

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Wednesday, May 31, 2017

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
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The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

Table of Contents

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Sousa)
Re: Ontario Finances and FAO Report

MPP Brown to Minister McMahon
Re: Investment in Festival - Giant Duck

MPP Tabuns to Premier Wynne
Re: Hydro One Sale and Electricity Costs

MPP Fedeli to Minister Sousa
Re: FAO Report

MPP Forster to Minister Hoskins
Re: Hospital Closure

MPP Dong to Minister Del Duca (McMahon)
Re: Cycling Infrastructure

MPP Nicholls to Minister Lalonde
Re: Segregation of Inmates and Mental Health

MPP Sattler to Minister Hoskins
Re: Mental Health Pilot Project in London

MPP Martins to Minister Flynn
Re: Changing Workplaces

MPP Jeff Yurek (Oosterhoff) to Minister Hoskins
Re: Welland Hospital Closure

MPP Campbell to Premier Wynne (Murray)
Re: Grassy Narrows

MPP Baker to Minister Damerla
Re: Supports for Seniors in the Budget

MPP Pettapiece to Minister Hoskins
Re: Health in Rural Communities

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Sousa) Re: Ontario Finances and FAO Report

PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Thanks to the financial accountability office, we now know that Ontario does not have a balanced budget. The books, the books were cooked for an election illusion. The F.A.O. Said the Liberals won't --

The Speaker: I'm sorry but that the phrase can't be used. Please withdraw.

Patrick Brown: Withdraw.

The Speaker: Carry on.

Patrick Brown: The S.A.O. Said the Liberals won't be able I quote to balance the budget without significant policy adjustments. I repeat significant fiscal policy adjustments. What does that mean for Liberals? It means either hidden new taxes or frontline service cuts. So, Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier, given what the F.A.O. Has clearly said, what will it be?

The Speaker: Question.

Patrick Brown: Is it going to be new taxes or is it going to be cuts to frontline service?

[Applause]

Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the work of the financial accountability officer. I was --

The Speaker: The member from Leeds- Grenville will withdraw. The person that continues that trend. It's unparliamentary and I won't accept it. Premier?

Premier Wynne: You know, I was pleased, Mr. Speaker, that his economic forecasts are broadly in line with ours, showing strong economic momentum in 2017 and 2018 and confirming strong job gains, Mr. Speaker. His analysis is also in line with the major Canadian banks and financial institutions, and they also predict Ontario will continue to lead Canada in economic growth, Mr. Speaker. That is very good news for the people of Ontario. Our unemployment rate is at the lowest that it's been in 16 years. Great news. And has been below the national average.

The Speaker: Answer.

Premier Wynne: For the last two years, Mr. Speaker. So I thank the F.A.O. For his report and, Mr. Speaker, we've got a good strong outlook and he agrees with that.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. And I get the Premier's talking point is to thank the F.A.O., and that may sound good, but the reality is the F.A.O. Is calling this government's budget a charade, a sham. You know, look at what has actually been said. The F.A.O. Projecting continued Ontario budget deficits over the next five years. I quote -- 2017/18 F.A.O. Projects a deficit due to more taxes and a \$3 billion boost from onetime nontax revenues. Ontarians will not be fooled. The F.A.O. Is saying your numbers do not add up. Ontario has -- does not have a balanced budget. This is a significant deficit. And if I'm supposed to believe, if I'm supposed to believe the F.A.O. Or this Liberal government, I'm with the F.A.O.. Nonpartisan legislative oversight.

The Speaker: Question.

Patrick Brown: Is calling the government out. Will you do the right thing? Will the Premier admit we still have a huge deficit in Ontario? The Speaker: Premier?

Premier Wynne: Minister of finance.

The Speaker: Minister of finance.

Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the member opposite, recognizing that the F.A.O. Has also revised his numbers from the spring to the fall, increasing the economic growth that the province of Ontario's been having, recognizing the trend are improving over time. The F.A.O. Max reference to that, Mr. Speaker. An independent work -- have also assessed it and we have actually taken their projections, papered it down in order to be -- tapered it down in order to be prudent. What's more important, Mr. Speaker, is the actual numbers. And the actual numbers year over year have always exceeded our budget and our targets. This coming year we project a deficit of \$4.5 billion. It's now down to 1.5 billion and improving, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

The Speaker: It's going to calm down. Final supplementary.

Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The Minister of financing is saying all that counts is the actual numbers. The F.A.O. Is saying we have a deficit well beyond \$5 billion. So how is it possible that we've got a Premier and a Minister of finance has the audacity to say to people of Ontario we have a balanced budget when we don't? The nonpartisan legislative oversight is saying your numbers do not add up. I want to make sure the government tells the truth to Ontarians. Is the F.A.O. Correct that your numbers do not add up? Is the F.A.O. Correct that we don't have a balanced budget?

[Applause] The F.A.O. Is correct that Ontario's economy is improving. The F.A.O. Is correct that we are trending downward. The f.a.o.'s correct that our debt to G.D.P. -- And those are projections by the F.A.O., which we actually do appreciate. In fact we appreciate others and their input so that we can then taper and --

Minister Charles Sousa: Speaker, we've put forward a budget and it's a living document. We always overcome challenges that they perceive and take those efforts. The member opposite is voting against pharmacare for children. He's voting against increased funding for hospitals. He's voting against increased funding for schools. He's voting for the elimination of free tuition for our students, the very measures that improves our economy that enables tous come to balance.

[Applause]

MPP Brown to Minister McMahon Re: Investment in Festival - Giant Duck

PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Since I can't get an answer on the budget deficit, I'm going to ask the Premier something directly. We've heard other government Minister s try to give their spin on this but I want to hear directly from the Premier. What does a \$120,000 giant rubber ducky have to do with Canada's 150th anniversary?

The Speaker: Premier?

Premier Kathleen Wynne: Minister of tourism, culture and sport.

Minister Eleanor McMahon: Thank you, Speaker. You know, I'm happy to take this question. I want to thank the member opposite. You know, when we say yes to festivals like we did with the waterfront Toronto festival at \$121,000, Speaker, we did so confident it would leverage the kind of results this festival has LED to in the past number of years, including \$6 million in tourism spend, Speaker. We think that's a great return on investment. I don't know about the members opposite but we absolutely agree that that's the case. And so --

The Speaker: The member from -- excuse me. The member from Kitchener-conestoga's warned. I'm

going to get tighter. Finish, please.

Thank you, Speaker. We have faced, Speaker, unlike the party opposite and local tourism operators. We have faith in their decision what is going to leverage tourism opportunities in their part of the province and make it fun.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the

Premier. I ask the question to the Premier and I want the Premier on the record. I understand why the Premier is embarrassed that her government spent \$121,000 on a giant rubber ducky. But if the Premier is actually --

Patrick Brown: If the Premier can actually defend them, she's not going to send someone else to defend it. She will say here in the House that her government is ok with spending \$121,000, that we don't v.remember we're in deficit. \$121,000 we don't have on a giant rubber ducky. Can the Premier say here today that she supports this? And if she won't, why won't she? [Applause]

Minister McMahon: You know, Speaker, none of those arguments hold water and the leader of the opposition knows it. And here's what else we know, Speaker. That again, when we have faith and confidence in these local organizers they know what works. \$121,000 that we are leveraging in this festival, Speaker, is now being leveraged amongst six municipalities, Speaker. And that's really important because you know what? The member opposite says it's shameful. You know what's shameful? That the party opposite doesn't understand the importance of local tourism investments and is completely out of touch -- [Applause] Completely out of touch with --

[Unclear] You are completely out of touch. I also want to add, Speaker, that the member from Brock had something interesting to say and was quoted as saying that these activities are not only important part of life in our towns and villages but provide a Tourism and economy --

Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, I have more empathy for the Premier if she said we made a mistake. We shouldn't have spent \$121,000 on a giant rubber ducky when the province is in deficit. The reality is we have homeless men and women on our streets. Children can't get funding for autism. Nurses are being fired, and yet this government thinks it's good value of taxpayer funds to spend \$121,000 on the giant rubber ducky. And I understand the Premier's staff are probably telling her don't get ed on this. Have someone else defend this ugly government policy. But once again a third time to the Premier, will you defend your decision to sign off on a \$121,000 for a giant rubber ducky, yes or no?

Minister McMahon: You know, Speaker, I know that -- The Speaker: The member from Timmins James Bay is warned. Who's next? Try from this place. Carry on. Thank you, Speaker. You know, I know that leader of the opposition doesn't want to talk about the labour reforms we're proposing on this side of the House, Speaker. [Applause] I know he doesn't want to talk about that. So he's dragging the puck, Mr. Speaker, and he's put it over to me and I'm quite happy to take it and here's why. Because not only is this festival in Toronto going to bring tourists from around the world to Toronto and that's why the city of Toronto gave \$75,000 to this festival. But it's because five other municipalities across our province said yes, too. What did they say yes to? They told us that they want to take this. Duck around the province, Speaker, and it's going to the leader of the opposition's riding so is he going to call local -- [Interjections] Organizers and tell them that the duck can't come?

MPP Tabuns to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro One Sale and Electricity Costs

MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, to the Premier. This session the Premier has done nothing but plow ahead with her own agenda to try and save herself and her party before the next election. Take hydro for example. The Premier went ahead with her wrong-headed Hydro One sell-off, even though 80% of Ontarians are against it. Does the Premier think she knows more than 80%

of Ontarians? [Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you. Premier?

Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, you know, I've had the opportunity over the last couple of days to talk about specifically these changes that we are making to labour laws and employment standards, Mr. Speaker, and for the minimum wage. And all of that, Mr. Speaker, is part of a plan. It's part of the reality that government, in my opinion, exists to help people. It exists to do things that we cannot do alone. [Applause] Government exists to make society more fair. So whether that's free tuition for students who will see that this fall, over 200,000 students will go to College and university. They will get free or better-than-free tuition, Mr. Speaker. Whether it is cutting people's electricity bills, whether it's building 100,000 new child care spaces, Mr. Speaker, or whether it's raising the minimum wage. And making sure part time and full-time workers are paid the same. All of that about is fair Ontario. That's what we've been doing, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Tabuns: I'm not surprised the Premier doesn't want to talk about Hydro One. Under this Liberal government, hydro rates have gone up by a staggering 300%. Under this Premier alone, rates have gone up 50%. Instead of doing something to fix the mess that she's helped create in our hydro system, the Premier signed Ontario families and businesses onto a \$45 billion borrowing scheme that will cause our hydro bills to soar even higher. What does the Premier have to say to the people who will be hurt by her scheme? [Applause]

Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, you know, I know the member opposite. I know him quite well, and I know that he is committed to, for example, building transit, Mr. Speaker. I know that he believes in infrastructure building. I also know that he recognizes that over many years, because he knows a lot about the electricity system in Ontario. Over many years, government after government did not make the investments in the electricity system in Ontario that were needed. The system was degraded. By the time we came into office in 2003 under the previous Premier, Mr. Speaker, there had to be investments in order to upgrade the system. We made those investments, Mr. Speaker, and we are paying now for those in this generation and we believe that it is more fair to pay for those investments over a longer period of time. Premier Wynne: That's what we're doing in order that people can see some relief right now and they will see that relief come this summer, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

MPP Tabuns: Speaker, indeed I do know the system and privatization is danging the hydro in this province. Damaging it. [Applause] The Premier didn't even give the people of Ontario or the opposition, for that matter, reasonable time to have their say about her hydro scheme. She's ramming it through the House in a little over two weeks. Two weeks. For legislation that will affect our lives for three decades to come. Why does the Premier insist on limiting public input and opposition debate on our hydro scheme? What is she afraid of

?Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, there has been an enormous debate and discussion around this province about the cost of electricity. The member opposite knows that. We're moving forward to give people relief by this summer, Mr. Speaker, because we know that that will help people and it will help small businesses on main streets all over the province, Mr. Speaker. They will see a reduction in their electricity costs and people in more rural and remote communities will see up to a 40 to 50% reduction, Mr. Speaker. I believe that it was an important decision to move ahead, Mr. Speaker. I also know that the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One, Mr. Speaker, was part of our plan to invest in the people of this province, invest in infrastructure. We were not, as the member opposite is I believe, Mr. Speaker, constrained by an ideology that says that never work with the private sector. Do not trust the private sector, Mr. Speaker. Premier Wynne: I believe that the way society works is that government, private sector, civil society works together to improve a lot of lives for the people of Ontario.

MPP Tabuns to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Hydro Ads

MPP Peter Tabuns: Again to the premier. It's not just that she sold off hydro one or that she's ramming her borrowing scheme through this house. The premier is also using the power of her office to advertise that scheme to Ontarians by forcing utility companies to include her liberal party messaging in people's hydro bills. Will the premier admit that she's just using the political inserts to save her own skin before the next election? [Applause]

Premier Kathleen Wynne: You know, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that has concerned me and has concerned us is that not everyone who's eligible for the Ontario energy electricity support program, Mr. Speaker, actually have applied for it and know about it so we're doing everything we can to make sure that people know about that program, Mr. Speaker. So that they can apply and they can get a 50% reduction, Mr. Speaker. And so we are making sure that that can happen. Mr. Speaker, as I said I know that the member opposite knows that people in the province need relief. It's quite astonishing to me, Mr. Speaker, that I expect that he and his colleagues will be voting against that relief, Mr. Speaker. I think that, you know, there's been enough discussion and they've talked to enough people, as we have, to know that people need relief. They need it now, and in fact the member opposite brought forward a plan with his party that actually would not have given people relief, certainly not in the short term, Mr. Speaker. And maybe not ever. We're bringing relief to people. They're vetting against it, Mr. Speaker. We know that people in the province need this relief right now.

MPP Tabuns: Thank you, speaker. Again to the premier. And we are voting against soaring hydro bills. Make no mistake. [Applause] Make no mistake. The premier is focused on nothing but her own political fortunes this session. She's barrelled ahead with a massively unpopular sell-off of hydro one. She's allowed hydro rates to skyrocket. She's ramming through a \$45 billion borrowing scheme that the F.A.O. Says will do not nothing but drive hydro bills even higher. And she's forcing private companies to do some sneaky political manoeuvring for her in their bills. Why does the premier get that she can't win an election or improve her poll numbers by continuing to make decisions that sound out the people of this province? [Applause]

Premier Wynne: Minister of energy.

Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased that it's this Premier and this government that's bringing forward a plan that's going to be reducing bills for people right across the province by 25%, Mr. Speaker. But let me quote Ontario regional chief isidor day. The elimination of the delivery charge will assist our citizens by reducing energy poverty in our communities. It also represents recognition for the use of the land and the development ant expansion of the provincial energy grid. Today's commitment by the ontar government is commendable and allows the path forward for the greater quality of life for first nations in Ontario. That is what they are voting against, Mr. Speaker. Let me quote ava hill -- each one of our community members will benefit from Ontario's fair hydro plan. This is a step towards reconciliation and recognition of our inherent rights as treaty holders. That is what they are voting against, Mr. Speaker. We are making a difference for every family in this province. That is what the opposition is voting against today, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Fedeli to Minister Sousa Re: FAO Report

MPP Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for Premier. The headline on the financial accountability officer's release this morning says it all. Quote -- F.A.O. Expects steady deterioration of Ontario's budget deficit. Despite the government announcing a so-called balanced budget, the F.A.O. Confirms this is only by using onetime revenue from the sale of Hydro One. He confirms this is also due to using revenue from the onetime sale of buildings such as the O.P.G. Headquarters across the street. Speaker, what business in Canada would be allowed to pull the wool over their investors' eyes? In the real world, people have gone to jail for pulling a stunt like that. So I ask the Premier. Will you Fess up to the taxpayers and provide the real state of Ontario --

[Applause Premier Wynne: Minister of finance.

Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the question because it does give us an opportunity to reinforce the tremendous growth in Ontario's economy, outpacing Canada -- Because of these initiatives and efforts we put forward a budget that not only is a balanced and balanced this year, next year and the year after that. Public accounts coming forward in the fall will reinforce that we've outperformed yet again even last year. Those are actual numbers, Mr. Speaker. But the member opposite is asking a question -- I say the member opposite is asking these questions because he and his party are uncomfortable with the warning. By increasing minimum wage. He even had the audacity to say --

MPP Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier. We know the government only announced a balanced budget through these onetime sales. They're going to run out of things to sell next year. So the financial accountability officer said the budget deficit will continue to deteriorate, quote, without additional government measures. We saw the government trying to balance the budget on the backs of frontline health care workers. They fired 1,600 nurses. We saw the government trying to balance the budget on the backs of students. The Liberals have closed more schools than any other government in the history of Ontario. So my question is to the Premier. Which group is she going to target next to continue this charade of balanced budgets?

Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we're always looking at our economic policy, putting forward fiscal plans that enable us to grow our economy. We are of course looking at assets that are unproductive and purpose us to reinvest, Mr. Speaker, in making even greater contributions to our economy, and that is exactly what is happening. And part of that contribution, Mr. Speaker, in this budget is to increase support for our health care by \$11.5 billion, which that member opposite is voting against. He's voting against an additional 9.5 billion dollars more into our education. He's voting against pharmacare, free medicine for all young people under the age of 25, Mr. Speaker, and he's voting against free tuition for our students. He's voting against the very measures that enable our economy to succeed. As I said before he is distracting from the issues around minimum wage and that is what affects the people of this province. We are talking about a plan for the people of Ontario for today and tomorrow. [Applause]

MPP Forster to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Closure

MPP Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker. My question to the Premier. Niagara health serves tens of thousands of families, some of who are with us here in the gallery today and they made that long trek on the Q.E.W. For three hours on a bus to be here, along with the Ontario health coalition Natalie Mara and sue Hutt. They brought over 2,500 letters that I will deliver actually to the Premier and the health Minister after question period, from community members asking the government to stop the proposal to close hospitals in our riding. The Liberal government has a proposal in place to close more hospitals in south niagara welland, in port colborne all based on a nonvalidated report issued in 2012 by Kevin Smith that experts describe as lacking in total evidence and reference. It's without any formal consultation with families in my community. And this restructuring will be unprecedented in Ontario. Will the Minister explain. To my friends that are here in the gallery today and those watching at home why the Liberal government refuses to put a stop to this shortsighted proposal?

Premier Kathleen Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

The Speaker: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to first welcome and acknowledge the members of the Ontario health coalition who are here this morning and other community members and leaders from welland in the welland area, the niagara region that have made that trip here today to advocate on behalf of health care in Ontario.

[Applause] And in their region, Mr. Speaker. And I want to begin, and I'll have more to say in the

supplementary, but I want to begin by saying that that party voted against our budget which allocated 9 billion more dollars in capital infrastructure for hospitals, including a dedicated brand-new hospital in niagara for the niagara region, Mr. Speaker.

[Applause] And it was the hard work not of that member opposite but the member from St. Catharines, from the local niagara mayor, mayor diodati, and many other local leaders. That worked so hard over the years to get us to the place where we are today, to be able to make that financial commitment to build a brand-new hospital for the niagara region. The Speaker: Thank you.

[Applause] Forster: Well, unfortunately it's not site under south niagara which is actually where the hospitals are closing. But in any event we know that niagara has one of the highest populations of seniors in the province many of whom live on very low incomes. Worse, the region has the lowest, second lowest number of long-term care beds in the province. And studies from the niagara region show that the growth is actually going to be in south niagara. So while Niagara Falls deserves a new hospital and needs one, welland and port colborne and Wayne fleet also deserve to have a hospital for their residents.

[Applause] And closing the hospital will have devastating impacts on not only economic development in the south end of niagara, but on the people who live in our community. So I will ask again, will the Minister listen to the experts and to the message brought from the constituents of my riding today. Put an immediate stop to the closure of the welland and port colborne hospitals?

[Applause] Minister Hoskins: So, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows that I've spoken with her about the hospitals in the region, including the welland hospital that she is most preoccupied with. I've met with mayor campion as well, Mr. Speaker. I've met with other community leaders, other mayors in the region about welland hospital. She knows that I have been absolutely only and flexible to the future of the welland hospital. In fact I have instructed my officials to demonstrate that flexibility. I grew up not very far from welland. I understand the importance of that community hospital to the community and I will do everything I can to work with my ministry and with the community to keep welland open. That is my commitment. That is what we have been working towards. The member opposite knows that. I'm glad that the members in the gallery also are here to listen to that commitment that we are working and we are working with the lhins, local leadership. The mayors, the communities, everybody to find the right solution.

MPP Dong to Minister Del Duca (McMahon) Re: Cycling Infrastructure

MPP Han Dong: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of transportation. Speaker, residents in my riding of Trinity- Spadina have different options to get to work and around the city. In my mind the most convenient way is to bike. I know that many in my community are passionate to biking. At the same time there are many more in my community who want to choose cycling but feel that the necessary infrastructure isn't there to allow for them to ride around safely. Speaker, I'm aware that on Monday the Minister of transportation was the Minister of tourism, culture and sport to make a very important announcement about our government's commitment to cycling. Would the Minister please provide the member of this House with more information on how exactly we're making Ontario better and safer place to ride a bike?

Minister Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. Of course I want to begin by thanking the member from Trinity- Spadina for his question and tireless advocacy on behalf of his community. This past Sunday I was very happy to stand alongside the Minister of tourism, culture and sport as we made a very important announcement regarding the future of cycling here in Ontario. Speaker, you'll know that in budget 2017 we announced that we'll be investing \$50 million to support commuter cycling infrastructure in our province.

[Applause] And, Speaker, on Monday we were pleased to announce specifically that as part of this commitment we'll be providing eligible municipalities from across the province with funding through the Ontario municipal commuter cycling program. This funding will go directly to municipalities so that they can build more bike lanes and other cycling infrastructure or choose to enhance existing

cycling infrastructure. Speaker, to make cycling an even more convenient option for commuters we have also created a new cycling web hub that will provide a single point of access. For all things cycling here in Ontario. We'll keep making these critical investments because our government knows that investing in cycling infrastructure makes for safer more comfortable ride and that's exactly what helps encourage Ontarians --

MPP Dong: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the Minister on behalf of the cycling community in my riding. As the Minister mentioned, by helping municipalities improve their cycling infrastructure, we're making it easier for people to choose their bike to get around both for recreation and to get to school and work. As a part-time cyclist, I know that there's nothing better than ride along a trail, discovering new towns and regions and spending time outdoors with kids, or even something simple -- as simple as riding your bike to work in the morning much it is no secret that cycling in Ontario is experiencing rapid growth, and as many people -- more people realize that a fun -- this is a fun and healthy form of transportation. Minister, through the Speaker to you, can you tell us more other incentives happening around the bike lanes?

Minister Eleanor McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, And I want to thank the member for the question and for his advocacy. He likely has more cyclists per square metre in his riding than any riding in the country, Mr. Speaker. He really knows how to look after him and I appreciate his advocacy. Very pleased, Speaker, to rise in the House and talk about this announcement because I had a great time on Monday with my Colleague the Minister of transportation announcing what is, Speaker, the largest investment in cycling infrastructure in the history of our province. A significant investment that is going to contribute to the extensive trails across our province and the cycling facilities and infrastructure. We're also responding to the growing needs expressed by municipalities, Speaker. And this in turn really is all about cycling tourism as well, which we know grows local economies. Our cycling tourism plan tour by bike was something I was pleased to announce earlier this year. Speaker, our government is clearly committed to investing in cycling making it easier and safer for people to ride, responding to the needs of municipalities and working hard with the local tourism officials. And not-for-profits who are making this happen and I want to thank them on behalf of all of us for their diligent work. Thank you very much.

MPP Nicholls to Minister Lalonde Re: Segregation of Inmates and Mental Health

MPP Rick Nicholls: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of correctional services. Correctional nurses face a dual task of protecting the health and well-being of inmates while also protecting themselves. They face plenty of verbal assaults, as well as being spat at and having faeces thrown at them. The good work they do is not possible if they are not safe. Don Goodenough nurse and steward with local 234 at maplehurst correctional complex said that one of our most urgent needs is finding alternatives to segregation. Mental health is a huge concern right now. To simply say that we can't segregate without viable alternatives in place will only lead to more violence. So, Speaker, to the Minister, how does this government plan to address increased violence in our jails or will they simply leave the hand of our correctional nurses handcuffed?

Minister Marie-France Lalonde: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the member actually opposite -- I thank the member opposite for his question, because I had the pleasure this morning of meeting with our correctional nurses, but also in the past few months, during my visit into our institutions, meeting with them and talking with them about some of the challenges that they are experiencing. And at first I want to say thank you and thank them for their dedication and all their hard work that they do in often difficult and dangerous conditions, Mr. Speaker.

[Applause] They are the front line on every and every day and know better than anyone the challenges and the opportunities that exist in our facilities. By working together, we are committed to giving them the tools and the support they need to do their job to the best of their greatest ability. So through our ongoing transformation, Mr. Speaker, we are committed of reaching our shared goal, which is to ensure the best possible outcome --

MPP Nicholls: Thank you, Speaker. Well, Minister, actions speak louder than words. Explosive reports from global's Carolyn Jarvis shed new light on the crisis and community corrections due to a lack of resources for overworked probation and parole officers. Ontario's new corrections Minister stated that she was unaware of the fact that home visits were not being done. The Attorney General was even more reckless stating that these concerns were, and I quote, manufactured by the opposition. But the fact is, Speaker, staff have highlighted these issues countless times in past and were ignored by this ministry. On Sunday, a Sudbury man, who was issued a lifetime weapons ban and probation order, was arrested after attacking a bus driver with a knife. So, Speaker, to the Minister, why is the rest of the province more concerned with clear issues and community corrections than this government?

[Applause]

Minister Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, our government takes the safety of our community very serious and very seriously. I want to put some facts for the opposite member in terms of the recidivism has dropped significantly. The crime rate has declined over by 30%. And I have to say with a lot of pride that we are currently in the biggest, the greatest transformation of our justice system in generations. And I look at the member opposite asking questions and I remember their failed Mike Harris era. When I go to the jail I'm reminded about what they've done to our correctional service. I would say privatizing but let's not forget cutting services, cutting our correctional staff in there. We are actually rebuilding a system that they poorly managed for several years unfortunately. So, Mr. Speaker, I am very happy. Of the great work that our parole and probation officers. I have met with their executives and I'm going to continue engaging to find a solution.

MPP Sattler to Minister Hoskins Re: Mental Health Pilot Project in London

MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Speaker, I have been raising concerns about London's mental health crisis since I was first elected, but over the past three and a half years, all this Liberal government has done is make things worse. Two months ago I shared the story of a constituent forced to lie for a week in a hospital hallway waiting for a mental health bed. Last week another constituent, David Warren, spent more than three days in the E.R. Waiting for his wife to be transferred to the mental health unit after she had been ordered to go to the hospital through a form 1. Eventually she had to go to St. Thomas to get the treatment she required. Does the Premier think it is acceptable that Londoners have to leave their community to access the emergency care they so urgently need? [Applause]

Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And we continue to make investments in mental health and addiction services across this province, including in London, and it was this government just a couple of years ago that provided the more than \$1 million in funding for the operations of the crisis centre, which provides a critically important -- as the member well knows critically important resource for kind of individuals in London who are facing those mental health challenges, Mr. Speaker. But we've also fairly substantially, I would say, increased the budget of London health sciences itself. 16 million more dollars to their operating budget this year. In addition to the fund, in addition to the fund that were provided to them last year which enables them to deal with some of those challenges that they're facing whether that's in the E.R., whether it's bed capacity, Mr. Speaker. But we're working on all fronts. We're working with the hospital. We're working with the crisis centre, working with the community to find other measures that can be taken to provide that high quality care.

[Applause]

MPP Sattler: Again to the Premier. Speaker, when my office spoke to the London health sciences centre about David Warren and his wife, staff at the hospital acknowledged that long waits in the E.R. Only worsen the condition of mental health patients. They said that the system failed David's wife. One of the things that could help is London's proposed mental health diversion project, which could divert as many as 3,000 people a year from the hospital E.D. To the community-based crisis centre. Five times I have asked this government to approve this pilot project but the project remains

stalled. In fact London Middlesex chief Neil Roberts who is here today has become so frustrated that he has temporarily withdrawn E.M.S. Participation from the project. Does the Premier agree that her government is failing families like David's and will she commit to implementing London's much needed mental health pilot project now?

Minister Hoskins: Well, and of course I acknowledged Neil at the beginning of question period and I'm glad that he is here with us on this issue. And Neil himself and other paramedics and E.M.S. Providers, they understand the law in the province, where they are required to -- if they receive an individual, whether it's mental health or physical health situation, they're required by law to deliver that individual to a hospital environment. There was a solution that was suggested to the crisis centre where they could strengthen the relationship between the hospital and crisis centre run by cmha, that would have permitted almost overnight, Mr. Speaker, for that solution that the member opposite is looking for to happen. However, notwithstanding their rejection of that solution which exists in Ottawa and in Sudbury and works quite well, Mr. Speaker, we are working on what I believe is quite an innovative solution. We're working with all partners, E.M.S., the Ihins, London health sciences, cmha. I wish we were working with the member opposite. I know she's raised it six times. I am prepared to work with her if she'll work with me.

MPP Martins to Minister Flynn Re: Changing Workplaces

MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Minister of labour. Speaker, yesterday the Minister alongside the Premier announced the government's exciting response to the changing workplaces review. We heard that the workplaces today is not the same as the legislation was first created to protect workers. Our economy is strong and it is growing. It is outperforming other jurisdictions. Our unemployment rate is the lowest it has been in 16 years. But not everyone is feeling the benefits of our strong economy. People are worried about falling behind, even as they work so hard to get ahead. I have heard from constituents and community groups in my ride -- riding of Davenport that they are struggling to support their families on part-time, contract or minimum wage work. Our workers want stability in their jobs and to avoid tough decisions on whether they should earn a wage for the day. to take care of themselves or their families. Speaker, account Minister please tell us more about the government's proposed measures to help safeguard employees and create fair and better workplaces?

Minister Kevin Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. I'll tell you how proud I am to stand today and to answer that question from the member from Davenport, who's so happy to stand today in the House on this really important issue, Speaker. When we launched the changing workplaces review two years ago, we did so on the understanding, Speaker, that workplaces are changed. The workplace that a lot of us entered as young people simply have changed. The legislation needed to change with it. We know, Speaker, the responsible change to ensure that every hardworking person in the province of Ontario has a chance to reach their full potential. Speaker, Ontario's got a tradition of fairness and decency in our workplaces. They've got to continue to be the dividing values whether it's wage equality that lifts people out of poverty, paid sick days, Speaker, that will allow working parents to take better care of themselves and their children. Leaves that allow Ontarians to take care of themselves. Their loved ones, Speaker. Increased enforcement, Speaker. I am proud of the response of this government, Speaker, to one of the best written reports I've seen in the history of Ontario.

Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister for his answers. I am thrilled to hear about these proposed changes. Minister, you already know we need to move forward in order to give people a fair chance in today's workplace. A few years back our government ended the minimum wage freeze that the previous Progressive Conservative government had brought in. We put together a plan and a system that raised the minimum wage by 70% since 2003. As a result of those changes, full-time minimum-wage earners in the province are currently making \$2,392 per year more than they did three years ago. The Minister, as I have written and spoken to you in the past, you know that I believe all Ontarians should have a fair and livable wage of \$15 an hour. Yesterday you and this Premier announced that we are going further to support our minimum wage earners. I know that these proposed measures are going to greatly improve the lives of the hardworking people. In my riding of Davenport. Can the Minister please tell us more about the proposed changes

to minimum wage?

Minister Flynn: Speaker, there's no member in this House that has advocated or been involved more than the member for Davenport on this issue, Speaker.

[Applause] She stood up for her constituents, Speaker, in a way that is unlike many others. Hard working Ontarians really deserve to be paid that decent wage. Everybody's got to have the right to be able to provide their families with the necessities of daily life. Speaker, what we propose to do is increase Ontario's general minimum wage to \$14 per hour on January 1st of 2018 and then to \$15 an hour on January 1st of 2019. Speaker, that's going to ensure workers across this province are paid thoroughly for their work. It's going to help them get ahead and help them share in the economic prosperity of this province. It's going to support higher consumer spending, higher wages, Speaker. Support strong business. That's because employers don't create -- customers Chait -- create the wealth, Speaker. The spend something where it's going to -- I can't wait to hear the response from the other party. You know where we stand.

MPP Jeff Yurek (Oosterhoff) to Minister Hoskins Re: Welland Hospital Closure

MPP Jeff Yurek: Speaker, my question's to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Speaker, today a large number of welland area residents are here today to voice their concern over the Liberal government's plan to close their hospitals. The hospital services that are needed over -- excuse me. The hospital services treat over 100,000 welland area residents. However, due to this government's fiscal mismanagement, the health care system's become rationed. Because of the rationing nurses have been fired, access to services cut and the Liberal government's planning to close hospitals across the province. Speaker, area mayor versus concerns about that. The replacement of their hospital will make it very difficult to recruit doctors. Speaker, will the Minister reconsider the closure, listen to the residents here and across the province, and keep the welland hospital open?

Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really grateful for the opportunity to the welland hospital for a second time this morning and to do it in the context, as I referenced in my previous answer, of anticipate unprecedented capital investment in our hospital's \$20 billion over the next decade. We added 9 billion in this budget alone, that that party of course voted against. And one of the specific items referenced in that budget was a new niagara hospital, Regional Hospital. We have many Regional Hospitals around this province. A brand-new niagara hospital which will serve that entire community, including the community the member opposite has expressed concern for I believe for the first time. And, Mr. Speaker, that brand-new hospital is the result of the hard work of individuals like the coalition that's here today and their fight for welland and other hospitals in that region, which is critically important and I admire them for that and respect them for that. So we will be working together. I'm happy to talk talk specifically about welland in the supplementary.

MPP Sam Oosterhoff: My family are also hurting because of Liberal mismanagement in health care. Now they're afraid the Minister is going to close the welland hospital. Closing this hospital would mean elderly in sick and remote rural communities would have to travel almost an hour to reach an emergency room. One elderly family is very concerned because they have no public transit and do not know how they will be able to receive the care they need and visit their loved ones in hospital. Mr. Speaker, my question is simple and to the Minister. Why must you make seniors and families pay for the waste and mismanagement of this Liberal government?

Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the member opposite can check Hansard from about 40 minutes ago, when I specifically -- and I think emphatically, expressed my commitment to do everything I could to keep welland hospital open. I've met with the local -- I've met with the mayors throughout the region, including mayor champion, Mr. Speaker. I've met with certainly the NDP Party that has for some time to their credit, unlike the P.C.S who have addressed this as a concern of the communities involved. And, Mr. Speaker, I will work with the community and with the lhin and the local leadership to see what solution is best for that community. As I have said before, we have made no decision. There has been no decision made in terms of the future of the welland

hospital. We are building a brand-new hospital for the niagara region. We've given them a \$26 million planning grant. We're going to continue with a capital investment. Commitment is in the budget, a budget that member voted against.

MPP Campbell to Premier Wynne (Murray) Re: Grassy Narrows

MPP Sarah Campbell: Thank you, speaker. My question is to the premier. Two days ago we learned the government's plan for cleaning up the wabigoon river is to off-load this responsibility onto somebody else. The Ontario government intend to make domtar responsible for cleaning up the Mercury, even though decade ago the Ontario government formally declared that domtar is not responsible for cleaning up the Mercury. This is a cynical ploy to delay action on cleaning up the Mercury that is poisoning the people of grassy narrows and first nation. Will the premier stop these stalling tactics and get to work on cleaning up the wabigoon river? [Applause]

Premier Kathleen Wynne: I know that the minister of the environment and climate change is going to want to speak to the supplementary. Mr. Speaker, just let me be very, very clear. We are committed to cleaning up the grassy narrows water system, Mr. Speaker. We've made a commitment to that. There is work that has begun already, Mr. Speaker. As part of that, there is a commitment and I made this commitment when we were meeting with folks from the community, with the chiefs, Mr. Speaker, and with the scientist John rudd, who has been part of these discussions, Mr. Speaker, and with David Suzuki. Yes, we are calling on domtar to take responsibility, Mr. Speaker, but that is not, that is not going to stop us from moving ahead and cleaning up the water in the grassy narrows community, Mr. Speaker. That is not in any way going to stop us from doing that cleanup.

Campbell: The premier's well aware that Ontario's superior court has ruled that it is illegal to off-load their responsibilities. She doesn't care that what she is doing is illegal. She knows that she will lose this latest court battle. Her goal is not to win. Her goal is to delay much all the while families in grassy narrows and wab si mum are literally dying of Mercury poisoning. Will the premier listen to her consciee, stop this pointless delay and get to work cleaning up the Mercury once and for all? [Applause]

Minister Glen Murray: We're doing what that party didn't do in government. We're enforcing the law, Mr. Speaker. We're holding companies who pollute when there's additional sources. And if your government had done it, we wouldn't be having this discussion. If the party opposite had enforced the law, we wouldn't be having it. So members -- [Unclear] [Interjections] Of the river, Mr. Speaker. She should listen. The remediation of the river. We are moving the signs from two years to one year fast tracking it. That money is going. The remediation of the river is going. If you think we shouldn't -- To account. When did the N.D.P. Become sloppy in enforcing the law? You're demanding we don't enforce the law? [Interjections]

MPP Baker to Minister Damerla Re: Supports for Seniors in the Budget

MPP Yvan Baker: Thanks very much, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of seniors affairs. Minister, my riding of Etobicoke Centre is home to one of the largest populations of seniors in Ontario. And that's why issues that affect seniors are one of my priorities. That's why I hold monthly advisory group. That's why I hosted a consultation on dementia strategy, why I've been an advocate for funding for local hospitals like Etobicoke Jen Alf ral and trillium and I introduce add ban that would -- bill that would ban telemarketing sales many of our seniors are concerned about. Last week k5id census confirmed the number of seniors in Canada is still growing. In fact in Ontario the seniors population is projected to double over the next 25 years to 4 million people. And for the first time there are now more Ontarians over the age of 65 than there are children under the age of 15. So Minister, my question to you is can you update us. Doing as a government and what is in our budget to help seniors in Ontario?

Minister Dipika Damerla: Thank you, Speaker. I want to begin by thanking the member for Etobicoke Centre for the important question but more importantly, Speaker, for the advocacy work he does on behalf of seniors in his riding. I've had the opportunity to firsthand see him in action with the seniors advisory committee. And I just have to say he does an outstanding job. The challenge I have, Mr. Speaker, is that we're doing so much for seniors that I'm afraid I will run out of time but I'm going to try and give you a flavour. As part of our budget the government is providing \$8 million over the next three years to support the creation of 40 new elderly person centres soon to be renamed as the seniors active living centre, Mr. Speaker. This will increase the number of these E.P. C.s from about 360 to 400. We're also committing about \$11 million over three years to provide further funding. For the very popular seniors community grant program that's already helped over a quarter of a million seniors in just three years. I could go on, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Baker: Thanks very much, Speaker. Thank you, Minister. I know those investments that you talk about will make a difference. We want seniors living happy, healthy active lives and some of those investments will certainly assist in that. Actually since you mention it, as we speak I'm actually working with a group in my community who's working on trying to establish community hub so we can deliver those services that seniors need in their community in an accessible way. So thank you very much for that. Now I know in addition to the things you mentioned there are other elements in the budget, other things we are doing. I know you said there's a lot you wanted to talk about. Minister, could you expand a little bit on the things we're doing for seniors in this province?

Minister Damerla: I'm so glad for the opportunity of supplementary so I can continue to talk about what our government is doing for seniors. For instance, Mr. Speaker, Ontario is increasing the health care investment by \$11.5 billion over the next three years to increase access to care, reduce wait times and enhance patient experience, including, Mr. Speaker, a brand-new hospital -- sorry expansion of a hospital in my riding, in my city of Mississauga by 360 beds. And recently I was with Minister Hoskins at Baycrest where we announced an additional \$100 million, Mr. Speaker, over three years for dementia. This will include funding to provide provincewide access to community programs and other investments to enhance access to care. Finally, Mr. Speaker, Ontario's helping seniors -- With the cost of public transit with the proposed Ontario seniors public transit tax credit. Thank you.

MPP Pettapiece to Minister Hoskins Re: Health in Rural Communities

MPP Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Almost 15 years ago the Romanow report identified an inverse care law for rural and remote community. It says people in rural communities have poorer health status and greater needs for primary health care, yet they are not as well served and have more difficulty accessing health services than people in urban areas. Speaker, does the Minister accept this fact? And if so will he reject any proposal to take long-term care beds out of rural Ontario? Where many homes already have long waiting lists. And does the Minister agree that simplistic so-called bed ratios don't tell the full story?

Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think there are so many parts to this and so many questions I was asked. I'm not sure if it's wise for me -- I think I'll say yes to the first part, which was the evidence, the science in terms of disparities that exist, which are well acknowledged and social determinants of health that are often behind that factors H.Q.O. Report that came out recently looking at that situation in the northern part of this province. But the other pieces I'm just not how I should declare myself. Maybe he'll be more specific in supplementary. But certainly it points to the importance of the investment that we made this year, that that party regrettably voted against, of a 3.1% increase to the operating budget of our hospitals, Mr. Speaker, to an \$11 billion cumulative increase in our health care budget. Three years. Significant investment as well in long-term care, including important elements like the food allocation, Mr. Speaker. And I'm curious to see the supplementary where this might be going.

MPP Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. Hillside manor near steeringville is slated to the close. This government is considering the proposal to move as many as 50 long-term care beds to London. And we still don't know what will happen to hillside's remaining 40 bed. If London needs more bed, give them more bed. But don't drag us down to the lowest common denominator. At my constituency office, the phones are ringing. Emails are pouring in. Municipalities are writing letters and passing resolutions. They are totally opposed to this bed transfer and they want to be heard. Will this government listen?

Minister Hoskins: Thank you. I appreciate the clarity from the member opposite. As I recall, I know that he's written to me on the subject of hiside manor and he knows as a result of that exchange that no decision has been made, Mr. Speaker, with regards to the balance or the allocation or any owe -- potential moving of licences or long-term care beds, including for hillside. What has begun, as is required under the law, Mr. Speak, as we look to redevelop 30,000 long-term care beds across this province, to provide greater support and greater care, that it's required that long-term home operators that they consult with the community. In fact I explicitly asked, which is likely how the member found out, that the long-term care operator specifically consult with the local members of provincial parliament as well as other leadership, local leaders. Undertaken appropriate consultation. No decisions have been taken.