? Will he cut the supports we're making for business? And, Mr. Speaker, we are the largest contributor to the city of Toronto by far and he has never once supported their initiatives, for that matter any municipality in Ontario, because they --

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of health. I was pretty optimistic when I heard the Liberals might finally do the right thing and support our hospitals. But according to the Ontario health coalition The Liberals' budget, to quote them, barely made a dent. They said the funding will hardly even cover inflation and it certainly won't be enough to sustain the current system. That's from the Ontario health coalition. It seems it was just enough to get a few Liberal-friendly quotes. Mr. Speaker, after years of freezing budgets and cutting health care in hospitals left, right and centre, will the Minister admit this money doesn't cut it? They're not actually meeting the needs of Ontario's hospitals.

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I honestly don't know where to begin. I don't know if I should be talking about the two dozen hospitals that they closed when they were last in power, or I don't know if I should talk about when the leader of the official opposition, when he was part of a government in Ottawa that ended the health services provided to refugees in this country, Mr. Speaker. There are so many examples. Or their promise to cut 100,000 jobs, many of them in health care. But I am going to choose to talk about our investments. But I choose to talk about our investments as articulated by the Minister of finance in our budget. An additional nine -- \$9 billion to construct new hospitals in this province, making a total of \$20 billion over the next --

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of health. There's a trend here. When the government can't defend their own record, they point fingers. They blame others. They blame past provincial governments, past federal governments. Defend your own record. Be proud of your own record. If you're actually not embarrassed by what your a Mr. Speaker, you can be proud of your record. You don't need to attack others. Let me give you another example. Jamie Lee ball spent five days on a stretcher in a hallway and this is what she had to say about this government's budget. When you explain it's just inflation, it's really just shocking to me. I don't understand how that's even negotiable to offer Canadians their basic rights with regards to health care shouldn't be something they even have to discuss. Jamie Lee ball is right. When this government, when this Liberal government has cut and cut health care for the last five years and you have patients being stuck on stretchers for five days in hallways. It's not right. So I'm asking Jamie Lee ball's question. You didn't do enough for her. You haven't done enough for patients. When can we expect the government to do the right thing?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, on this side we're proud of our record. The member opposite should be embarrassed at his own record, Mr. Speaker. When he was a part of government in Ottawa, they closed the health council of Canada. When he was part of a government in Canada in Ottawa, they voted against the refugee interim federal health program. They closed the national Aboriginal health organization. I can't imagine what the member opposite has planned for the health care system cutting and slashing. We're investing, Mr. Speaker, \$7 billion over the next three years to further reduce wait times. Wait times that are the best in the country, Mr. Speaker, provide better access to care and to further enhance the patient experience. A 3.3% More than \$500 million infusion on top of last year's \$500 million for a billion dollars to hospitals. increase in health spending over the medium term, Mr. Speaker. A 3% increase to our hospitals' operating budgets.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of health, and once again typical response, they attack others. They can't be proud of their record. Why would they be proud of Jamie Lee ball? Mr. Speaker, they shouldn't be proud of their record. Jamie Lee ball, five days on a stretcher in a hallway, and they're proud of what they're doing to health care? It's awful, Mr. Speaker. And according to the last auditor general's report, just 30% of patients observed in hospital E.R.S made it to an acute care ward in less than 8 hours. They're proud of that 8 hours as the ministry of health's own target? What was that? You know, maybe because Ontario has the fewest number of hospital beds per 1,000 people across the country that they accept this. It's not good enough. The people of Ontario, our patients are sick. They deserve better. This government has not delivered. When will they support --

>> Minister Hoskins: The member opposite is just making it up as he goes along. Because you can make

it up. The Fraser report, Mr. Speaker, says that 85% of E.R. Patients are getting treatment within the 8-hour target for complex patients and 89% within the four-hour target for minor patients. In fact E.R. Wait times for the sickest patients have been cut by almost 30%, while at the same time the volumes that we're seeing in our E.R.S have increased by 40%, Mr. Speaker. More patients being seen, shorter wait times, to the point where also the Canadian institute for health information, cihi, is further proof that our government has made great progress. Hip replacements 85% completed within the medical benchmark higher than the national average. Knee replacement higher than the national average. 99% of radiation therapy within the medical bench mark, Mr. Speaker. Also above the national average. Every single metric, we are near if not at the top of the national performance in wait times, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Vanthof to Minister Matthew (Hoskins) Re: Pharmacare

>> MPP John Vanthof: My question is to the acting Premier. Can the acting Premier tell the 2.2 million Ontarians with no drug coverage why the Liberals are refusing to introduce the universal pharmacare program and ensure their access to the medications they need?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. You know, I don't really understand why the third party wants to get into a squabble about whether their plan is better than our plan or our plan is better thanb their plan. We agree the time has come for pharmacare in Ontario and in Canada, Speaker. One significant difference between their plan and our plan is that ours will start in January. This year -- 2018, Speaker. Everyone under age 25, with an ohip card, will have access to free drugs, with no Coe pay, Speaker, with no annual deductible. We are very proud of the investment we're making in pharmacare and we invite the NDP To join with us and support pharmacare in the province of Ontario and beyond.

>> MPP Vanthof: The difference is what we're proposing is actually pharmacare and here's an example. Tracy from newmarket saw the NDP Pharmacare announcement on TV am called us to tell us her story on what pharmacare would mean to her. She spent two years without benefits, first taking care of an ill relative and then working part time, without benefits. She has diabetes and high cholesterol. Her prescriptions cost \$300 per month. Paying for these medications put her into credit card debt and she's still struggling to pay that off. Tracy is older than 24. Our universal pharmacare plan would cover Tracy. Why are the Liberals refusing to bring in a universal pharmacare plan leaving people like Tracy going into debt just to pay for the medication they need?

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the leader of the third party will be in Peterborough later today, and I hope while she's there Mr. Speaker -- and I know she's planning to talk about access to medications. I hope that when she's speaking to the crowd and the media, that she'll be telling them of -- in Peterborough alone -- I hope the leader of the third party will be telling the citizens of the great city of Peterborough that 34,000 children and youth that will, as of January 1st, be receiving full free pharmacare. Or how 11,500 House holds in Peterborough, with children, Mr. Speaker. Those parents will no longer have to worry about paying for asthma inhalers or antibiotics. Or insulin. And, Mr. Speaker, this begins at the start of next January --

>> MPP Vanthof: New Democrats have a universal pharmacare plan that will give drug coverage to 14 million Ontarians. Under this plan, no diabetic or H.I.V. Patient will celebrate their 25th birthday knowing -- Under this plan, people with asthma or high blood pressure receiving social assistance can enter the work force knowing they won't lose their drug coverage. Why is this Liberal government leaving millions of Ontarians without drug coverage by refusg to bring in a universal pharmacare plan for people above 24?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite knows that we have programs involving Ontario disability supports as well as Ontario works and trillium, programs that provide supports to the kind of individuals that he is speaking to. However under their plan no one in this province will be covered for cancer medications. Under their plan no one in the province will be covered for drugs for rare diseases. And I have to say that the leader of the third party, who was first elected 4,700 days ago, and prior to last week only mentioned in this legislature the word pharmacare three times, once -- in fact she referenced it in the context of an op-ed that I had written about pharmacare. The other time she referenced it with regards to the trans-pacific partnership erroneously referring to the concern about pharmacare. Mr. Speaker, she had 4,700 days to talk about pharmacare. I appreciate the fact, late to the game, Mr. Speaker. But their advocacy is important as we try to secure pharmacare nationally.

MPP Gelinias to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Wait Times

>> MPP France Gelinias: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Does the Liberal government think it's ok that as a result of the Premier's cut and underfunding to our hospitals, people are going to the emergency, in an emergency are being treated in hallways, in a shower room, in a broom closet or in a TV room for days and sometimes weeks on end?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Of course not, Mr. Speaker. It's not acceptable, and that's why last year and again this year we've made significant investments in our hospitals, both on the capital side as for example the recent announcement of trillium in Mississauga last week where we announced that we are moving forward with the construction of a new hospital power with the two -- New E.R. As well as at the other sites of trillium, Mr. Speaker. But also importantly on the operating side in terms of operating budgets immediately moving to add to the resources provided last year an additional 3% increase to operating budgets of hospitals across this province. Mr. Speaker, that includes specific funds which will enable, in a flexible way, hospitals to address the unique challenges that they may be facing, whether that's in their E.R.S, because of growth, the 40% increase of patients that are being seen in our E.R.S. Or whether it's with regards to bed capacity and other issues. We're there to support our hospitals, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Gelinias: Thank you, Speaker. Olive is 84 years old. Be lives in Sudbury. She was admitted to the hospital with sepsis. While she was being treated she spent her first two nights on a stretcher in a busy E.R. The next 20 days in a TV room, including one night in the shower room that was quieter than the very busy TV room that she was in. The Premier cuts caused this crisis to happen. In her budget is not going to come close to fixing it. When is the Liberal government going to admit to the severity of the hospital overcrowding that the Premier H created and stop pretending that a 2% increase is going to solve it?

>> Minister Hoskins: Speaker, first of all the member's wrong with her percentage. The increase in operating budgets to our hospitals is 3%. And, Mr. Speaker, that includes -- that includes a significant amount of funding specifically to priority services. It includes over \$1 billion invested over the next three years, specifically to improve wait times, whether that occur in our E.R.S, whether it's the 2,800 more hip and knee replacements that will be provided, whether it's the 29,000 more M.R.I. Hours, the 2,100 more cataract surg Eries. Whether it's \$70 million to adopt the latest digital technologies, Mr. Speaker. \$74 million for mental health services. \$357 million for priority services in hospitals, 67 million dollars. For telemedicine. All together, including the increases already locked in from last year, \$11 billion more dollars into health care over the next three years.

>> MPP Gelinas: Thank you, Speaker. Well, Speaker, people across Ontario go to the hospital and they end up being treated in hallways. That's because, for decades, hospital budgets have been cut or frozen. We're talking about years and years of this Liberal government doing damage to our hospitals, and the Premier isn't undoing this damage. Instead her hospital budget falls at least \$300 million short of what is needed to keep the crisis from getting worse. Not even to get things better. Why is the Liberal government refusing to take responsibility for the damage the Premier has done to our health care system and to make a real and meaningful commitment to ending hallway medicine in Ontario?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, let -- let's hear what those who truly know about how meaningful the investments in last week's budget are. Teresa Agnew, nurse practitioners association of Ontario. Today's provincial budget provides great news for the people of Ontario. With significant funding increases to hospitals, long-term care homes and primary care, we can better meet the needs of an aging population. M.T.A. O's thrill today hear about free prescription drugs for children and youth. Or Anthony Dale, president and C.E.O. Of the Ontario hospital association -- it signal as renewed commitment from government to expand and enhance access to care across the continuum. The government's significant investment in hospital capital will help support a sustainable health care system for the future. Council of academic hospitals, same thing. Can I don't knows and celebrating the announcements last week --

MPP Fedeli to Minister Sousa Re: Homecapital Group Investigation

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the finance Minister. We've been asking you questions about home capital, the troubled mortgage lender, also under security commission investigation. Depositors left and the share price tumbled. Then they received a \$2 billion bailout from the health care of Ontario pension plan or hoop. Kevin Smith, the board chair of home capital, was a member of hoop's board and Jim cohane, hoop C.E.O., was also on the board of home capital. So after the \$2 billion deal was done, they then resigned from each other's board within 24 hours. All this happened right under the Minister 's nose. We want answers from the Minister. Is an investigation into this perceived conflict of interest under way? Or does the Minister agree that what went down in that 24-hour period somehow passes the smell test?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question, Mr. Speaker. In fact as I replied already on occasion, investigations are under way. The Ontario securities commission is doing its job and has already made public as to some of the allegations being put forward. Osfi, which is a federal regulator, oversees home capital, is also taking the appropriate steps to protect the interests of consumers and investors, and fsco, which is a regulator for here in Ontario, has already performed and laid some of the charges in regards to fraud. So the member opposite is now making allegations in regards to some of the executives and share ownership and the chair as well as the trustees and the resignation so we get all that. But our primary concern is to ensure consumers and investors are protected and that we take the appropriate steps, through the regulators, which is in fact doing their job to that extent. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Fedeli: To the Minister. Kevin Smith is also the \$720,000-a-year C.E.O. Of St. Joseph health centre in Hamilton. But while he's at his \$357,000 a year job at home capital, here's what's happening back at his hospital. 600 cataract surg Eries stopped, 58 registered nursing jobs cut, mental health treatment unit closed, 136 more positions cut including 61 R.N.S. Where was Kevin Smith through all this? Not in Hamilton but in Toronto attending 31 board meetings earning \$1.5 million in stock. You have to ask how could he possibly run St. Joseph's while heading up a multibillion-dollar company? I ask the Minister, is it right that a hospital C.E.O., who should be focused on health care, have another full-time job. Where he earned over \$1.5 million?

>> Minister Sousa: So, Mr. Speaker, again, we've made investments in the hospitals. We're investing

more in operating and in capital and supporting the well-being of Ontarians as we proceed forward on those matters. And the member -- They have fiduciary duties, Mr. Speaker. In fact home capital as well as hoop, act independently of government and they take the decisions as they see appropriate. We through the Ontario securities commission at fsc, make sure they're operating to the extent they protect consumers and investors, including the members and the beneficiaries of the pension plan. So it's their discretion, Mr. Speaker. They don't report to the government. They're separate of government. But we will take the appropriate steps to insure that they're protected and the member opposite has very clearly stated that they have resigned now as directors and as chair of their respective operation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP DiNovo to Minister Matthews (McMahon) Re: Funding Public Libraries

>> MPP Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Yesterday the Liberals defended cutting 20% from Toronto public libraries. The government says the library's digital archives project isn't being used. Actually the fact is, Mr. Speaker, usage is up. The government says the library isn't spending the money. Actually, Mr. Speaker, the liable rather says exactly the opposite is true. The Toronto public library says these Liberal cuts will mean less service at Toronto libraries. Why is the Liberal government cutting from Toronto libraries and what library services do they actually expect to disappear?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Well, thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question. I want to be very, very clear on this. There is no change whatsoever to the base funding for Toronto public libraries. We continue to invest \$4.1 million in annual base funding to Toronto public libraries. On top of that, there's an additional \$1 million to Toronto through the Ontario library capacities fund over the last three years to support the important work they do. What has changed, Speaker, is funding for the virtual reference library. Funding by the way that is 20% provincial and 80% city of Toronto. So Toronto public libraries. Speaker, we did contribute 20%. We have seen a reduction of use in -- we have chosen to reallocate that money in improving --

>> MPP DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again back to the acting Premier. Only in a Liberal world is a cut of \$1.4 million not a cut. One of the great things, Mr. Speaker, to public libraries is everyone uses them. Young people use them. Seniors use them. New Canadians use them. They are where people go to take out a book, use the internet, learn, take a language class, Polish up a resumé, catch up with friend and Neighbours. Public libraries are at the heart of local communities. And the Liberals are making cuts to the Toronto public library. Just ask them. Simple question. Will the Liberals reverse their cuts to libraries in Toronto? Can we tell Toronto public libraries some good news?

>> Minister Eleanor McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for her question. You know, Speaker, I know that she shares the love and care and concern of libraries and that's why I'm happy to share with her the following. Our public libraries remain an important priority for this government. That's why, Speaker, we actually take the time to talk to them and to listen to what they want. Libraries across this province told us very carefully through the development of our culture strategy that they want to be sure that the dollars that we were investing made sense. This is funding for a program that's been in existence for 20 years, that back then was an innovation but over time because of the increased development of the internet has made it such that only 25% of libraries in Ontario are using this program, and it's administered by the Toronto public liable rather. It is not their core funding, not their base funding which remains robust at \$1.4 billion and that's why I want the opposition to get their facts straight. Thank you.

MPP Colle to Minister Del Duca Re: School Zone Driving Safety

>> MPP Mike Colle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a member of the standing committee, we're dealing with the safer school Zones act. It's a legislation which came as a result of the Minister of transportation -- yeah. Came as a result of the fact is that we have a young 6-year-old girl in leaside killed on her way home from school. Last month we had another 7-year-old boy killed outside of Morrish public school. So we've got this bill before us that came as a result of this outcry from parents to make our schools safer. And what is really disgusting is that, as we sit in committee, not only Liberals but also the member from Niagara Falls will tell us, that the members of the Conservative opposition have been directed by their leader to block, obstruct -- And filibuster this bill. The bill is only 8 pages long. Over 300 --

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: Thank you very much, Speaker. Of course I want to begin by thanking the member from Eglinton- Lawrence for his advocacy on this issue and for hitting the nail right on the head, Speaker. Speaker, last November I was delight today join with Premier Kathleen Wynne and others, including mayor John Tory here from the city of Toronto in leaside to announce the strong action that our government is taking to help make Ontario's communities safer. In direct response to many requests that we have received from municipal partners across the province, including from mayor Tory right here in Toronto, Speaker, we introduced bill 65, the safer school Zones act. This bill contains strong tools to protect particularly children and seniors in our community, Speaker, because we want to make it safer for our most vulnerable road users. Speaker, as the member from Eglinton Lawrence pointed out, notwithstanding our best efforts to respond to the challenge that exists, the Conservative party, under direction from their leader. Have introduced over 300 amendments to slow down passage of this critical legislation, Speaker. It is disspsing. It's unconscionable and I call on them --

>> MPP Colle: Mr. Speaker, what is even more appalling, as we sat in that committee, we had listened to the principle of allenby school in my riding of avenue road. There were two teachers critically injured in front of that school a couple years ago. Both had had to retire from teaching because of their injuries. She came and pleaded to the committee to proceed with the safer school Zones act to protect her teachers and students. Yet now one of the amendments they moved? The Conservatives, directed by their leader, said do not allow any kind of speed enforcement devices on avenue road. After the official came and said we need something done on avenue road in front of allenby school. How is that responsible, when you have teachers -- You have parents pleading for something to be done about the speeding around our schools and in our communities? How can in good conscience --

>> Minister Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. Again I want to thank the member from Eglinton- Lawrence for the follow-up question. You can understand for those of us on this side, the government side of the House, frankly Speaker including for members of the NDP Caucus, this is a very serious piece of legislation in communities right across Ontario, Toronto, Ottawa, York region and many others, there has been a significant push from our municipal partners and our road safety partners to move forward with this legislation, Speaker. It is completely beyond my comprehension as to why the member from Kitchener- conestoga and the leader of the Conservative caucus would want to slow down passage of legislation that is designed specifically to help the elderly and to help students and their families get from point "A" to point "B" safely on the streets of the province of Ontario, Speaker. They have a chance at the committee stage to work with us to pass this legislation to do so in an expedited passion. Truly what our youngest and our oldest deserve from their government. Thank you very much, Speaker .

MPP Nicholls (Harris) to Minister Del Duca Re: School Zone Driving Safety

>> MPP Rick Nicholls: Thank you, Speaker. Speaking of keeping children safe, my question's to the acting Premier. Each day thousands of students are put in harm's way as drivers blow by school buses that are stopped -- With their red and yellow lights flashing. It's not funny. Several municipalities have started pilot programs using stop-arm cameras to capture Ed of these blow bys and we need to update our laws to reflect that. In mississauga, two and a half blow bys per day. Mississauga mayor crombie knows the importance of protecting students and has called on this Liberal government to support my amendment to the highway traffic act. In a statement she said -- we cannot wait for serious injury or fatality before we act. No parent or guardian should ever have to think about the safety of their child getting to and from school. Each day. Speaker, to the acting Premier. Will this government listen to the pilot results and support our amendment to bill 65, the safer school Zones act?

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: Thank you very much, Speaker. I think it's fairly evident from not only the legislation that we've introduced with bill 65, frankly also my responses to the member from Eglinton-lawrence. We are a government that takes the safety of our most vulnerable road users extremely safely. Thank you Speaker. So we take our responsibility in this regard extremely seriously, Speaker. So of course we will always consider any initiatives, any move to help improve the safety of those vulnerable road users, Speaker. But fundamentally the more than 300 amendments that that caucus has brought forward regarding bill 65 has less to do with that particular initiative and far more to do. With misguided principles on their part, Speaker, because they should be working closely with us to pass this legislation to help the road users that they claim to be concerned about. Thank you very much.

>> MPP Michael Harris: It will be exactly this initiative that we're talking about. Speaker, this is about the safety of our children. It's about using our amendment to bill 65 to take a significant step towards enhancing student safety. At committee, Liberal members have already refused serious safety enhancing - - Already refused serious safety amendments to 65, like doubling school zone fines or implementing speed signs. If Premier Kathleen Wynne and her Minister truly cares about student safety, she would allow her members to endorse this important safety measure for school bus cameras. This afternoon, 4 PM, her members will have an opportunity, a simple choice to stand in support of -- Student safety or stand against it. Will the acting Premier tell us now which will they do? Will they support our amendment to ensure student safety or will they not?

>> Minister Del Duca: Speaker, I said in my initial answer to the question from his Colleague that of course we will consider any initiative that actually will achieve the outcome that we're talking about here, Speaker. But, again, fundamentally over the last number of days on bill 65 as it's been in committee as that caucus and that member have brought forward -- Thank you, Speaker. As that member and his caucus have brought forward, at the direction of their leader Patrick Brown. So many amendments to slow down this process and filibuster this legislation. This latest stunt on their part, Speaker, speaks to me as something designed to save face, because rightly so, Speaker, they're embarrassed by their behaviour as it relates to not standing up for students, not standing up for the most vulnerable Help us pass bill 65.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Sousa Re: Real Estate Prices

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, to the acting Premier. The cost of a House is still skyrocketing. The budget doesn't have a single mechanism to help people buy a home. Instead people saw a budget that tried to score cheap political points by talking about foreign speculators. But as long as you have a Canadian passport or Canadian business number, there's nothing to rein in speculation. Nothing to stop consortium from buying swaths of housing to drive up prices. Why are the Liberals helping speculators? Why are they letting housing prices rise so fast because of the action of those speculators?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. Seriously. I mean there's 16-point plan that we brought forward to deal with both supply and demand with regards to housing, with an effort to ensure that we cool the market, provide some greater stability. We brought in measures to protect tenants and renters. Mr. Speaker, we've taken the first, non-resident Canadian speculative tax, is only one component of that. We are still going after those that are scalping assignments of purchase on new developments. That's also being addressed. And, Mr. Speaker, we'll continue to take the necessary steps going forward to have full disclosure, provide greater data and greater integrity in the work that we do to temper the market and protect interest of homeowners as well as those new families trying to get into the market as well.

>> MPP Tabuns: Again to the acting Premier. Over the last year, the cost of a home in Toronto rose by 31.7%. It means the average home costs \$920,791. A home at half that cost would still be out of reach for a lot of people. This budget protects corporations flipping properties. And lets housing get even more out of reach for people. Why isn't the government dealing with speculation?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with speculation. That's the whole purpose of the 16-point plan and the housing affordability measures that we've taken. As I said, we are going after those speculators that are crowding out families that want to buy into the marketplace. We're going after those that are taking advantage of loopholes and closing them. Working very closely with the federal government and C.R.A. To ensure enforcement of those and we're going after anyone that wants to speculate in a residential property at the expense of homeowners and new families trying to get into the marketplace. Now part of the issue is the fact that Ontario is destination of choice. I mean the region and the economy is growing. There's a lot of new jobs coming to the province. It's attracting many more who want to choose to live in Ontario and in this region and that's creating huge demand for -- We'll continue to support our marketplace, support our economic growth and support those families with the measures that we take. Thank you.

MPP Des Rosiers to Minister Jaczek Re: Programs for Domestic Violence

>> MPP Nathalie Des Rosiers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of social services and community service. Service Ontario day here at the Ontario legislature where we honour the work that you do that is essential for our community and I'm pleased that family services Ottawa is here with us today. The work that is done by family service Ontario and all the agency help end violence against women as well as provide assistance to those with developmental disabilities. These are essential services in our community. Whether it's coping with stress and anxiety, adjusting to separation, family service agencies have programs that help children, youth, families, students, adults, both men and women and seniors.

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you to the member for her question. Family service Ontario and their agencies touches thousands of Ontarians and helps to make the lives of the people they serve better. Several ministries in this government support F.S.O. Agencies to provide important services across the province, and through funding provided by my ministry, F.S.O. Provides counselling and therapy for survivors of sexual abuse and family violence. They work to keep women and children safe from domestic violence through early intervention and by providing prevention counselling services for men. F.S.O. Also provides community participation, caregiver respite services and supports and case management services for children and adults who have a developmental disability. I want to thank F.S.O. For the hard work they do each and every day to support some of Ontario's most vulnerable. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Des Rosiers: Thank you Madame Minister. To acknowledge essential service that's done in our community and to support so well. Continuing to make significant investment to support some of our most vulnerable individuals. I understand there's a 1 million rural reality fund that is designed to help rural, remote and northern women shelters and agencies to address their particular concern. I also understand that there's another fund of \$1.5 million to increase investment to indigenous community services, designed and delivered by indigenous people, including a counselling help line for indigenous women. Minister, Mr. President, account Minister please provide us with an update on the counselling program she has support understand.

>> Minister Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As part of our government's ongoing efforts to end violence against women, for the past two years my ministry has been testing a pilot project with family service Ontario to provide joint counselling programs for couples experiencing situational couple violence. This project is exploring the effectiveness of joint counselling for lower risk situational couple violence and whether early intervention would lead to a reduction in domestic violence. The pilot is part of our government's work aimed at reducing the thinking, behaviours and conflict that may lead to domestic violence. And we've been pleased with the results of the pilot so far, which is why I'm pleased to let this House know that we will be continuing the joint counselling program for another year in order to evaluate how this type of counselling is working. At an early intervention to violence. I'd like to thank F.S.O. For being here today. Your work makes a real difference in the lives of thousands of Ontarians every year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Yurek to Minister Hoskins Re: Healthcare Worker Safety

>> MPP Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Today I'm introducing a bill to protect the conscience rights of health care professionals. Unfortunately this government voted down every amendment the P.C. Party put forward to protect their conscience rights. Balance is needed in the system. The self-referral system which our party does support is only half the solution. Protection of conscience rights of health care professionals is the other half. Speaker, will this government support my private member's bill to be debated on May 18?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think as members of the legislature are already aware that the government's proposed legislation will support specific aspects of the implementation of medical assistance in dying by providing more protection and greater clarity for patients, their families and their health care providers. I have many times stood in this legislature asserting my commitment to and respect for conscience rights of health care providers of all of us, Mr. Speaker. I've also spoken about the necessity and the imperative to assure a balanced approach that also respects patients, Ontarians' right to access medical services in this province, Mr. Speaker. It's important that Ontarians understand there's nothing in this legislation that would negatively impact conscience rights of health care providers. It speaks to issues that are important with regards to protection from liability and certain life assurance stands and protection. And other details, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Yurek: Thank you very much, Speaker. That is specifically why I'm asking for this bill. There's nothing to protect the conscience rights of our health care professionals. Our amendments put forward to this government were going to enshrine that legislation. This government voted it down. Many patients, many health care professionals have letters and petitions in support of a self-referral system. A balance is needed today ensure patients access medical assistance in dying. Other jurisdictions have a self-referral system and protect the conscience rights of health care professionals and provide better access to medications -- assistance in dying. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister encourage his Colleagues, the members of the government, to vote in favour of my private member's bill on May 18th?

>> Minister Hoskins: There's no requirement by the federal legislation, Ontario legislation, to require physicians to participate in medical assistance in dying. However, we specifically, because there is an element of the federal legislation that speaks to both conscience rights as well as patients' right to access medical services, we introduced not once but twice an amendment to the legislation that speaks directly to and reaffirms conscience rights of health care providers and you know who voted it down, Mr. Speaker? That party, the Progressive Conservatives, not once but twice voted down our amendment to assert and reinforce and reiterate as the federal legislation did, conscience rights for health care providers. Shame on you.

MPP Fife to Minister Matthews (Coteau) Re: Youth Mental Health Services

>> MPP Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. It is mental health week in Ontario, and less than six months ago, Ontario's auditor general delivered a scathing report against this government's non-record on children's mental health. She found that youth mental health agencies in Ontario have been overwhelmed by 50% spike in hospitalization cases since 2009. She also found that this Liberal government had not analyzed the reasons behind the increase or taken steps to address mental health issues and illnesses account for more than \$6 billion in lost productivity costs every year, but this Liberal government has decided not to make mental health a priority. Why doesn't the acting Premier and this government understand that by denying mental health supports for children and youth, it compromises their ability to reach their potential in schools and in the world of work and often. Often has devastating results for families in this province?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. And I will take the first question and refer the supplementary to the Minister of children and youth services. Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and I this morning were at the university of Toronto where we made a very important funding announcement to support mental health services in our postsecondary institutions, in our Colleges and in our universities. Speaker, we announced an additional \$6 million a year on top of the \$9 million base funding, Speaker, to bring to \$15 million a year the supports on campus. That's a very important part of our mental health strategy to make sure that students can get access to the supports they need when and where they need those supports, Speaker. We are moving forward on supporting mental health for children and youth. I know the Minister of children -- Will want to speak to supplementary.

>> MPP Fife: The wait lists in this province are the norm, and that's the sad truth. Ontario is facing a mental health crisis. Wait lists of one and a half years for service. Most kids end up in a hospital only to be discharged and find out they have to wait again for services in their community. Advocates say that 11 million is needed immediately to expand treatment and make it available early. They say the system is in crisis. Even if you won't acknowledge it. Between 2006 and 2016, emergency department visits by children and youth seeking help for mental health or substance abuse increased by 63%. Hospitalizations were up by 67%. And according to children's mental health Ontario, they say and I quote -- our current mental health system. Is not meeting the needs of children, youth and families. Speaker, the government knew all of this and did nothing. My question is to the acting Premier. Why?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for the question. There is -- there's no question in my mind, Mr. Speaker, that there is more that needs to be done to help young people in this province when it comes to mental health. Over the last couple of years, we've worked with the sector, with advocates, with families, with young people to look for ways to build a strategy that's going to be right for Ontario. And we've come up with a moving on mental health strategy. I actually met with advocates this week here in the legislature, and I made a commitment that we would bring forward a

strategy very shortly based on the input we received across the province, and to really build system change that I believe is necessary in this province. There are areas where we see some overlap. There are areas where we see gaps. My job is to make sure that, with so much change taking place in mental health here in the province of Ontario. And the demand that continues to increase, I need to make sure that we're not set up for change just for one or two years but for 10, 20 years forward.

MPP Martins to Minister Hunter Re: Education Funding 2017 Budget

>> MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My wife is for the Minister of education. One of our top priorities is to support our children with the best possible start in life through our publicly funded education and early years system. As the mom of two young boys, this is a top priority for me. Investing in schools is part of building Ontario up and it is important our government responds to the local needs while creating the best possible learning environments for students not only in my riding of Davenport, Mr. Speaker, but across all of Ontario. Since 2013, 146 new schools and 183 major additions and renovations have been completed to better support student achievements and well-being. I know that across the province our government continues to invest. In newly renovated classrooms and school facilities. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister, can you speak how this year's 2017 budget includes key investments to ensure students are learning and building better to support –

>> Minister Mitzi Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I want to say thank you so much to the member from Davenport for her question. I know how passionate she is and indeed all the members, Mr. Speaker, because we believe that every child in Ontario deserves access to a world-class education and has the right to a supportive learning environment, Mr. Speaker, so that they can be their best. And that's why we're providing almost \$16 billion in capital investments over ten years to help build new schools in high growth areas to improve the condition of existing schools and to invest in projects to reduce surplus space. Building on our 2016 commitments. Renewal funding for schools, we're investing an additional \$1.2 billion in funding for repairs and renewals over the next two years in all of our schools.

>> MPP Martins: Thank you, Minister. We are extremely proud on this side of the House of the accomplishments and investments we have made in education. I know that last month our government also announced the details of the grants for student needs for the upcoming school year. This is the funding we provide across boards, all across the province, to better support student achievements and well-being. Speaker, through you to the Minister. Can you share with this House how this funding will help ensure that the young learners in my riding of Davenport and all learners across our great province get the knowledge and skills they need for success in the modern economy?

>> Minister Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. And again thank you to the wonderful member from Davenport for her question. I know how hard she is working on behalf of her community. Last month I was proud to announce that the total education funding will increase to \$23.8 billion for 2017/18. Mr. Speaker, that is an increase of \$879 million. And this includes \$21 million targeted for additional teachers and education workers to support special education. \$49 million over the next three years to promote and to support well-being of Ontario students, including mental health, Mr. Speaker. We know how important that is as our Minister of children and youth services has said. \$66 million in funding to support our indigenous students, Mr. Speaker. Reducing class sizes. Transition supports to postsecondary education, Mr. Speaker, for students, and this growth in funding reflects our government's commitment. School boards and students the best --

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Executive Salaries

>> MPP Todd Smith: My question this morning to the Minister of energy. Speaker, the chief financial officer -- At Hydro One is leaving. After receiving almost \$1 million increase in salary last year alone. Now \$1.7 million for this position. Speaker, now that there's another opening with Hydro One, will the Minister, who still controls 70% of that company or at least 70% of the shares of that company -- will he make an effort? Will he try to get executive compensation under control -- Start to get the millionaires out of the ratepayers' trough. Afford the hydro.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once gone I'm pleased to rise to talk about what our government is doing on this side of the House to ensure that we get our energy and our look trusty rates, Mr. Speaker, as affordable as possible unlike the other side of the House where they have no plan, Mr. Speaker. They have no idea on what to do with energy, let alone anything to do with the province, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to being a shareholder within Hydro One, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the government, like any other shareholder, will of course support a plan that balances attracting the best talent to run these companies, Mr. Speaker, while at the same time getting top value for money, Mr. Speaker. We want to continue to attract top talent to Hydro One, to O.P.G., who can deliver value for ratepayers, Mr. Speaker. I know that's something on that side of the House. That they don't understand. So over the past year, Mr. Speaker, Hydro One has become a much better company, and its customers are beginning to see just that.

>> MPP Smith: Sounds like the Minister 's ready to continue opening up the bank vault and allowing them to come in and take whatever they want at Hydro One. It's unbelievable to me really, Speaker, because this government continues to put up these expensive renewables across the province that are causing chaos on our grid. They haven't stopped the green energy act. They haven't stopped the sell-off of hood rode one shares. Every time they stand up in this legislature, Speaker, to use Hydro One for a photo op, they remember they still own 70% of it. But whenever they can actually do something about compensation there, they throw their hands in the air and just say here. Come on in. Take what you want. Speaker, Hydro One executives are eligible for hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars of bonuses every year. The Minister once again going to take the side of the people that are sending the hydro bills or side with the people who are getting exorbitant hydro bills in their home every month that they can't afford? Do the right thing, Minister.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we're actually siding with this the people of Ontario, providing them with a 25% reduction, Mr. Speaker. I know, I know the opposition and I know the member opposite talked about having their plan in the policy department, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's been 62 days since we've announced the fair hydro plan. What's their plan, Mr. Speaker ? They have no plan for hydro. They have no plan for the province of Ontario, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to helping families, Mr. Speaker, we actually listen to what they have to say and we acted, Mr. Speaker. We put together a plan that's going to reduce the rates by 25%. What did they do, Mr. Speaker ? They heard and did nothing.