

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Wednesday, September 27, 2017

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
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MPP Brown to Premier Wynne Re: Air Conditioning in Schools

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier, and I want to start off by apologizing. Yesterday, I assumed the Premier had air conditioning. In all her offices. I want to again offer my apologies for the huge inconvenience it must have been for the Premier to move her meeting to another air-conditioned room. Unfortunately when it's 30° out and schools are sweltering and children can't learn, they don't have the opportunity just to move to another room. They're not -- there are not rooms at the end of the hall that are blasting A.C. Like the option the Premier has. Many these classes don't have air conditioning or even working windows. So, Mr. Speaker, does the Premier really think that moving into another room is an option for these schools, without air conditioning and without operational windows?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Look, I know that when a classroom is too hot that it is -- it's a problem for staff and for students. It can be very uncomfortable. It is unseasonably hot right now, Mr. Speaker, and the reality is we are seeing more warmth and hotter days at times of the year that we wouldn't expect, Mr. Speaker. I understand that. You know, it is exactly why we have made such a huge investment in schools in the province. It's why \$1.4 billion has been allocated to school boards. School boards need to make these decisions, Mr. Speaker, and many of those dollars are being invested in classrooms, Mr. Speaker, where air conditioning is part of that, Mr. Speaker. So we will continue to work with school boards. I think it's perfectly reasonable, Mr. Speaker, to expect that boards and individual schools would have a plan for days that are very, very hot just as they would have a plan for days that are very, very cold, Mr. Speaker. So we will continue to work with school boards, continue to make investments. To make sure that classrooms are appropriate for staff and students.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. Yesterday I mentioned how most of the schools in Toronto don't have air conditioning. I just want to say it's not just a Toronto problem. In my riding of Simcoe North, I heard a story just yesterday. Orillia secondary school has been impacted fairly significantly. Temperatures inside the school exceeded 27°. Principal Jim Salmon says, I quote -- 12 classrooms that are experiencing tremendous amount of heat. It's a little frustrating but we're working on it. A grade 12 student said there are students who don't want to go to class because of the heat. These people can't find another room. They don't have that option like the Premier does. So, Mr. Speaker, a very straightforward question, will the Premier mandate a maximum temperature for our schools, yes or no?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, again, I absolutely understand that, with a hot weather event like we've had over the last number of days that there are schools in the province, there are classrooms in the province that get very, very warm, Mr. Speaker. I understand that. I also know that the investment that we have made, \$1.4 billion, which is on top of \$2.7 billion, which has been provided over the last two years. School boards need the flexibility, Mr. Speaker, to make decisions based on the region that they are in the province because the leader of the opposition is right. This is not just a challenge for Toronto. This is a challenge in different parts of the province, but there are different challenges in different regions. So, Mr. Speaker, we are committed to working with school boards. I have a lot of faith in educators, in directors of education of the 72 school boards to work with us, Mr. Speaker, to accommodate. And to adapt to the new reality that we are having unusual weather for the times of year, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. The government is brag big their \$1.4 billion investment. But let's put that into context. The repair backlog is 15 billion. We are talking about 9%. They're proud. They're bragging about attending to 9% of the repairs. We have leaking roofs, broken windows, broken boilers, schools with asbestos, and this government is bragging about attending to 9% of the problems. For 14 years they promised us they're going to invest in our schools and they have not. Wintertime we hear about conditions where it's too cold to learn. When it's warmer temperatures it's too hot to learn. So rather than bragging about the 9% of the repairs, my question to the

Premier is -- When are we going to get to all the repairs and make sure children in this province have schools that they can learn in?

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity just last week to meet with the president of the Ukraine. President of the Ukraine with a delegation. And they were here, Mr. Speaker, to meet with businesses and to take part in festivities with the Ukrainian community. But a particular interest that the president of Ukraine is the way in which we have integrated special needs students into our classrooms, Mr. Speaker. So when the leader of the opposition proposes that I am bragging about something in education, here's what is critical, Mr. Speaker. We have built an education system that is the pride of this province and is looked at by people around the world. We have -- we have Graduation, Mr. Speaker, from 68% to 86%, Mr. Speaker. Every young child in this province, in the year that they turn 4, have access to full-day kindergarten, Mr. Speaker. We have built an education system that's second to none --

MPP Brown to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. I want to share with you the concerns of the co-owner of first choice supermarket in Markham. They've been open since 1995. They employ 30 staffers. They have over 100 spotlights in their store. They now have dimmer lights and they switch from 60 Watts to 80 Watts and 100 Watts. They also have a large number of refrigerators and water tanks for seafood. In their last year's hydro bills increase went up another 15%. Mr. Speaker, this means that their bills are over \$30,000 a month. They thought they were going to get relief from this government based on the promise this is spring, yet their bills continue to skyrocket. What message do you have for that small business in Markham? When is their relief coming? When can they have hydro bills that they can afford?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the leader OFD the opposition raising the question because our government has brought forward new supports for many small businesses, but we continue to work, Mr. Speaker, to additionally find more programs to help small businesses. When it comes to grocery stores, Mr. Speaker, while I don't know all the details of that particular store, there are other grocery stores, Mr. Speaker, that I've been working with their local utilities to find out which programs they can qualify for through the save on energy program. One grocer in my riding, Mr. Speaker, is able to save 22% by actually utilizing the save on energy program, Mr. Speaker, implementing many of those programs and then seeing those reductions. We also, Mr. Speaker, have seen a modest decrease for all businesses as well by taking some of the social programs that we had in on the rate base before, Mr. Speaker, and we now have that on the tax base because those are social programs. And that's where they should be. And I'll have more to add in the supplementary.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. A lot of businesses expected, after all the hyperbole in the spring, there's going to be relief. All these TV ads saying the 'S going to be relief. It's not just the one restaurant in Markham. I have a letter here from another restaurant. Rule G Toronto's chinatown, they're saying where's their hydro relief? In four years their hydro bill has doubled. This is despite the fact they've actually reduced hours in recent years. They're reducing their consumption and their bill is skyrocketing. The Premier promised relief. They did not get it this summer. So my question, Mr. Speaker. When can rule G.C. Food in Scarborough expect the relief that you promised in the spring?

>> Minister Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, very happy to rise and talk about the fair hydro plan that's a 25% reduction for 500,000 small businesses and farms right across the province, Mr. Speaker. And we know, Mr. Speaker. We recognize, this government recognizes through the fair hydro plan, which is our plan, Mr. Speaker, something that I know the opposition is still trying to search for. But you know on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we've made sure that the save on energy program actually will provide relief to some of these small businesses. I encourage these small businesses to actually reach out to their local utility to find out which programs they can qualify for. That's why we

continue to talk about these programs and encourage them to apply, Mr. Speaker. Because when I go to community to community to community and we talk about these programs, many of the small businesses that I talk to saying at that they didn't know that these programs exist and when I'm doing that, Mr. Speaker, I'm usually in an opposition riding which just shows the fact, Mr. Speaker. That they're not talking to their constituents about what they can do to reduce their rates. That's something we'll continue to do on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The two restaurants, the two businesses I just mentioned were in Liberal MPP Ridings. The reality is businesses are struggling with hydroment and let me say the co-owner of first choice supermarket in Markham isn't confused. The owner of Royal G seafood restaurant isn't confused about their bill. They see it skyrocketing. But yesterday -- two daysing a actually, the president of the treasury board said people find their hydro bills quite confusing. What people find confusing is this government has allowed hydro bills to skyrocket by 300%. What people find confusing is the Liberals can charge you \$100 for using no power. What people find confusing is the fact that governments shut off thousands and thousands of Ontarians from power last winter. So maybe the Premier can answer this. Who really is confused? Is it our hard working small businesses or is it the Liberal Minister ?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no confusion when a 25% reduction is coming on everyone's bill, Mr. Speaker. And 500,000 small businesses and farms right across the province. But let's talk about what's confusing, Mr. Speaker. Is that party in favour of sex Ed education or not, Mr. Speaker ? Because we've seen lots of notes about that. We have no idea. Are they confused about what to do with energy or not what to do with energy, Mr. Speaker ? Because you know what? We're over 200 days now and we're waiting for a plan. An iota, something that they can do to actually help people. Now what, Mr. Speaker ? All they can do is vote against, vote against the plan - - Mr. Speaker, they voted against the plan that even the Ontario chamber of commerce has highlighted, that they have the importance for small business and challenges that they face that, regional Chambers are getting the support from the Ontario chamber. To work with small businesses specifically, Mr. Speaker. They continue to vote against helping the people of Ontario, will continue to work and benefit the people of Ontario.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Hoskins Re: Long-Term Care Spaces

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. My question to the Premier. This morning we learned from news reports that the government is the scrambling in the face of an overcrowding crisis in hospitals and seniors care. Now it's considering reopening the finch avenue site of humber river Regional Hospital to warehouse seniors waiting for long-term care. This hospital has been shuttered for years, a victim of Conservative and Liberal cost cutting. Will the Premier explain how a facility that wasn't good enough for patients two years ago will be good enough for vulnerable seniors now?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is true that the ministry is actively considering a plan to reopen the finch site of the humber river hospital, the former had you ber river hospital, in order to provide what I view as a tremendous opportunity in the city, where we are facing a growing population and we have capacity challenges, and prance the member opposite missed it in the budget where we allocated \$24 million specifically for interventions and activities such as this, where individuals who are occupying A.L.C. Beds in hospital but can be better served and prefer to be out of hospital, this gives them an environment which is more specific to their needs, conducive to their improvement, and, Mr. Speaker, and it may be that this is an important transitional step for them to return home. So I can't understand how the member opposite could possibly be against this bill.

>> MPP Tabuns: Again for Premier. The last Conservative government fired 6,000 nurses, closed 28 hospitals and slashed over 7,000 hospital beds. And for 14 years, the Liberal government has either underfunded or frozen hospital budgets, creating the crisis in care that we're facing now. The Premier has refused to even admit that there was a problem in hospitals. Now she's scrambling.

Warehousing some of the most vulnerable people, waiting for long-term care in our hospitals that won't have any specialized service for years won't fix the real problem. The Premier has known about the desperate state of our hospitals for years. Is this the best she can do?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I hope this is a five-part question, because I can't believe -- and I'm happy to answer all morning -- I can't believe that the member opposite is suggesting this is anything but a positive development in our health care system. It's supported by the hospitals, many hospitals, Mr. Speaker. It's supported by the community. This is a former hospital that was -- so this is a former hospital that was -- that provides this opportunity because we just recently opened a \$4 billion brand-new Humber River hospital, Mr. Speaker. But this gives us an opportunity to actually treat individuals in hospital, in A.L.C. Beds that could be better cared for in a better transitional environment with high quality care. That was a hospital up until a year ago, Mr. Speaker. I can't for the life of me understand why the member would --

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the Premier. Hospitals are desperately overcrowded. Patients are being left in hallways for days. People are waiting in emergency rooms for 12 hours or more. Wait lists for long-term care are now years long, and we have a government that's scrambling to find a solution after years of making the problem worse. Even the Ontario hospital association has said that, without immediate action from the Premier and her Liberal government, our hospitals will face a dangerous capacity crisis as soon as this winter. Will the Premier finally admit what people all over Ontario already know, that without drastic, immediate action from her government, our hospitals will no longer be able to deliver the health care that Ontario families need and deserve?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, -- Would the member finally admit that he should have chosen a different opening question, Mr. Speaker, because it was the NDP, by the way, that closed 9,000 hospital beds -- 24% of all acute care beds, 13% of mental health beds in this province. That's their record. We're doing precisely what the O.H.A., what hospitals, what Torontonians, what the community, what the seniors themselves that would be better cared for -- these are nonacute patients that are better cared for in this environment and this, to be honest, Mr. Speaker, absolutely mystifies me. It was a colossal mistake for them to specifically oppose this development.

MPP Armstrong to Minister Hoskins Re: Long-Term Care Spaces

>> MPP Teresa Armstrong: My question is to the Premier. Families today are worried and asking themselves what will it come to for their dads, their moms and their grandparents? Will the plan from this Premier be to force their loved one into a shuttered building just to get them out of the way? Yeah, they're asking. They're asking. The overcrowding crisis stretches around this province. From London and just last week, we learned that the C.E.O. Of London health sciences begged the government for emergency funding to open 24 additional beds. He said that their hospitals were seeing unprecedented E.R. Levels and they needed extra funding just to keep up. Can the Premier tell us what she plans to do in London to begin undoing the mess she and her government have created in health care?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, only the NDP would demand more capacity and then complain about us creating capacity, Mr. Speaker. And only the NDP would see utilizing resources, consultation with the community, consultation with the hospitals, creating that capacity that they've been asking for in helping patients. Only the NDP would see that as a problem, Mr. Speaker. This will create 150 -- this will create, Mr. Speaker, 150 beds for nonacute patients currently residing in hospitals in an environment which will be even more supportive and appropriate, with appropriate staffing to their specific needs, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Armstrong: Speaker, hospitals are over capacity, overcrowded. In Windsor, Sudbury, Brant, Kitchener- Waterloo and all over the province. The Premier's \$Pratt stopgap measures will force vulnerable people, mostly seniors, into mothball facilities to try and relieve the pressure on Toronto

hospitals. That's what's happening. I know she's scrambling to save Toronto votes, and that's true, but Premier has a responsibility to every single Ontarian. Will the Premier finally listen to hospital C.E.O.S, hospital associations and thousands of Ontario families demanding better health care in Ontario and do something about the overcrowding and hallway hospital medicine crisis that they've created?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I remain shocked at the NDP Position with regards to what we're looking at for the Finch site of the former Humber River hospital. To describe it as warehousing, to describe it as mothballing is an insult to the hardworking hospital -- that really since day one of that new hospital opening we've been looking at this as a positive opportunity to free up capacity in a number of hospitals, not just Humber River. There are a number of hospitals in Toronto and the G.T.A. That are contributing to this plan. In fact the idea came from them themselves as an appropriate and a high level and a high-quality decision that will provide the best possible care for individuals who do not require the acute care in hospitals. They are not acute. This is a highly preferable environment. And I know both members have not even visited the site, have not talked to hospital officials, have not talked to O.H.A. About this, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Armstrong: The Ontario hospital association has said that one of the main causes for this crisis is that frail, elderly patients are being forced to stay in hospitals because there aren't enough long-term care beds. Has more than 30,000 names on it, yet this government stubbornly refuses to look at our long-term care system, at the long-term care system to identify why so many sick seniors are being forced to wait in hospitals for months and in cases years. Will this Premier expand its scope of the Wettlaufer inquiry and finally commit to fixing the long-term care system -- Crisis.

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I am well aware of the NDP Plan. Their plan, we've seen it before. They closed more than 9,000 hospital beds. 24% of all of the acute care beds in this province. 13% of the mental health beds in this province, Mr. Speaker. And I know they've promised to cut \$500 million from the health and education budgets in the last election, Mr. Speaker. That's not a path we're prepared to go on. And it's an absolute insult to the hardworking frontline health care professionals. The C.E.O.S of the many hospitals involved in this proposal. The Toronto Central LHIN, the O.H.A., all of the partners, the communities. All of the partners that we're working together with on this solution, this will be a solution that addresses the very need they're asking us to address, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Arnott to Minister Ballard (Sandals) Re: Air Quality

>> MPP Ted Arnott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Early Monday night, an email was sent by Air Quality Ontario, which is a branch of the Ministry of the Environment to some Hamilton residents just south of my riding advising them that hot and humid weather there are conditions were creating elevated pollution levels. It said that a special air quality statement was in place due to the high levels of air pollution at that time. And that people needed to know that, quote, exposure to air pollution is particularly a concern for children, the elderly and those who have underlying medical conditions such as lung or heart disease, end quote. Mr. Speaker, we know that the government has set aside millions of dollars for their self-promoting self-serving pre-election ads. In contrast, will the Premier inform this House how much money was spent by Air Quality Ontario to inform Hamilton residents of this vitally urgent and potentially lifesaving information?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you for that important question, which allows me, Speaker, to highlight some of the important work that our government and specifically my ministry has been doing for a number of years. Least, Speaker, among the least which is closing of the coal-burning plants, electrical generating coal burning plants across Ontario. You know, Speaker that, alone has saved the Ontario health care system an estimated \$4 billion, Mr. Speaker. So I can tell you, Speaker, that ongoing monitoring in Hamilton has shown that air quality has improved significantly since the mid 1990s, with a large reduction of pollutants in the air. And I'll tell you as well, Speaker, that Hamilton, Hamilton remains on the cutting edge of air pollution control research. And practical

applications with regard to collaborative approaches, to continuing to improve air quality.

>> MPP Arnott: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier, because that response in no way answered my question. The Minister neglected to point out that it was our environment Minister the Honourable Elizabeth Witmer who first announced -- lakeview generating station in mississauga. Again the email from air quality Ontario said and I quote -- children, seniors and those with cardiovascular lung disease such as asthma are at risk. When the government does little other than sending out an email blast -- When the government does very little other than sending out an email blast to inform residents of this kind of potentially life threatening situation, yet they budget millions of dollars on pre-election ads, people rightly question their priorities. It appears the government is more concerned about its own reelection than public health. How many people sit at home looking at government websites? There will be many thousands of seniors in Hamilton that don't use email and are not on a government email list.

Will the Premier explain why the government failed to get this important information out to a broader audience?

>> Minister Liz Sandals: I want to talk a little bit about advertising, because I really don't think that what you're talking about is advertising. You're talking about the process for having a formal ad, a formal ad on television or a formal ad on digital media, something that there's some production value for, which goes through a very extensive approval process, which would never allow you to respond to anything of an urgent nature in an urgent manner. So the processes that are talking about here have nothing to do with government advertising. You're conflating two topics that are totally unrelated, and the issue that we have here -- Ministry of environment is how in the modern world do you effectively instantly notify people? And one of the way is with your email distribution list.

MPP Vanthof to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Advertising

>> MPP John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Yesterday the Premier stated that the \$5.5 million hydro ad campaign, which was designed to boost Liberal polling numbers, was important, because people in the province needed to know the details about government programs that are in place. Can the Premier tell us, do these ads inform Ontarians under the Liberal hydro plan, a government program, their hydro bills will begin going up shortly after the next election?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and respond to the question, because it's important to state, Mr. Speaker, that Ontario remains the only jurisdiction in Canada to enact legislation that bans government paid partisan advertising. And we passed this historic legislation because we are against government using taxpayer dollars for partisan advertising, Mr. Speaker. I sat in the -- had the honour of sitting in the House of commons for six years when the leader of the opposition stood you and supported his government's action plan at the time and he would defend that, Mr. Speaker. And that's why, Mr. Speaker, that said, Mr. Speaker, the Ontario government has the responsibility to raise awareness and communicate information about programs and services that affect the people of Ontario. And this includes informing Ontarians of changes to their electricity bills so that they can use this information to plan for the future. It all adds director yans to a dedicated website where they can learn more about these changes, Mr. Speaker, and lower their bills even more.

>> MPP Vanthof: Once again to the Premier. Perhaps the government should think about informing Ontarians so they can plan for their future about all the details of the programs, because can the Premier tell us why the ads fail to mention that Ontarians will spend nearly two decades, a total of over \$21 billion more than they would without the Ontario hydro plan?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again when it comes to all of the programs that are being offered, the Ontario electricity support program is one of those programs, Mr. Speaker. There

are many that you can find on this website and this offers significant support to low-income households across the province and we've been doing everything we can to get enrollment even higher on this, Mr. Speaker. We've put inserts in people's bills. We've created the advertisements and more. You know, Mr. Speaker, the NDP's support for this program is less clear, Mr. Speaker. You know, when you're talking about advertisement, and you said it's a government responsibility to communicate information about programs and services that people need. Let's go through some of the largest advertising spend of 2015/2016, Mr. Speaker, our sexual violence and harassment campaign. Who will you help challenged existing attitudes and sparked international discussion. We've communicated to Ontarians about -- Vaccines for children in Ontario. We do many, many things, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that we let Ontarians know about the programs and services available to them.

MPP Des Rosiers to Minister Hoskins Re: Support for Alzheimer's

>> MPP Nathalie Des Rosiers: [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. [End of Translation] We know that approximately 175 thousand people in Ontario live with dementia -- 175,000 people, and the number is expected to grow with the aging population. My own father lived with dementia for seven years and I know firsthand how much it affected him and my mother and our entire family. With the 2017 budget, the government announced an additional investment of \$101 million over three years for a dementia strategy. This will improve coordination of care that is critical to help people with dementia. I think it will also continue to invest in health care providers education, in-home support, better trained P.S.W.s and patient navigation for people with dementia and certainly will strengthen chapters across Ontario. Can the Minister expand on what this investment will do?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. Let me once again welcome and acknowledge the courageous and hardworking and passionate, compassionate individuals that are here today from Alzheimer society of Ontario and the associated branches. And, Mr. Speaker, our investment in dementia will ensure that everyone living with dementia in Ontario, their families and their care partners have the right supports, the right funding and the right tools in place to make those important and informed decisions about their care and that they continue particularly to be treated with the dignity and respect that they deserve. And these investments include a 10 million additional investment in behavioural supports Ontario and is a key component of our \$100 million dementia strategy. It goes to specialized services. For residents with cognitive impairments who are exhibiting challenging and complex behaviours. These are the sort of investments that are necessary and I'm proud to announce --

>> MPP Des Rosiers: [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [End of Translation] Minister for his answer and for his vision of health care, and also for his support for this very important issue. Dementia touches the lives of so many in Ontario and it affects the person who lives with the disease but also his or her family. With a growing aging population the burden is rising on people that provide care for people with physical or cognitive condition, injury or chronic illness. Can the Minister please tell this House about some of the other important investments that this government is making to support families and caregivers of those who live with dementia?

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you once again. It is absolutely critical we do respond effectively to the needs of both patients but also care partners, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're making sure that we're providing more care for people living with dementia while also look after their care partners. So we're increasing access to adult day programs for people with dementia. We're adding additional hours of care and transportation to help people travel to their local program location. We're enhancing care partner respite services both in home and overnight. We're investing an additional \$20 million this year alone for respite care, for care partners of people receiving care at home, bringing the three-year commitment for respite alone to \$120 million, Mr. Speaker. And by increasing funding for approximately 1.2 million more hours of respite services for care partners, caregivers and care partners can. Get a break for rest, family commitments or other priorities, Mr. Speaker.

MPP MacLaren to Minister Mauro Re: Disaster Recovery Program

>> MPP Jack MacLaren: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of municipal affairs. Minister, over 600 homes in Constance bay suffered flood damage in May when the Ottawa river level rose to its highest level in over 100 years. Many people had to move out of their homes. The damage was extreme. The stress levels were extreme. People have applied to the disaster recovery program for badly needed financial help to repair their homes. They are waiting and they are waiting and they are waiting. Minister, could you encourage the people administering the Ontario disaster recovery program to please speed up the approval process?

>> Minister Bill Mauro: Speaker, thank you very much to the member from Carleton-mississippi mills for the question. I congratulate him as a member of the trillium party. It's my understanding this is your first question since you've joined the party. Welcome your leadership to the gallery today. As the member has mentioned, it is an incredibly difficult situation for people when they experience these very significant flooding events. That's why, Speaker, we've had actually 35 municipalities in Ontario this year in which we have had to activate our disaster recovery assistance for Ontarians program. I would tell the member to be sure that he is letting his constituents know that they have until Friday, October 27th to apply. The deadline is open 'til then. If they have not applied yet, ensure, please, that they do and ensure that they're working as closely as they can with the adjuster. If people are not receiving the assistance they need if they're in the geographic boundary. And if they are eligible, sometimes it may mean that their applications in to the adjuster are not complete so I encourage them to work with the adjuster. Stay connected to the municipal services office. If necessary –

>> MPP MacLaren: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of postpone AI affairs again. Thank you for your answer, Minister. Minister, four homes in Constance bay have been condemned as unfit to live in because of severe flooding damage. Jeff and Christine Smith, CARA Shaw and Diane flood don't have homes they can live in. They all need to build a new home. But they don't have flood insurance or the cash. They have applied for funding from the Ontario disaster recovery program. These people are desperate and they are stressed out. They have been told that they will probably qualify for funding. Minister, could you put a special rush on processing their application forms?

>> Minister Mauro: Speaker, let me, in terms of the timing of the program, just say to the member and to the House I want to congratulate if I can our member from Ancaster Dundas Glen brought Ted McMeekin our former Minister who when he had -- When he had carriage of the file brought in two very significant changes to the program about two years ago. There used to be the requirement that local community would have to fund-raise a significant amount of money even before the program could begin. And there also was a requirement at that time for some local administration in terms of administering the claims. The former Minister, when he had the helm and carriage of this file, changed this program in a very significant way. It has enabled the assistance from the disaster recovery assistance program to get to the people who need the help if they're in the geographically defined boundary and if they're eligible to receive the assistance much faster than would have been the case. I understand it's very serious. I understand how distressed people can be. I can only tell you that we have already changed the program to get the money out the door as quickly as we can to those people that are eligible.

MPP Nicholls to Minister Del Duca Re: School Bus Safety

>> MPP Rick Nicholls: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the Premier. Everyone in this legislature knows that it's illegal to pass a school bus when it is stopped, lights flashing and stop arm extended. Last February, my bill short-formed the school bus system's bill or access 2017 passed unanimously at second reading. But unfortunately your government continues to dismiss this bill as

insignificant any can't. We tried to move it forward before the session's end by asking the government to include it as part of the safe schools act. Sadly, this request was denied. Premier, it's been 216 days. All this government proposes to do about blow bys is the call for more and more consultation with municipalities. We all know that consultation is code for doing nothing. The government trap won't solve the problem. Premier, will you see it to it that my bill be sent to committee and passed?

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: Thanks so very much, Speaker. I thank the member for Chatham-kent-Essex for his question. He and I have had not only in the course of debate here in this legislature but also conversations here in this building. I do acknowledge and I have acknowledged to him directly that I recognize the importance, our government recognizes the importance of making sure that we are in the strongest position possible to make sure that our most vulnerable road users including students, including those that are near school buses are protected at all times, Speaker. So when the member talks about the consultation process we have committed to undertake -- in fact in my conversations with that member I've offered him the opportunity to participate in these consultations. Speaker, it's not simply about delay. It's not all about delaying in fact, Mr. Speaker, . It's about making sure that we get it right. There is what I'll say is an evidentiary burden that's required in order for the technology to work appropriately and in order for us to be able to make sure that whatever is drawn from those cameras can be entered into evidence without the need for a stand-alone independent witness. We need to make sure we're getting it right. That's why we're going to do the consultation, Speaker. Happy to include that the number in the consultation process, Speaker, and happy to have a conversation about it as well.

>> MPP Nicholls: I want to ask the Premier, last may we missed a golden opportunity to get my nonpartisan bill 94 to get passed into law before the summer recess. People are ouj raged this didn't happen. I have letters from municipalities throughout the province supporting this bill and hundreds of signatures on petitions calling the government to action. Recently, a blow-by occurred in tecumseh. It was captured on a home security system. It recorded a mother's horror as she went out to meet her children and saw a car passing on the shoulder of the road just as her children were about to get off the bus. Luckily no children were hurt, but it could have ended in tragedy. Premier, Minister, the longer your government dismisses bill 94, the greater the chances are of tragedy. Will you take action today and expedite bill 74 before it is too late?

>> Minister Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I thank the member for the follow-up question. I will say -- I didn't say this in the opening answer. I will say it very clearly. There is nobody in this House frankly, Speaker, I can't believe there's anyone in the province who would in any way, shape or form not want to move forward aggressively to make sure we stop the blow bys from happening as that member has said and as members of all sides of the House have said, Mr. Speaker. Number one there is nothing that currently stops video cameras were be -- from being used on school buses. In fact there are some places in the province that have gone forward looking at some of the pilot opportunities that exist because of the technology. What we are consulting on not just with municipalities and the member opposite, if he chooses to participate in the consultation but also with our road safety partners, is making sure that whatever is produced by way of the camera itself, can be entered into evidence in a way that does not necessarily require a third party be interesting to verify that the offence in question, that -- as has been pointed out like red-light cameras, Speaker. We're not quite there yet, Speaker. We hope to be there soon. I will assure all members as soon as we can satisfy the rest of the elements required --

MPP DiNovo to Minister Hoskins Re: Opioid Crisis

>> MPP Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Ontario is in the midst of an opioid overdose emergency and it's only getting worse. Last year at least 865 people lost their lives to overdoses. In my riding, people are overdosing every single day. And frontline harm reduction workers are doing heroic work to save lives. But they're still not getting the resources they need on the front lines. Toronto's board of health is calling on the Liberal government to officially

declare this an emergency. When will the Premier recognize the urgency of this epidemic and declare a public emergency? Because that's actually what it is.

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And the member opposite is absolutely correct. This is a public health crisis and we can never forget the 865 individuals, sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters lost their lives to overdose last year. And the crisis is getting worse, Mr. Speaker. That's why we have a very substantial, almost \$300 million response to this crisis at every possible level. Mr. Speaker, that includes here in Toronto. We are providing 100% of the funding for the three safe injection sites. We're providing naloxone free of charge around the province to more than 200 different localities. 1,600 pharmacies where we're providing test strips to test for fentanyl, including at the safe injection sites and pop-up sites across the province. Where we're making those investments at every touch point of this crisis so that we can be confident that we'll turn the tide, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People in Toronto know there's an emergency. Toronto board of health is asking the Liberal government to call it an emergency. It's claiming more lives every day. Toronto's medical officer of health says a declaration of emergency could trigger, quote, a smoother flow of dollars, unquote, to the front lines. And frontline harm reduction workers say we need a declaration of emergency so we can start to see an end in sight to this epidemic. When will the Premier listen to Toronto, declare an emergency and get the resources that frontline workers need right now to save more lives?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, our mechanism to declare a provincial emergency is for events that are expected to be of a time-limited nature. In fact we are able to do it for a 14 day period which is then renewable., Mr. Speaker, it's important to know that, and for individuals I think we all realize this is not a finite crisis. This is a crisis that has been going on for some time. Regrettably it will be going on for some time into the future. That's why we're making multimillion-dollar investments. I know that individuals are looking to B.C. Where they've had to declare such an emergency in order to compel hospitals to provide E.R. Data in order to compel officials, including the police to coordinate with the government and with the Minister of health. We have that ability without having to declare such a crisis. So I'm actually confident in saying that the declaration of a provincial emergency would not give me any additional tools to do other than --

MPP Potts to Minister McMahon Re: Invictus Games

>> MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of tourism, culture and sport. And I can't stress enough, Speaker, how excited I am that Ontario's hosting the invictus games this month. Thank you. Yes. We are hosting such a talented group of athletes and service people, both from Canada and around the globe, and this has showcased a level of co-operation that inspires and motivates all of us. Just last week I had the pleasure of participating in the kicking off of the games with the rising of the invictus flag at Nathan Phillips square and also tomorrow I'll be attending the invictus Barrick gold career fair. Now I've had the opportunity to meet some of the inspirational athletes, the coaches and their families and I have been so moved by this experience and by the presence of all these different athletes from 17 nations, and I feel lucky to be part of these games and I will continue to watch closely. But, Speaker, can you, through you to the Minister, can she tell the members of this House. What we can expect from these invictus games?

>> Minister Eleanor McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from Beaches-East York for his question and for participating in the invictus games here in Toronto. Speaker, thanks to all the hard work of our volunteers and everyone involved we can now say that Ontario has hosted the largest invictus games held to date. And they are to a standard athletes from around the world are noticing. Just yesterday I had the honour of presenting medals to the women's hand bike competition in beautiful high park. I spoke to athletes from Italy, France, the United States and Great Britain and they were highly complimentary -- Great Britain and they were highly complimentary. I had

the pleasure of meeting his Royal highness prince Harry. He was kind enough to thank me and our government for our support of the games and he had nothing but praise for them. More importantly, Speaker, he talked -- Thank you, Speaker. Speaks to the dignity of the games and the athletes -- Mr. Speaker, . We have a legacy and honour to host them here in Ontario.

>> MPP Potts: Thank you, Speaker, for that supplementary. And thank you to the Minister, who I often affectionately refer to as the him sterl of fun and fitness, for her response. The reality, Speaker, is this Minister 's done incredible work to promote sport and tourism and culture in our province, and we're absolutely delighted with her work in that regard. And it' amazing, Speaker, to see how wide reaching and how impactful our government's investment in the games has been. \$10 million from the people of Ontario. The contribution to these games will have enormous payoffs to the athletes, to the volunteers, the spectators and to the economic overall economic benefit of our province. The games truly represent the power of sport to challenge, inspire and overcome limitations. So, Speaker, through you again to the Minister, can she explain and speak to how we can all now get involved in these games?

>> Minister McMahon: [Speaking in French] [End of Translation] Thank you to the member for Beaches- East York for that question. While attending the gains and visiting athletes village I've had the pleasure and honour of meeting team Canada ems -- and witnessing the camarad Erie they share, the care and attention they receive from their loved ones, physician and caregivers and friends and Colleagues and hear countless stories of personal courage and determination. While there I've also met dedicated volunteers, many of whom volunteered at the pan am parapan am games. One of the many legacies of those games, Speaker. I want to share with all Ontarians and members of this House admission continues to be free and open to the public including the archery event held today at the fort York national historic site. Finally I would like to thank the coaches, Speaker. It's national coaches week and we all know what a valuable role that they play. I would like members of this House to know and thank all of them for the wonderful role that they play in coaching our athletes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Coe to Minister Hunter Re: New School Construction

>> MPP Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker. And to the Minister of education. The Liberal government continues to be out of touch, Speaker, with the needs of parents and students in communities across this great province. In east Aurora, for example, the population has grown by 30%. And the community needs a new public high school. Because the Minister has ignored the needs to this local community, Speaker, parents in east Aurora are forced to pay, forced to pay to bus their children to a school over 30 minutes away. Minister, how long will families in east Aurora have to wait before you accept their request to approve the construction of the new public high school?

>> Minister Mitzie Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise in this House and to talk about the investments that we're making in Ontario's publicly funded education system because, Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, we have made unprecedented investments in education in Ontario. When you look at our new schools that have been built in this province since 2003, 820 new schools have been built and over 800 extensive additions and renovations. Mr. Speaker, we have invested in the capital needs of our schools since 2003 \$1.5 billion. And I have gone -- that has gone into communities and is providing excellent learning environments for our students with these new facilities just on the first week of school. I visited a school in brampton. State-of-the-art 21st century learning facilities for our students so that they can get the best education possible.

>> MPP Coe: Speaker, back to the Minister of education. These Aurora parents have repeatedly raised this issue with the Minister of education, and this government has not responded and done absolutely nothing about the proposed construction of a public high school. Speaker, not only that, but this Minister has closed schools in communities elsewhere in Ontario that desperately need them to stay open. When will the Liberal government finally take action and listen to the community

needs of parents and students in east Aurora?

>> Minister Hunter: Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. We are very committed to our public education system, and since 2003 we've increased education funding in this province by 66%. You know, it would be very good for the member opposite, given that he is the education critic, to really recognize the growth in schools even in his own riding of Whitby, where we have built or improved significantly 11 schools, Mr. Speaker. Eleven schools since 2003. So we're making these investments because we know that Ontario students deserve the best education possible. Our Premier this morning has talked about that, has talked about how these investments are providing a return to our students. Our graduation rates are now at 86.5%. That is an increase of 1 percentage points since 2003.

MPP Gretzky to Minister Milczyn Re: Homelessness

>> MPP Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. Last week the city of Windsor was dealt a devastating blow. Our community support services found out that they will not receive one cent of the 200 million in funding that the province alet for tackling homelessness this year. Ministry officials said our proposal was very good. Speaker, there was no excuse to deny Windsor a portion of this funding. We just found out from statistics Canada that among all cities in Canada, Windsor has the highest rate of children living in low income House holds. Almost one in four. That's over 16,000 children in Windsor. I recently visited our downtown mission Victoria manor and the welcome centre shelter for women and families in Windsor. It's clear that they, along with other community organizations, are stretched thin and in desperate need of resources. Speaker, will the Premier -- Please explain to this House why her government does not think Windsor's homelessness and domestic violence services deserve their support?

>> Minister Peter Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for the question. Our government is committed to investing in affordable housing across this province and housing to support people in transition, to escape chronic cycle of homelessness by putting them on a road to having long-term -- a long-term home and dignified life with the supports they need to sustain themselves. Our government has invested \$200 million through the homes for good program across the province to assist communities to develop the kind of housing that will help break the cycle of chronic homelessness, Mr. Speaker. This program was very well received by housing providers -- And municipalities, and I'm happy to give more information in the supplementary.

>> MPP Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier. I understand that many cities in Ontario applied for this funding because, just like in Windsor, families across this province are struggling too. Under this Liberal government, hydro bill versus gone up 300%. An important -- and important public services like health care continue to be cut. And what has this government done to respond to families in crisis? We recently found out that one in ten shelters in Ontario closed between 2011 and 2016 because of funding cuts. Muncipalities like Windsor have fewer and fewer resources for homelessness prevention. Even so the number of people whose primary residence is a shelter has increased by 10%. Windsor's community supports for our most vulnerable are operating with el over capacity and yet this Liberal government denied them the funding they desperately need, this while spending 5.5 million on advertising to repair the damaged Liberal image. Speaker, when will the Premier get her priorities straight and support Windsor families in need?

>> Minister Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And on this side of the House, our priority is to break the chronic cycle of homelessness and to help people get into long-term remember child care. Since 2013, we've helped over 103,000 people who suffer from homelessness to break that cycle. And since 2003 the city of Windsor has received over \$106 million in funding for affordable housing. We've created 305 affordable units. We've repaired 6,944 affordable units. We've provided 305 Windsor House holds with down payment assistance and we've prevented 1,235 evictions, Mr. Speaker. We've invested 57.4 million dollars -- To the city of Windsor as part of our community homelessness prevention initiative, on top of the other investments, Mr. Speaker. Beer' committed

to -- Breaking homelessness in this province. We have a plan to do so.

MPP Martins to Minister Hunter Re: Education Equity Action Plan

>> MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question this morning is for the Minister of education. Schools in my riding of Davenport and across Ontario -- Are incredibly diverse places to learn. In fact -- So thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question this morning is for the Minister of education. Schools in my riding of Davenport and across Ontario are incredibly diverse places to learn. In fact the nearly 2 million students in our province come from many culturally diverse communities. We know that children and youth deserve a school system that listens to their voices and responds with plans that mirror their needs. I know our government is working hard to address systemic Barriers to student achievements, equity and well-being in schools but there is always more that can be done. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister, what is the Ontario government doing to make schools fairer and more inclusive for students in Davenport and across the province?

>> Minister Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I want to thank the member from Davenport for her question, Mr. Speaker. I have repeatedly gone out into her community and I've seen how dedicated she is to the student and to the families in her community. An absolute real leader, Mr. Speaker. And equity is a central part of Ontario's renewed vision for education. We have to move beyond the status quo. Just this month our government announced plans for making our public education system fairer for all students by identifying and eliminating systemic Barriers, discriminatory practices and biases to support student success. We know that existing structured policies, programs, practices may unintentionally disadvantage some student populations and that is why, Mr. Speaker, I announced our government's road map to equity in Ontario's education equity action plan. The plan will help fulfil Ontario's vision for an education system that is welcoming and inclusive for all students, regardless of their background.