

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Wednesday, September 13, 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.

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MPP Harris to Minister Del Duca Re: New Metrolinx Station

>> MPP Michael Harris: Speaker, my question's for the Minister of transportation. Speaker, today the Premier is testifying before the Sudbury bribery hearings where Liberal ethics and integrity are on trial. Given that leadership starts at the top, few are surprised to hear reports ethically questionable dealings leading to the approval of a G.O. Station in the Minister 's own riding. A \$100 million G.O. Station that a metrolinx business case had already rejected. Yes, when metrolinx said no the Minister approved it himself in a news release. Mr. Speaker, simple question, did the Minister override metrolinx for his own personal political gains?

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I appreciate the question from the member across the way. I had not spoken on this -- I have spoken a number of months ago in this legislature. I've also had a member to speak to the issue publicly on a number of occasions. Speaker, I will repeat now what I've said in the past on this issue. Firstly from my perspective as Minister of transportation, but also as someone who has lived and worked in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area my entire life, I believe fundamentally that it's extremely important for governments at all levels and of all stripes to invest in critical transportation and transit infrastructure, as communities grow and evolve, Speaker. We will see in parts of the gtha, as that member knows, explosive growth over the next number of years and we want to make sure that we're building in the right place at the right time, Speaker. What I've said in the last number of days of course metrolinx -- Any contractual obligations with respect to either the proposed Kirby G.O. Station or Lawrence east G.O. Station, Speaker. I understand metrolinx will be conducting work in that regard and that was in media reports earlier today.

>> MPP Harris: Yes. Back to the Minister. Speaker, there's something seriously wrong when the Minister 's approving backyard G.O. Stations that metrolinx in fact warned would drive commuters out of their train seats and back onto the road. Even the " Toronto star" editorial board strongly condemned this Minister 's decision saying, quote -- politics rather than good policy has determined transit decisions in this region. Politicians with little or no regard for the evidence declare what's to be built often in a crass effort to garner votes. And who is the politician they speak of? That would be the Minister of transportation. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister come clean and admit that "The star" was right and that this was just a crass effort to garner votes?

>> Minister Del Duca: So, Speaker, again I appreciate the follow-up question. First what I didn't mention in my original answer but I will say now among other things, Speaker, I do passionately believe in investing in transit infrastructure as communities including my own grow and there will be explosive growth in this particular part of York region over the next 10 to 15 years, Speaker. I think it's also important to note that the proposed Kirby G.O. Station is roughly 10 kilometres away from the riding in which I intend to run in next year's election campaign, Speaker. But at the same time, as I said in my -- the second half of my answer to the first question, I have now sent a letter to the chair of the board of metrolinx to make sure stipulate explicitly that metrolinx is not to enter into any contractual obligations essentially spend any money on either the Lawrence east or Kirby G.O. Station until the metrolinx staff and board are satisfied that stations both at Lawrence east and Kirby are justified. The chair has responded with a letter saying they will have that work completed by their February 2018 board meeting. Thanks very much.

>> MPP Harris: The Minister should just come clean here today. No further review nor Minister assurances he'll listen to metrolinx station recommendations going forward can cover up questions as to why he didn't listen to the same experts when his direction tried to drive us backward. Continued attempts to dance around political influence, questions only breed more concern for Liberal ethics and corruption of the process. That same " Toronto star" editorial declared, and I quote -- if the Minister can't demonstrate to Ontarians that this is not politically motivated, he will have left no doubt that he is unfit for the job. Mr. Speaker, account Minister explain, was this decision politically motivated or is he simply unfit for the job?

>> Minister Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I've now served in my role for about three and a half years as Minister of transportation I think, and I've taken many questions from leader Patrick Brown and the member from Kitchener-conestoga in this legislature on transit and transportation, Speaker. And I have to say, I have to say that I've never heard that member question my fitness to serve when I invested and our government invested in Kitchener-conestoga for the G.O. Station at --

[Interjections] I didn't hear Patrick Brown and the member from Kitchener-conestoga suggest that I didn't have fitness to serve when we doubled gas tax for 99 communities across the province of Ontario to support public transit. I didn't hear that member or any member of the opposition complain when we invested in highways in the north, L.R.T.S in Hamilton, subway expansions in every corner. Thank you, Speaker. I didn't hear any of those members complain when we talked about building G.O. Stations in Stoney Creek for example, Speaker. Invest -- vesting in critical cycling infrastructure, Speaker. I only hear it today playing politics --

MPP Yakabuski to Minister Flynn Re: Minimum Wage Increases

>> MPP John Yakabuski: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Minister of labour. Yesterday, when a reporter asked how business should handle their labour reforms, he responded, and I quote -- I think they could look at pricing. The Liberals actually want to raise prices across the board. Everything is about to get more expensive. Speaker, by just how much money does the Minister want to raise the price of everything from gas to groceries?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member for that question. Speaker, what I want to raise is a standard of living for people that are working 35, 40 hours a week working two and three jobs, Speaker, and still not being able to get by. What I want to know, Speaker, is I know what the third party stands on this. Speaker, I know where the government stands on this, Speaker. I don't know from day to day where that party across, Speaker, stands. I don't know where the members stand. He's telling us yesterday that the leader of the opposition supports \$15 an hour. The leader of the opposition tells us he doesn't support \$15 an hour, Speaker. We stand firmly in the corner of working people in the province of Ontario, Speaker, who are working hard and -- Plus a week, Speaker, still can't pay all the bills. We're going to change that. That party needs to support us.

>> MPP Yakabuski: Wow. Back to the Minister. This statement from the Minister's further evidence that the Wynne Liberals are out of touch with small businesses and families. Their reckless approach to the minimum wage is it's their way or the highway. They refuse to listen to any independent experts who are advising them -- Chamber of commerce and financial accountability officer have weighed in, and the Liberals have ignored their independent advice, advice that warned that these measures could actually hurt Ontarians and lead to job losses from between 50 and 185,000 jobs. Speaker, why does all Ontario have to suffer when the Liberals try to gain votes?

>> Minister Flynn: Speaker, we know that the long list of opinions on this issue, the long list of studies, long list of literature comes from Ontario, Speaker. It comes from across Canada. It comes from across the entire continent, Speaker. The leader of the opposition and the labour critic can try and ignore those studies. Clearly we've got 53 economists step forward. People who were fellows of the Royal society of Canada. Two former presidents of the Canadian economics association. One that was used, Speaker, by Jim Flaherty and the Conservative government have stepped forward and said Ontario is on the right track. This government knows that it's on the side of working people in the province. They're working as I said 35, 40, 50 hours a week. Speaker, it's time that the minimum wage in this province reflected the reality of what it costs to live in this province, Speaker. And it's time for the opposition party to come clean on where they stand on this issue.

>> MPP Yakabuski: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Minister. When faced with that evidence from the F.A.O., the Minister chose to double down. I said and I quote -- the moral and economic evidence supporting this fundamental belief is without question. We will not back down from this commitment. Actually, the moral and economic evidence says otherwise. First, morally speaking the

F.A.O. Confirmed that this plan does not target, and I quote him, low income families and raising the minimum wage would be an inefficient policy tool for reducing overall poverty. Second, the economic evidence from the F.A.O. Shows the minimum of 50,000 job losses while the chamber of commerce says it could be as many as 185,000. Speaker, why is the Minister ignoring the real moral and economic evidence. Why not stop being so reckless and conduct their own economic impact analysis?

>> Minister Flynn: Speaker, as I said, Speaker, you can go out and find a variety of opinions on this issue, Speaker. We've looked at them all. What I'm saying, Speaker, is it's not good enough to claim your support of \$15 minimum wage as you have done personally, as the member has done personally, Speaker, and then not have any plan and have a leader who's saying he's going to vote against it. Have a labour critic who says he's going to vote for it. It's not good enough for the leader of the opposition to say I don't think anybody in Ontario can live on \$11 an hour and then not propose to. Thank you, Speaker. There's a bill before the House that will propose to raise the standard of living for 30% of the people that live in this province, Speaker. The opposition party either votes for it or against it. I hear they're voting against it, Speaker. They should --

MPP Horwath to Minister Hoskins Re: Mental Health Services

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question's to the Deputy Premier. This morning the member from Nickel Belt and I joined fœa Irvin, a grade 12 student from Guelph who lost both of his parents to mental illness. In fact he and his grandparents, Donna and Ross Irvin, are with us in the chamber today. Call for the creation of a ministry of mental health and addictions in Ontario. Since the loss of his parents he's been advocating for an end to the mental health care crisis in Ontario. Having a ministry dedicated to mental health and addictions will go a long way to ensuring that mental health care gets more resources, more funding and the focus and attention that it absolutely deserves. Will the Liberal government commit to this important step in helping people who are suffering and don't have access to the services that they need?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, first let me say hello to Noah and grandparents and to say, I think on behalf of the legislature but certainly for me personally, and as Minister of health how sorry I am that you have been through such a tragic personal experience, and I also want to not simply acknowledge that but also applaud you for your courage and your leadership. And -- Mr. Speaker, the leadership that has shown to Ontario and to this province. To the country in the face of such enormous personal tragedies I think is inspiring to all of us and I look forward to speaking to it directly in supplementary.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I've heard from so many people who need urgent care. In fact I'm sure that every single member in this legislature has heard from people who urgently need mental health care and addiction services, but they're stuck waiting months and months on waiting lists. I've listened to parents who are trying desperately to get mental health support for their kids, but thousands and thousands of children cannot get the care that they need. I heard tragic stories like Noah's, a family who have suffered so very much, Speaker, because their loved ones could not get the mental health services that they need in their province. Why won't the Liberal government commit to giving struggling Ontarians the help and care that they need?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to mental health. In fact there can be no health without mental health. I view them -- I think we all do -- as two sides of the same coin. When we look at physical health and mental health, they are two sides of the same coin. We need to invest in and pursue with vigour and intent to the same degree our efforts on mental health as we do in physical health in this province, and we have a long way to go, Mr. Speaker. We have a long way to go. We've had from many sources, many experts, those with lived experience as well as experts across this province and this country, to help us shape our investments, and we have created -- and this is the third year where we have a mental health and addictions leadership advisory council chair, that provides directly to me advice on an ongoing basis on what investments we need to make and that's resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars -- In investment that specifically target those

areas where we know where the pressing need is and where we need to make a difference, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, everyone who needs access to mental health care and support should be able to get it when they need it. And that is not happening in this province. It's not happening today under Liberal government. And if the Liberal government and the Minister of health refuse to commit to creating a ministry and helping Ontarians, what exactly is the government planning to do to fix the mental health care crisis in this province? Because the efforts to date have not been adequate, and they have not been effective.

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I think the entire country recognizes that our efforts as a nation have not been adequate or sufficient. There's the federal government, whether it's the individual provincial governments, territorial governments, Mr. Speaker, all governments. But there has been a societal change. The stigma that still exists has been lessened. The recognition of political leaders that these investments need to be made, that recognition exists. We have a long pathway in front of us, and I want to applaud the NDP for coming forward, because I understand and I agree with and I believe in their motivation. And it's the same as mine, Mr. Speaker, is to create an environment, a health system, a society where there is no stigma against mental health, individuals suffering from mental illness and where we do make the investments on par with physical health. And we do see it as part of the same whole in terms of the person's being. There can be no health without mental health, Mr. Speaker. And my commitment to Noah and his grandparents is to achieve that goal.

MPP Horwath to Minister Hoskins Re: Mental Health Services

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: My next question's also to the Deputy Premier. Speaker, seven years ago, MPPs from all parties came together on the select committee for mental health and addiction. They heard heartbreaking stories from across our province and they made urgent, urgent recommendations seven years ago for changes to help save lives in this province. It's been seven years, and those urgent recommendations versus not been implemented. My question for the acting Premier is simple. Why?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we deeply appreciated the work of the individuals of the MPPs that sat on the select committee, and the many hundreds if not thousands that were part of a process that provided that good advice. There are a number, well within this legislature today, a number of MPPs that sat on that select committee. In fact, Mr. Speaker, just about ten days ago we had the inaugural Cabinet committee meeting of the new mental wellness tabled that is come promulgated of Cabinet Ministers and MPPs to give an even higher priority to our mandate on mental health. And one of the first orders of the day, in fact, was to look at some of the specific recommendations within that select committee report. And, Mr. Speaker, we have now, through the advisory -- Council as well as this committee, I think, the experience and expertise and determination to make a further difference.

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, it may be that a committee got together ten days ago, but seven years ago, the recommendations came forward, and now, seven years later, the mental health crisis in Ontario is even worse than it was then, not better. The Wynne government, like the Conservatives before them, have swept problems under the rug and allowed mental health care to slip through the cracks for far too long in this province. When will the government take action that is needed and actually action that has been recommended seven years ago to help people struggling with mental health and addictions in Ontario?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, even as recently as this year's budget we made a significant 140 million new dollar investments in mental health services, a budget that that party voted against, Mr. Speaker. So that included -- and they're saying children's mental health, has included the creation, Mr. Speaker, of youth wellness hubs, which provide, Mr. Speaker, a wraparound support service for children and youth up to the age of 25 across this province, those integrated services that are so important to restoring wellness, Mr. Speaker. It also included -- and we were the first province

in the entire country to do so, is to fund structured psychotherapy so therapy such as cognitive behavioural therapy, which has highly proven effectiveness and can be delivered through a number of disciplines, which has a dramatic impact. Particularly for those that have mood disorders, Mr. Speaker. These are the sort of investments that we made this year that that party voted against.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, mental health and addictions care in this province must be a priority, not an afterthought. Not an afterthought. We need to bring it out shadows and give mental health care the attention and the focus that it needs to be able to provide the kind of services, the kind of care that people until crisis and that people overall deserve in order to be well in the province of Ontario. One crucial way, Speaker, one crucial way to give mental health and addictions care is to have a stand-alone, separate ministry, the ministry of mental health and addictions. That's what we would do, Speaker five were in government. We are committed to creating a ministry of addictions and mental health. Will this government do the same? Will they make--

>> Minister Hoskins Mr. Speaker, I look forward to -- I believe it's being debated at private members tomorrow afternoon, Mr. Speaker. And I do know that the party opposite looked to their sister NDP Party in British Columbia a couple of weeks ago announced a stand-alone ministry on mental health and addictions. I applaud and understand and agree with their motivation. It is he to make sure that we have integrated, coordinated care. Mr. Speaker, we have more than doubled our investment in mental health. It's just plain wrong to suggest that this government isn't absolutely committed to prioritizing mental health and our investments whether it's in supportive housing, whether it's in youth services, Mr. Speaker. Whether there are -- there are a myriad of investments that we have made approaching a quarter after billion dollars the last several years alone, that we are committed to this. I look forward to the discussion tomorrow, because I think any discussion about mental health, Mr. Speaker, particularly in this legislature is important and positive and helps to reduce and eliminate the stigma that's still out there.

MPP Scott to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Human Trafficking

>> MPP Laurie Scott: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of the status of women. It's clear that this government would rather have us focusing on issues like cannabis than on fighting human sex trafficking. I spent the past few days at an excellent conference on human sex trafficking hosted by the Ontario provincial police in Barrie. It was a gathering of some of the best experts working to address the ongoing crisis that now reaches every corner of Ontario. But sadly not one Minister bothered to show up. It's the same story across the province. Police officers, community organizations and individuals are working day and night to stop traffickers and save the lives of victims without adequate provincial coordination, information or resources. Mr. Speaker, how can the Wynne government claim to be acting on this issue when they don't even bother to show up?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today and talk about this very important issue. I want to thank the member opposite for this important question and I want to start off by saying that we on this side of the House will not take accusations of being inactive when it comes to actually getting out there and doing the job. I am not going to go through the list of things that we did this summer, but I can tell you that I visited the Canadian border institute. I also talked to people across the province about various issues when it comes to women and women's issues and sexual violence and harassment. Absolutely human trafficking is a devastating crime that violates human rights, and I want you to know that we are working hard every day to put a stop to it and to help survivors and to put in place the pieces that they need in order to heal. That's why we -- Have launched an across-government strategy to end human trafficking. I'm not sure. Perhaps the member opposite isn't aware that we did this. We absolutely did it last

>> MPP Scott: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister. It's time to stop the shell game. What do we see on the ground? Minister's missing in action, delays in the rollout of funding for victim services, underresourced police departments. They've had years to act but have little to show for it except for press releases and conversations. That just doesn't cut it. Mr. Speaker, does the government not see how important this issue is or do they just not have it in them to lead this fight against human sex trafficking?

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: I am happy to talk about what the government is doing on this side to help the survivors of this deplorable and brutal crime. Let me start by telling you we don't just talk about it. We move money forward and we move money into -- Actual pieces that are building support and service. Let me tell you, enhanced funding on 6.65 million to 47 community-based partners. It is easy to sit on that side and criticize and wander around talking about how we're not doing anything. We are doing something. We're working very hard with our partners. We're not just listening. We're actually putting our actions into words and into actual legislation. \$72 million. All of our other ministries to deliver a strategy that will take care of this problem on a real fundamental basis.

MPP French to Minister Sousa Re: Sears Pensions

>> MPP Jennifer K. French: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Earlier this year, Sears Canada filed for creditor protection and began the process of closing stores and liquidating assets. So far 59 locations have been closed and nearly 3,000 jobs have been lost. We have a Sears in Oshawa and our community is watching anxiously. Now Sears Canada has filed a petition to terminate its vastly underfunded pension plan, leaving thousands at risk of losing their pensions. There are 18,000 retirees that depend on this pension plan. What does the government have to say to the Sears pensioners that are worried about supporting their families?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. Certainly an issue of great concern for all of us when any company is faltering on their commitments and we recognize we've done this on a number of other occasions. Ontario is the only province that offers a guarantee. And we've recognized the assets of the pension must be supported. We are working to ensure that Sears, which does remain operating at this point, is continuing. FSCO, which is Minister's the T.B.A., including the pension benefits guarantee is also monitoring the situation. It does not affect the assets in the pension plan but we are taking the steps necessary. In supplementary I'll advise more. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP French: Back to the acting Premier. This government is failing pensioners and last year the Premier -- actually everyone in this whole House supported my motion to protect pensioners by prioritizing them during bankruptcy proceedings. Now the Premier's saying there isn't a role for government. Now she doesn't seem to think they deserve her help. Why did the Premier go back on her word and decide that pensioners should be left to fend for themselves?

>> Minister Sousa: That's total nonsense. The member opposite recognizes exactly that the federal government is in charge of the prioritization affected assets. We on this side of the House have actually through our reforms are increasing the pension guarantee. We've taken reforms to support our pensioners and retirees. We've taken the steps necessary -- in our last budget around this very issue, which you did not support. We continue to do our best to support our pensioners and retirees. We're taking the steps to reform our pensions all across the province to protect their interests. The member opposite knows that.

MPP Baker to Minister Duguid Re: Amazon Headquarters

>> MPP Yvan Baker: Thanks very much, Speaker. Speaker, my question's for the Minister of economic development and growth. Minister, Amazon recently announced that it wants to open a second North American headquarters and has opened the bidding to large cities in North America. Amazon said the campus will cost up to about \$5 billion and will create up to 50,000 new jobs. Now, I know from my business experience, prior to entering politics, that as the presence of companies increases in a particular sector this increases the likelihood of investment from other companies in that sector. The winning city is not only going to attract 50,000 jobs and the investment but it could attract additional investments in the years to come. I actually think this is a great opportunity for Ontario and I know there's a lot of buzz about Amazon being able to locate its headquarters here in Ontario.

Minister, could you tell this House, could you tell the people of Ontario what you are doing, what we are doing to attract Amazon here to Ontario?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member's absolutely right. This is a huge and exciting opportunity for Ontario. We recently created our Ontario investment office and they're already fully engaged on this working closely with our municipal partners in developing what will be a compelling pitch for Ontario. Alan Ardad, our chief investment officer, is working closely with Ed Clark and a group of Ontario business leaders on this very important initiative. We're going to leave no stone unturned on this, Mr. Speaker. We're going to fight for this investment. What we need to do to do everything we can to land it. I have no doubt because of the investments we've made in our people, because of the investments we've made in driving and transforming our economy, that Ontario is the best location for this. But let's stay grounded on this. We're asking an American company now to make an investment of a head office, significant investment outside of the United States. In their current climate this is going to be challenging but we're up to that challenge and going to do everything we can to try to land it for the people of Ontario.

>> MPP Baker: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. Minister, as you know, prior to being elected I was in business. I was a management consultant and one of the things that I did, when I worked in consulting, was to advise companies on decisions and important investment decisions like the one Amazon's about to make about its second headquarters. I know from experience there are many criteria companies consider. One of the most important criteria that they consider when expanding their business is knowing that they will have access to skilled workers for the talent that they need to grow their business. And in fact Amazon has indicated that it is trying to attract and entertain talent focus in the software development and related fields. You mentioned in your response to me just now that we had fierce competition for this bid. With all the cities and jurisdictions competing for this kind of investment, what are Ontario's competitive advantages and what can we do to attract businesses like Amazon to our province, to Ontario?

>> Minister Duguid: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member hinted at it. Because of the investments we've made in transforming our economy, because of the investments we've made in growing some of the most talented work force anywhere in the world, Ontario already is a global tech leader and that gives us a leg up. Just ask companies like Facebook, Thomson Reuters, Google, IBM. And many others that have located offices here in this province. We're second now only to the Silicon Valley when it comes to the number of I.C.T. companies. That's 20,000 companies doing business here in the province of Ontario. We graduate 40,000 science, tech, engineering and math students and we're not done, Mr. Speaker. We continue to make investments in the new economy. We're investing in A.I., autonomous vehicles, 5 G technology, quantum computing and cyber security. Because of the investments we're making, we're growing this economy, Mr. Speaker, and the new economy. I have no doubt but to say that Ontario is the best location for Amazon and any other company that wants to get ahead in this global economy.

MPP Yurek to Minister Sousa Re: Federal Tax Changes

>> MPP Jeff Yurek: Mr. Speaker, my question's to the acting Premier. Speaker, while the Premier herself is spending time testifying today at the Sudbury bribery trial, the Ontario P.C. Party -- Speaker, Ontario P.C. Party is going to be here today defending small businesses, farmers and health care professionals. That's why a month ago I wrote to this government about the federal Liberal government's recently proposed changes to professional corporations and the unintended negative impact it will have on patients, taxpayers and doctors. Mr. Speaker, this government has spent three years in an aggressive attempt to contain physician costs to the extent of imposing unilateral cuts and using heavy-handed tactics designed to embarrass doctors. Mr. Speaker, these federal cuts are another attack on doctors. Mr. Speaker, it has to stop. Will the acting Premier and the Minister of Health tell their Liberal friends enough is enough?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member opposite recognizing that the federal government has taken it upon themselves a bill to -- corporate taxes that's going for consultants

and others and sprinkling effect. We're allowing the federal government to do its job. We ourselves will be in constant contact and recognize it will have an impact on many of us here in the province of Ontario as well as across Canada.

>> MPP Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. Bath to the acting Premier. The federal Liberal changes will create financial Barriers for doctors to make investments in their practices. The changes will negatively impact the retirement planning process. Most importantly make it very difficult for doctors to continue to pay staff and office expenses during absences such as maternity leave or illness. Mr. Speaker, this government gave the doctors the ability to incorporate in lieu of fee increases. If the federal tax changes go through it will have a massive financial implication on the province and the patient care will suffer. Mr. Speaker, will the acting Premier call Prime Minister Trudeau today and him to stop his Liberal download of costs to our health care system

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is requesting and asking about an item that is the federal government's purview and we recognize that impact. I can tell you what we can do in this House and in this Legislative Assembly. Ask this member why he doesn't support the tremendous amount of increase that we've provided for our health care. The amount we provide to support more doctors. The member opposite and the other member who asked the question have the ability to support our initiatives that are Progressive and enable us to support doctors. They're voting against those measures.

We will continue to support our doctors and our health care by investing more in them. This side of the House.

MPP Hatfield to Minister Mauro Re: Ontario Disaster Relief

>> MPP Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. My question for the Deputy Premier. Good morning. Criteria for Ontario's disaster recovery assistance program were written in the last century. Consumer backup claims during torrential rainfalls aren't covered. In our area, we had more than 6,000 homes flooded recently. The pin Ster of postpone AI affairs took a look and says few of them will qualify under the existing guidelines. Well, Duh. Let's change the guidelines. Speaker -- Climate change is real. Torrential downpours causing sewer backups are the norm in this century. When will this government accept this, change the rules so people can get some help as they try to recover from natural disasters?

>> Minister Bill Mauro: Thank you very much. Thank you to the member for the question. He's accurate. I had the opportunity to be in Windsor yesterday for the second time within a year unfortunately related to significant flooding in that particular community. Speaker, at the heart of his question is about private insurance for sewage backup. Before I made the comments publicly yesterday and last week, when we activated the program, I checked. It is made known to me that insurance is broadly and readily available for sewage backup in these instances, and I don't think speaking that most of the public would expect the province of Ontario and all of their taxpayers to be supporting or paying for something for which there is private sector insurance readily available. At the end of the day, Speaker, the program is there to deal with Overland flooding. The reason it deals with Overland flooding -- And the reason the program is structured the way it is structured, Speaker, is to deal with Overland flooding, and that is because there is no readily available private sector insurance to deal with that particular --

>> MPP Hatfield: Well, Speaker, some private insurance companies have cut off people without warning. Some of them cap claims at ridiculous amounts. Municipalities have been building better sewers for years. Windsor's mayor says floods from this last storm caused \$175 million in damage in his city alone. Such storms are hitting all across Ontario. The evidence is in. We need a decision. When will this government do the right thing, change the guidelines and offer real hope for people affected by natural disasters?

>> Minister Mauro: Speaker, we recently changed the program to relieve local municipalities of the requirement to have a local fund-raising effort or a committee and a committee so we've made it better already. But at the heart of the issue, Speaker, this is ultimately about infrastructure, and I

would say quite openly and proudly that there's probably not another provincial government in this country that has a better record of investing in infrastructure, including in cities like Windsor, since we came to government in 2003. Most recent example of that being clean water waste water fund first announced by the federal government as a 50% federal 50% municipal fund. Only many municipalities would not have been able to tap into that. I work very hard along with the Minister of infrastructure and our Premier to bring 270 million new dollars into that fund, clean water wastewater fund for the federal government to help our municipalities even more than we have been through a great number of years to deal with construction issues. At the end of the day that's what this is about. I made the point, Speaker, we all have a role to play. Individuals can avail themselves of the programs that are available. Municipalities need to plan their communities appropriately and invest in infrastructure and the province and the federal government --

MPP Kiwala to Minister Chiarelli Re: Federal Infrastructure Spending Agreements

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of infrastructure. Part of our government's plan to build a fair and open economy is enhancing quality of life by investing in the schools, hospitals, roads and public transit that people in Ontario expect and deserve. We know that provincial governments alone cannot make 100% of the investments needed to address the existing infrastructure deficits and accommodate future needs. The federal government needs to be at the table as a reliable and flexible partner. In my riding every Kingston and the islands, I have had the opportunity to see first hand the results of federal provincial partnerships on infrastructure. Hello future at St. Lawrence College is a project supported by the collaboration between the provincial and federal governments through the postsecondary institutions strategic investment fund. This successful project will help St. Lawrence College reduce greenhouse gas emissions and energy usage on campus -- plus. Which will result in positive impacts. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister, could he please provide the House with what the lay of the land is for federal provincial relations on infrastructure in this province?

>> Minister Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, the member from Kingston and the Islands is absolutely correct. Ontario's best served when different levels of government work together. We are glad finally to have a federal partner at the table with a plan to spend \$186 billion nationally on infrastructure. Speaker, while it is less than \$190 billion Ontario alone is investing, it is a level of investment we haven't seen from the federal government in a generation. We work very closely with the federal government on its first investments which have resulted in over 1,300 clean water and waste water projects and over 600 public transit infrastructure projects. We have just started negotiations to bring additional \$11.8 billion in federal investment to Ontario. As the Premier said at the council and federation meeting in July, Ontario wants the federal program. To be flexible and to build on our existing joint investments. It is critical that we work together, all orders of government, to get this right.

>> MPP Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My thanks to the minister for his response. I'm glad to hear that, after decades of underinvestment under previous governments, we finally have both a provincial and federal government committed to spurring economic growth and enhancing the quality of life by investing in infrastructure. It's already clear that the productive relationship Ontario has built and fostered with the federal government results in every riding across this province, including every riding held by a member of the opposition in receiving that advantage. I myself have had the chance to work alongside my riding's federal member of parliament, M.P. Mark Garrison, to announce some of the projects the Minister mentioned. While we have made significant progress on the infrastructure file, we know that the work is far from over. There is always more work that can be done., Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister, can he please give the House insight into next steps for negotiations with the federal government?

>> Minister Chiarelli: Speaker, I thank the member for the question. Our government is making the largest infrastructure investment in Ontario's history, an unprecedented \$190 billion over 13 years. And want to maximize every dollar. That means working with the federal government to align spending wherever possible. Next week I will be co-chair at a meeting of Canada's infrastructure

Minister's where we will continue discussions on phase two investments. We are advocating for programs that respect past investments and existing priorities. We are optimistic that the federal government's commitment to some additional flexibility will occur. And negotiations are expected to continue through the fall and winter with the goal of concluding by date set by the federal government, March 2018. Mr. Speaker, . The people of Ontario are best served when all orders of government work together.

MPP Wilson to Minister McGarry Re: Wasaga Beach Clean-up

>> MPP Jim Wilson: Mr. Speaker, my question's for the Minister of natural resources. Minister, for years I've been contacting this government over and over again about the deteriorating conditions of the beach front of Wasaga Beach. Various issues have been identified including overgrowth of vegetation, terrible washrooms, piping plover nesting areas, the list goes on and on. Residents are concerned. Tourists are concerned. The town is concerned. Yet nothing is being done by your government. Over 2,300 people have recently signed a petition asking the government to fix these issues. Minister, Wasaga Beach is a jewel in this province. The Guinness Book of Records calls this beach the longest freshwater beach in the world and, from a provincial standpoint, I cannot understand why more attention is not being given to its proper care and maintenance. Will you do the right thing and commit to finally resolving these issues?

>> Minister Kathryn McGarry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. -I had a very good meeting with Mayor Brian Smith and the councillors from the area that looked after Wasaga Beach this summer at Amos. I can tell you that we provided some information back and forth together. Number one I did compliment them on ten years as a blue flag designation for Wasaga Beach in this province. That's something we can all be proud of. And some of the. Some of the beach items the members brought up is beach raking, secondary park plan management. We discussed funding, etc., etc. What I would like to say to this member is that there's a secondary beach plan that's been put in place. Ontario Parks continues to work very closely with the municipality. I know that all the gate receipts, which helps provide for the services in any Ontario park, are all put into this area. We continue to work with them and I'll address some of the details in the supplementary.

>> MPP Wilson: Back to the Minister. Minister, the letter I received from you just the other day about lack of proper maintenance of the beach, you offered me a tour with park staff. Well, I don't need a tour in my own riding, Minister. It's insulting. You're the one that needs a tour. Local ratepayer associations have been asking for years that a Minister actually come up and look at the beach and look at the concerns. Mr. Brown's been there twice recently. For the first 15 years of my life, our family had a cottage at Wasaga Beach. I've lived there -- I've lived there full time for the past 25 years and recently I sent you pictures, actual pictures of what's going on now of the deterioration and degradation of the beach. My constituents and I don't appreciate getting the same form letter from you -- Minister's every time we raise our concerns. Frankly we're just tired of it. People in my riding want these issues addressed. So Speaker, I ask the Minister will she join me on a tour. And meet with the town and 9 residents association

>> Minister McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker. I have not only been to the beach several times in the summer but I visited in all seasons, including the winter as well. I know that the secondary beach plan that we've been working very hard on again describes to the values of the blue flag designation. There are areas of that longest fresh water beach area that remain ecologically intact. We have the piping plovers that are nesting on that area, and recently with the new secondary plan we're allowing some light raking in that area. We're also allowing some reclamation of some of the beach sand that has gone away from that area to put back on the beach. But one of the reasons we have vegetation on Beaches is to prevent erosion so that we can maintain that -- Fine sand there. We are very proud of the work that they've done and if that member and that party over there would help to vote for the investments that have been -- Provincial government in the last years --

MPP Vanthof to Minister Sousa Re: LCBO in Rural Locations

>> MPP John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of finance. The area around Largo Lake has about 1,000 residents. The town has one gas station, one co-op grocery store, two restaurants, several tourist lodges and campgrounds and, until recently, had one LCBO outlet. And in a northern Ontario tourist town an LCBO outlet is an anchor store. Due to circumstances beyond anyone's control, LCBO could no longer stay in their current location. But instead of moving locations, they got out of Dodge. They abandoned the town. They abandoned the residents. In our inquiries the president of LCBO stated and I quote -- there are other areas that are underserved where we can better allocate resources, while it is not as convenient for Largo Lake residents can purchase in Inglehart or online. Kirkland Lake is 27 kilometres. Inglehart's 45 and there is no service half the places. Does the Minister agree with the president of the LCBO that the maximizing profits for the LCBO should be the only basis on deciding where to locate --

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Speaker, I appreciate the question. I also appreciate and applaud your advocacy and the letter you sent to both LCBO and myself and recognizing the impact it has on your community as well as other communities across the province that do not have an LCBO. I appreciate the fact that many do want the retail outlet to exist, recognizing the positive impact it has on a community. We also recognize that one of the reasons we came with online delivery is to facilitate those communities that don't have access to LCBO. Some do tag -- take an agency store to provide service and convenience to consumers. Also one of the reasons we've expanded it to grocery stores and other means by which to expand distribution across the province. But I appreciate your question. I know we are looking at ways to try to facilitate the community as they're impacted by this decision. Thank you.

>> MPP Vanthof: Rural Ontarians travelling 27 to 40 kilometres one way for service is reasonable. With this ratio in mind many other outlets in my region are at risk. In fact many outlets throughout rural Ontario are at risk under that ratio. And the province, through the LCBO, has a social responsibility to all Ontarians, including rural Ontarians. Will the Minister work with me and actually restore that social responsibility to the town of Largo Lake and ensure that all rural Ontarians in the future also have the benefit as a social responsibility of the government through the LCBO and aren't abandoned?

>> Minister Sousa: Again the member talked about social responsibility and taking the precautions necessary to support our communities and our citizens who are not only looking for alcohol but want to be doing so in a socially responsible way by having someone like LCBO and their staff to provide that service. I know Largo Lake from my understanding was closed as a result of safety issues and I'm not sure as to the details why it was so but I will continue to look into it and I recognize again the impact it has on any community that doesn't have access to an LCBO. They of course have access in other ways and some that need travelling more long distances based upon their location and remoteness of their communities. But it is something that we can consider, we are looking at and again thank you for the question.

MPP Rinaldi to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction

>> MPP Lou Rinaldi: My question's to the Minister of energy. Minister, last year the Premier said our essential goal for this government making everyday life more affordable for the people of Ontario. While our economy's doing well, not every family's seeing the impact on their personal budgets. The cost of electricity has become a concern for many in my community. I heard from many people in the most rural parts of my riding like Landing. I and people of Ontario were eager to see the government take action. Our government took a big step forward ensuring clean and reliable electricity is affordable to everyone in Ontario. The fair hydro plan passed last session is a 25% reduction average to all Households in the province, no loopholes, no exceptions. Mr. Speaker, to the Minister, when does the fair hydro plan -- begin to lower bills and how will it help Households across the province?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also want to thank the member from Northumberland-quinte west for that question. Of course for all of his hard work that he does day in and day out for his constituents. Mr. Speaker, our government inherited an electricity system that was in disrepair, Mr. Speaker. We invested \$50 billion in rebuilding the system and eliminating dirty coal from our generation mix. However we asked one generation alone to pay the freight of these investments, for everyone before and after. And that's why, Mr. Speaker, this spring we took action. We passed legislation which has, since July 1st, lowered electricity bills by the full 25%, on average, for every House hold in this province. And under our plan, Mr. Speaker, rates will increase no more than -- Inflation for the next four years, Mr. Speaker. We're proud of the work that we've done, Mr. Speaker, and we're putting our plan into action to make life more affordable for Ontarians.

>> MPP Rinaldi: Thank you, Minister, for that response. I know that this has been a positive initiative for the families of small businesses in my riding and indeed across the province. And, Minister, I can testify that I've seen the difference in my own bill. The 25% reduction on average will help to curb costs for people of Ontario across the board, while other programs provide the type of support that keeps our province fair and competitive. However, there are also other elements of the government plan that provides additional support to particular communities who need it. Many low-income Ontarians take advantage of the Ontario electricity support program the O.E.S. B., which provides unbill subsidy for those who qualify for the program. I understand under the fair hydro plan the government expanded this program. Could the Minister provide more details -- Programs that are being expanded for the benefit of those who need the most in our province?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I just want to acknowledge the work that this member has done to talk about those who are vulnerable in his community and across, right across the province, Mr. Speaker. With our governments over the summer, Mr. Speaker, the oesp program for example that helps vulnerable consumers, it has been expanded by 50% with a maximum credit of now \$900 a year and a special credit for those with unique electricity needs, Mr. Speaker, offers a maximum of \$1,300 a year. Another program that was expanded over the summer, Mr. Speaker, is designed to lower delivery rates called the triple-rp. This program provides a substantial subsidy that lowers distribution -- excuse me, Mr. Speaker. That lowers distribution costs for those in the most expensive-to-serve areas of our province. While the opposition chose to vote against expanding these programs to help people, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that our fair hydro plan is providing real and substantial relief --

MPP Barrett to Minister Zimmer Re: Caledonia Road Blockade

>> MPP Toby Barrett: To the acting Premier. From August 4 -- no August 10 to September 4th labour day, the main thoroughfare of caledonia was blockaded putting businesses and homeowners through psychological and economic hell. More specifically many customers phased 56 mile detour. Businesses lost 25 to 60%. Staff were let go and had their hours cut. Homeowners expressed concern about property values and compromised service from firefighters, police, ambulance. However, on September 1st, your government announced it was standing down from dealing with the caledonia blockade. Acting Premier, what steps have you taken to arrange compensation, as has been done in the past, for caledonia and area homeowners and area businesses?

>> Minister David Zimmer: Thank you very much, Speaker. Speaker, the member opposite is quite correct. There was a blockade that was put up a couple of weeks ago. Our ministry, ministry of indigenous relations, took that situation very seriously, as did the six nations elected council and the hawed noh sawnee traditional confederacy. I can assure members opposite and everyone in this House that, after a s Eries of negotiations with first nations, with the Ontario provincial police with the various ministries, that blockade was peacefully ended. And I want to congratulate and recognize the hard work of the Ontario provincial police in working in a way -- Way that was respectful of six nations and the haudenosaunee and the government of Ontario.

>> MPP Barrett: Past month was a nightmare yet again for people in the caledonia area. I've dealt

with many ministries. September 2nd, a local newspaper reported that, when a fire was set on the southern Ontario railway in Caledonia, a Caledonia fire truck was not allowed to pass through the barricade, not allowed to put it out. September 4th, Labour Day, police attempted to secure Haldimand County 6th line at the bridge. Again to quote another local paper, they were sent away by protestors and ordered to take up a position further back, which they did. Speaker, we've seen this film before. No firefighters, no police, no customers in the stores. Caledonia now worries. When will this happen again? Acting Premier, you and the federal government. My question is, working with the federal government as has been done in the past to compensate residents of Caledonia?

>> Minister Zimmer: Thank you, again, for that question. You know, the point here is that ten years ago there was a situation in Caledonia that went on and on and on, and there were real issues of public safety. This time there was a blockade that went up. Issues about -- but the point again is that all persons involved in the resolution of that blockade be they police, be they fire responders, first responders, the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, the Ontario provincial police. It was resolved peacefully. That's progress. That's in the spirit of reconciliation. And we will continue to deal with issues involving matters that First Nations -- raise wherever in the province. We will deal with them in a respectful way, in a peaceful way through a constructive resolution.