

# Transcript of Provincial Question Period for October 20, 2016

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period

41st Parliament, 2nd Session

Thursday, October 20, 2016

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Windstream Ruling

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The people of Ontario will pay for this government's loss of the windstream lawsuit for years and years to come. The \$28 million judgment is just the tip of the iceberg. The tribunal stated that the \$5.2 billion contract is still valid and in force. That means the Liberals have two choices. Build the project and pay out \$5.2 billion, or enter into settlement negotiations to try to convince windstream to take less. Either way, Ontario is on the hook for billions. Mr. Speaker, when do the Liberals plan on handing over \$5.2 billion to windstream? Mr. Speaker, is this gas plant 2.0?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member opposite, and as I have said, we can confirm that we have -- been advised of the tribunal's decision. What's interesting is

that the tribunal dismissed the majority of claims made against Canada and Ontario, Mr. Speaker. The final award was significantly less than the damages being sought by windstream, Mr. Speaker, and Ontario is reviewing the decision. Officials are reviewing the decision and we understand that Canada's doing the same in order to determine next steps. It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, as I hear the heckling from the other side -- We are taking a cautious and responsible approach, Mr. Speaker, to offshore wind to allow for the development of research and coordination, particularly, particularly in the area of decommissioning requirements and noise over water, Mr. Speaker. We're looking for evidence and research in those areas.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. Not only will we be on the hook for billions of dollars because this government had to save two Liberal seats, and not only are we going to have to pay \$28 million to windstream already. There's untold millions of dollars spent fighting this case. The legal cost involved in this. We know the Canadian government sent 10 representatives to the tribunal at a cost of \$8 million in legal fees. Ontario sent 20 representatives to the tribunal. It's fair to assume the costs will be significantly more. So my question to the Premier. He may not want to talk about the \$5.2 billion, but at least tell the legislature, tell the people Ontario how much you've spent in legal costs. How much taxpayer dollars have been spent fighting this windstream contract that you mistakenly committed Ontario to?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to rise and outline, you know, to the leader of the opposition what truly is happening right now in Ontario is carefully reviewing the decision, and we understand that the federal government is doing the same in order to determine next steps, Mr. Speaker. It's been less than a week that we've been advised -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So Ontario's been advised of the tribunal's decision in NAFTA chapter 11 dispute between windstream and Canada, and the tribunal dismissed the majority of claims with the final 25 million being significantly less than the -- what was originally sought, Mr. Speaker. But when it comes to dollars and wanting to know the amounts, when they want us to rip up contracts, Mr. Speaker, that's billions and billions and billions of dollars, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to know what their amount is, Mr. Speaker, because they don't have --

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. First it was the complete botching of the oesp and paying \$9 million in consultants instead of helping low-income families pay their hydro bills. Now it's millions and millions of dollars spent to lose a lot through the cost of \$2 million so far. And likely to be significantly more down the road. Why won't the Liberals tell us how much they spent? We know the federal government spent \$8 million on legal fees. We know Ontario had a much bigger delegation. I couldn't get the answer from the Minister of energy. I'll ask the Premier again how much did this government, how much Premier's government spend on legal fees trying to fight this foolish commitment that this Premier's made? Once again on energy?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important to let the leader of the opposition know that we're still reviewing the decision, and it's really too early to jump to -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, you know what? We're going to let, you know, it take its course, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So we're very proud of renewable energy on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the pro-coal party on that side, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to ensure that we invest and do the right thing when it comes to renewable energy in this province, Mr. Speaker. But you know, I know the leader of the opposition talks about the oesp program and the O.E.B., Mr. Speaker. The oesp program is actually doing great work. We're actually helping 145,000 families, Mr. Speaker, with \$21 million in benefits so far and that's only in 10 months, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Energy Management & Political Donations

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The auditor general revealed that Ontario overpaid by \$9.2 billion for renewable energy contracts. That's the auditor general being very specific. An overpayment of \$9.2 billion. We also know the Ontario Liberal party received \$3 million in donations from 30 companies that received renewable energy contracts. So, Mr. Speaker, my question is straightforward to the Premier, and I realize it may be uncomfortable for her to answer, but why did Ontario pay, overpay by \$9.2 billion for renewable energy contracts that every single Ontarian is now paying on their hydro bills?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know the Minister of energy's going to want to speak to this question. You know, Mr. Speaker, we made a decision to complete the shutdown of all of the coal-fired plants in Ontario and we made a decision to replace that energy with clean, clean electricity, Mr. Speaker. The electricity grid is 90% emissions free in Ontario. And I not heckling on the other side is coming from a party that wouldn't have done that, doesn't believe in it, doesn't believe in clean energy, Mr. Speaker. Would take us back to coal generation, Mr. Speaker. We know that having no smog days is in the best interests of every person in this province, but especially, Mr. Speaker, it's in the best interests of kids who are growing, whose lungs are growing, growing kids who might have asthma. It's an incredibly important -- it's an incredibly important initiative that we have taken, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is our responsibility to remove pollution from the air. We've done that.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. I know it's the Liberal talking points to say this is about coal. It's not about coal. The Progressive Conservatives announced to phase out coal. This is about an overpayment of \$9.2 billion. This is about the Liberal party accepting \$1.3 million in donations. I'm tired of the diversions. I'm tired of the Liberals' speaking points. People in Ontario are struggling and they seem oblivious to it. Mr. Speaker, \$12 million to pay for high-priced consultants and ads for the oesp. Untold millions of dollars spent fighting the wind stream lawsuit. Overpaying \$9.2 billion that's on our bills now. Mr. Speaker, when it comes to Liberal energy policies, my question is this. Why is it always Liberal lawyers, Liberal consultants and friends that get rich while the people of Ontario are stuck with higher and higher hydro bills?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and answer the opposition's question once again, because you know what? The leader of the opposition makes it very clear that they would -- you know, wouldn't have built any new supply, Mr. Speaker. That they would have continued to left the system crumbling, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that when we have a blackout like we did in 2003 -- Mr. Speaker, back in 2003 we didn't have enough generation. We didn't have enough capacity. So when we took over, Mr. Speaker, we had to build that capacity, and we made sure, Mr. Speaker, that we built that capacity making -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So we're very proud that we've made a green system. We've eliminated coal, Mr. Speaker. We no longer have to send out warnings to families right across the province telling them that they don't have to go outside to breathe, Mr. Speaker. That's something that we should all be proud of. Unfortunately this government is very proud of it. The opposition is not. We know there's a pro coal party, Mr. Speaker, because they want to continue to find cheaper ways to make electricity, Speaker. We understand some families are struggling. We have programs --

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. The Minister of energy says they're helping -- they have programs that are helping. Well, let's talk about their programs. There are still 355,000 low-income families in Ontario that have yet to receive the Ontario electricity support program -- So, Mr. Speaker, to talk about the program, because they spent so much on consultants rather than helping low-income families, 350,000 low-income families in Ontario that were meant to get this help aren't getting it. And then there's the 1.2 million rural families in Ontario that the Liberals have excluded from the rural or remote rate protection. What kind of help is this? The only people that I can see that are being helped by this government. Foolish energy policies are Pennsylvania or Michigan or New York. My question to the Premier's when are you going to stop making America great and make Ontario great?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the leader of the opposition keeps quoting Donald Trump because he believes in Donald Trump's philosophy, Mr. Speaker. But on this side of the House, Mr.

Speaker, we do not. Love struck hate, Mr. Speaker. What we've done, Mr. Speaker, is make sure that we've invested in programs like the oesp program. In ten months, Mr. Speaker, in ten months 145,000 families have been helped by the oesp program. We don't believe that's enough, Mr. Speaker, so we budget \$225 million to get as many of them as possible onto this program. Mr. Speaker, this is a great program to ensure that every, every MPP Actually promotes this. I know when I was at AMO there was opposition party mayors that were coming from their ridings and they said they didn't know about the program, Mr. Speaker. So you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to make sure that my ministry sends to every MPP The oesp programs again. Ensure these families get on the program when they need it.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Hoskins) Re: eHealth & Digital Health Strategy

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thanks, Speaker. My question's for the Premier. Will the Premier rule out privatizing some or all of Ontario's health assets?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, we've been very clear. I've been clear. The Deputy Premier's been clear. The Minister of energy's been clear that -- sorry the Minister of health has been clear. He's been clear, too. The Minister of health has been clear. We are not selling health, Mr. Speaker. We are not selling people -- patient's personal health information, Mr. Speaker. There have been millions of dollars that have been invested in digital, medical initiatives in this province through health, Mr. Speaker, and we need to understand the value of that. We need to understand how we can improve service to patients. That's what this is about. That's what the Minister of health has asked Ed Clark to give us advice on, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, yesterday the Liberals said they would be valuing our digital health assets. And after valuing, they would be leveraging them, Speaker. That's what the Liberals said yesterday in this chamber. It sounds a lot like what the Liberal plan was for Hydro One, which the Premier calls unlocking value and leveraging our assets, Speaker. How many private companies has Ed Clark or the government spoken to about being either a private partner in our health services or purchasing our assets?

>> Premier Wynne: So, Mr. Speaker, the leader of the third party might know that Canada health infoway has estimated roughly \$1 billion in annual benefits to Ontario as a result of the investments that have been made in health, Mr. Speaker, and almost \$6 billion in cumulative benefits since 2007. It's important that we undertake this review so that we can better understand the value of the digital assets as we move toward a new vision for digital health in Ontario, Mr. Speaker. The mandate of health expires in 2017, Mr. Speaker, and, you know, I've mentioned in this House before that Ed Clark also conducted important work to improve the lcbo and beer store to maximize the value of our assets, Mr. Speaker, and that's what's happened. There's been no sell-off of the lcbo, Mr. Speaker, and I know the leader of the third party will say that that's very different than ehealth and it is different, but in terms of an asset that's owned by the people of Ontario. It is the same thing, Mr. Speaker. How do we make sure that we understand the value and how do we make sure that we maximize the value of that to the people of Ontario.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, if the government wants to improve health, they should improve -- excuse me, health. But it's not what the Premier has said. Nothing that Ed Clark has said and nothing that the Minister has said explains why they need to open -- or to provide the open market value to find out the open market value of our health assets in order to improve it. Nothing that she has said, the Premier, nothing that the Minister has said, fog that Ed Clark has said tells us why they need to know this open market value. And she continues to not answer that question today, Speaker. Has Ed Clark or anyone else been given instructions to talk to private companies about private partnerships to provide, health services

or the private operations of parts of our health system?

>> Min. Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are not selling or privatizing health or Ontarians' personal health records, full stop, period. We're not selling health. I can't understand why the leader of the third party doesn't realize the value as Canada health infoway has, to actually look at the investments made -- so with a mandate due to end at the end of 2017, with incredible opportunity in the digital health realm, including in this province, looking at the investments that we've made where 80% of family doctors are using electronic medical records, most of our diagnostic and advertised. We have incredible opportunity. It behooves us quite frankly to have an expert like Ed Clark look at the assets, look at how we can actually many prove upon the system that we've created.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Sousa) Re: Hydro One

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. The answers did not make me feel very confident. My next question's also for the Premier. When the Premier decided to privatize Hydro One, Hydro One was given a \$2.6 billion tax holiday by the Liberals. A \$2.6 billion tax holiday was given to Hydro One when the Liberals privatized it. Hydro One wants to keep the benefit of that tax holiday for its investors. New Democrats think that that tax holiday \$2.6 billion, Speaker, should benefit Ontarians who are struggling with their hydro costs. Will the Premier ensure this \$2.6 billion tax break goes to Ontario ratepayers and not to private investors?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I know the Minister of finance is going to want to weigh in on this on the supplementary. But, Mr. Speaker, let me just say this, that the leader of the third party does not support the investments that we are making in infrastructure, roads, bridges, transit, as a result of the decision that is we have made, Mr. Speaker, including, including the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One. She doesn't support those investments. She doesn't support, I suppose by extension, the economic growth that we are seeing in this province as a result of those investments, Mr. Speaker. Ontario is one of the leaders in the country in terms of economic growth, Mr. Speaker. We're outstripping other provinces, other states, O.E.C. -- European -- North American jurisdictions and g-7 countries. So, Mr. Speaker, the growth that we are seeing. As a result of the plan that we are implementing including investment in infrastructure, is not something that the leader of the third party supports, Mr. Speaker, but she should.

>> Andrea Horwath: Nobody believes what this Premier says at the best of times and they're certain not going to believe that. But what they want to hear is what's going to happen to the \$2.6 billion, Speaker. That's what I'm asking this Premier to come clean about with the people of this province. Hydro One's annual report says that keeping this \$2.6 billion tax gift will, and I quote, result in net cash savings over the next five years due to the reduction of cash taxes payable by Hydro One, end quote. They warn their shareholders in their annual report, in the same report that the O.E.B. Could actually force them to ensure that the benefit of this \$2.6 billion actually goes to ratepayers instead of private for-profit shareholders. So the question is -- Is the Premier going to stand with Hydro One's private investors, or are they going to stand with the people of Ontario?

>> Min. Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. And the references made as to how we were proceeding to facilitate greater value for a corporation owned by the province and the people of Ontario, which we still remain by -- retain by the way at this point and we continue to always be the largest shareholder, benefitting from those endeavours. Furthermore, the exemptions that were put in place were in lieu of taxes, which are still then going to be net benefitted to the province. So the member

opposite makes reference to the transaction that enabled us to maximize our value. At the same time the O.E.B. Independently will continue to foster and look at those rates, which by the way was zero increase this is time around, recognizing the tremendous opportunity that Hydro One have been able to be more efficient in their system. Of course that will also benefit ratepayers in the end and all Ontario. Thank you.

>> Andrea Horwath: The Liberal privatization, Speaker, of Hydro One means that Hydro One is definitely getting this \$2.6 billion tax break. The Minister of finance just acknowledged that. The O.E.B. Is absolutely going to decide whether that benefits Ontarians or whether that is going to benefit private investors. The government can issue a directive today. In fact I'm asking the government straight up today to commit to putting a directive forward to the O.E.B. So that the saving of Hydro One that they're getting for that tax break, that \$2.6 billion, is actually directed to the benefit of Ontario ratepayers and not to the benefit of private investors. Will they make -- People of Ontario.

>> So, Mr. Speaker, the transaction that ensued as a result of that very exemption, all of this is going to the benefit of infrastructure and investment to be made by the province of Ontario to build new roads and infrastructure. It's going directly into the trillium trust for benefit of all Ontarians and the people of Ontario. The member opposite should know that and if she doesn't she should see how the transaction occurred so that we could reinvest those proceeds in other activities and other projects, again. Something that the member opposite in that party has no plan to ensue and we will, Mr. Speaker, reinvest those moneys dollar for dollar for the purposes of making greater assets and greater returns for the province of Ontario

MPP Clark to Minister McMahon Re: Ontario Trillium Foundation

>> MPP Steve Clark: Thanks, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of tourism culture and sport. Speaker, a so-called regionalization scheme to slash Ontario trillium foundation catchment areas from 16 to just 5 communities. Already trillium is allowing its 16 grant review teams to wither away. These volunteers are the program's heart and soul who truly understand their communities. The Minister should know that her ministry's memorandum of understanding with trillium requires those teams to have at least 18 members. But according to the agency's website, only Toronto now has the minimum. The average of the others is just .... Speaker, will the Minister tell trillium to stop downsizing by stealth and uphold its agreement by acting to fill those vacancies?

>> Min. Eleanor McMahon: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I want to thank the Honourable member for his question. The reason I want to thank him, I know he knows as I do that trillium remains one of the most important mechanisms in our country for funding the not-for-profit sector and for building capacity in options right across our province. That's why, Speaker, on this side of the House we're investing in the trillium foundation. We've held the funding steady, and in fact, Speaker, I'm proud to say that next year with our 150th anniversary on the horizon we're investing even more in programs and projects across this province, Speaker. So if the Honourable member wants to have a conversation, Speaker, about his ideas on how we can make a more robust infrastructure, I'm happy to listen to them. We can have that conversation. We remain committed to trillium. We are filling those vacancies of pace, Speaker, in our local communities and local grant teams and I look forward to the supplementary. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Clark: Back to the Minister. Speaker, I raised this with the previous Minister and he was obviously surprised by what was going on and is full steam ahead under this Minister's watch. Grant review teams are being starved of volunteers credit to to ensure granting decisions have the most local impact. Multiple -  
- iple catchment areas have no local staff to help volunteer groups navigate the application process. So if the Minister doesn't believe me, that this is wrong, I ask her to talk to frontline staff. They know their hands-on work with agencies cannot be replaced by a 1-800 number. Trillium wants this plan finalised by April, Speaker, but it can't happen unless this Minister signs off. Speaker, will the Minister commit to maintaining trillium's local roots by pledging not to sign a new M.O.U. With fewer than 16 catchment areas?

>> Min. McMahon: You know, Speaker, the only thing again I'm happy to take the opposite -- member opposite's question. The only thing that the surprises me, Speaker, and people on this side of the House is that the Honourable member would ask that kind of question when he knows full well this government has been committed to the Ontario trillium foundation for years and will continue to do so. That commitment remains strong, Speaker, and our local grant teams are critically important as the Honourable member knows. Why? Because they give us the kind of local advice that helps us and helps them to make the critical investment decisions that further the work of our not-for-profit sector. Finally, Speaker, I just want to tell the House that, as a former trillium funded organization and a lead early of a not-for-profit organization that benefits from the Ontario trillium foundation I, my ministry, our entire government are committed to see those local teams remaining strong and in place so that we can continue to fund a robust sector. That's what we're doing on this side of the House, Speaker. Thank you very much

#### MPP Gelinias to Minister Hoskins Re: Medical Wait Times

>> MPP France Gelinias: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. For knee surgery, you should be able to look at the official government wait time for surgery website and trust that what is written there is actually accurate. But the good people in London and across southwestern Ontario know that they can't trust those numbers. They are waiting months longer than the government will admit or publish for the surgery that they need. In fact local surgeons say that the real time for hip and knee surgery in London are twice as long as what the ministry published data online states. Why does the Premier think that this is right -- it is right to publish surgical wait times that are not accurate?

>> Min. Eric Hoskins: I know that the member opposite is talking about -- there are different aspects obviously once a decision has been made to refer to a specialist, and that individual may or may not require surgery at the end of that visit with the specialist, and then there's a separate period of time if the decision by the specialist by that frontline clinician is made that surgery's warranted, then there's a period of time obviously that ensues prior to that operation taking place. So it is important for all of us I think to recognize that it is largely at the discretion of the frontline clinician and specialist to determine the level of priority for both of those situations, so we are working closely with our frontline providers, but we're also investing incredible amounts of money, \$2 billion, only on wait times to bring them down to -- Be able to provide more hip and knee surgery and other types of surgery. We've invested in the last decade roughly \$2 billion, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Gelinias: Thank you, Speaker. I know exactly how wait time is calculated in Ontario, and so do the surgeons in London, and what you have on your website is not accurate. In northern Ontario or throughout Ontario, people should not have to wait 200, 300, 400 days for the surgery. It just should not be happening, but in London, after the surgeons said that yes you need a hip and knee surgery, after the clock starts ticking for this website wait time, the government says you will wait seven months. But every surgeon in London knows that it will be at least 11 months before you will get your hip or knee surgery. Will the Premier stop publishing inaccurate wait times, and even more importantly make sure that the people get access to surgery in a timely manner?

>> Min. Hoskins: I know the member opposite understands the difference that I've described earlier between wait ones and wait twos. It is critically important that we reduce both of those waiting periods, and we're doing that. But I have to recall from the Fraser institute and I think the Fraser institute is saying this week not only need to be surprised but I think we can appreciate with confidence what they're saying. They've given us straight As in their wait time alliance report card in five key service areas including hip replacement surgery, knee replacement surgery, cataract procedures, cancer radiation and coronary



artery bypass grafts. Is there more work to be done? Of course there is. Are we looking at wait time measurements? I need to remind that party and p.c. party that neither party measured any waits at all when they were in government. We're doing it. We're at the top of the list in terms of the shortest wait times in this country. And we're continuing to improve, Mr. Speaker

#### MPP Vernile to Minister Zimmer Re: Algonquin Land Claim Agreement

>> MPP Daiene Vernile: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Indian Affairs and reconciliation. On Tuesday -- indigenous. On Tuesday the Minister was in Ottawa for a very important event marking an historic moment for Canada, the province of Ontario and the Algonquins of Ontario. Now we heard that, unlike many First Nations the Algonquins of Ontario never entered into a formal treaty with the crown, with a claim dating back 250 years. The Algonquins' land claim is one of the largest and most complex in Ontario. Speaker, could the Minister please elaborate on the significance of the event that took place on Tuesday?

>> Min. David Zimmer: Yes. Thank you, Speaker. Yes, Speaker. It was a truly significant event. The signing of a historic agreement in principle between the federal and Algonquins of Ontario. It marked the start of a new treaty relationship. Working together in the spirit of reconciliation to resolve a very long-standing land claim that covers an area of 36,000 kilometres, square kilometres in eastern Ontario. More than a million people share this land with the Algonquins of Ontario. The historic treaty will provide balance for the rights and interests of all concerned and allow long overdue reconciliation to provide economic opportunities by creating an environment of true partnership with all. Thank you, Speaker.

>> MPP Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank the Minister for his response. It's very encouraging to see that the government has worked very hard in partnership with the Algonquins of Ontario and the federal government to reach this very significant milestone. And might I add that we are pleased now that we have a federal party, a federal partner in Ottawa that cares about indigenous issues and has actually come to the table. Land claim and treaty negotiations give us the opportunity to resolve long-standing disputes concerning land in a balanced way that respects the rights of indigenous peoples. It's a remarkable example of reconciliation in action. Speaker, could Minister please tell us what Ontarians should expect from this historic agreement in principle?

>> Min. Zimmer: Yes. Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, let me highlight some, just some of the key components to the Algonquin agreement in principle. The agreement was first shaped by consultation with 10 Algonquin Ontario communities and other indigenous groups. The agreement sets out the main elements of a settlement, including the Algonquins of Ontario to receive capital funding from Canada and from Ontario and the transfer of provincial Crown land to the Algonquins. Importantly no privately owned land will be taken away from anyone to settle the claim, and no one will lose access to their private property. Importantly, very importantly, Algonquin Park will remain a park for the enjoyment of all. Speaker, and to members of this chamber, I tell you that the negotiating parties took great, great care to craft this agreement. Thank you, Speaker

#### MPP Wilson to Minister Hoskins Re: Medical Wait Times

>> MPP Jim Wilson: My question's for the Minister of health. Recently Mr. Robbie Ross of Collingwood wrote to me to say that he requires knee replacement surgery. Mr. Ross met with his orthopaedic surgeon at the Collingwood general hospital. Who told him recently that the joint surgery budget is used up for this fiscal year. Mr. Ross is now on a waiting list and the fiscal year for the surgery budget doesn't start again until April 2017. And Mr. Ross has no idea how long he'll be on that waiting list. Mr. Ross is frustrated and his surgeon is, too. This type of situation is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. It signifies how the government's wasteful spending, mismanagement and scandal has harmed our health care sector. We warned you, Minister and Premier, that this would happen. Speaker, what does this Minister have to say to Mr. Ross. And many other residents in my ride hog have similar stories?

>> Min. Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would say to Mr. Ross that it's important that he work with his local primary care provider, with his specialist. There are some specialists, Mr. Speaker, that have longer wait times than others. The Min. is in a position and often does, with individual patients, Mr. Speaker, works with them to find perhaps a specialist, a surgeon, a hospital nearby that has a shorter wait time but it's also the responsibility of that specialist to prioritize, and so those that truly most urgently do require that hip or knee replacement or cataract surgery, it's complete L1 within the realm of that hospital, completely within the realm of that specialist to actually put that person at the top of the list, Mr. Speaker. So we need to make sure that triage is taking place. We need to, as a province, invest as we are \$2 billion just to reduce wait times. For important procedures. That's what's got us to the top of the list in Canada for the shortest wait times across the board, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Wilson: Well clearly, Mr. Speaker, the government's going to have to do better. We're only halfway through the fiscal year, and hospital after hospital, surgeon after surgeon has run out of money. You blamed us for not voting for your budget. Well, your budget passed and made things worse so thank god we didn't vote for it. Lisa Henderly a 46-year-old wasaga beach resident who needs hip surgery like Mr. Ross she's been told there's no money left for her procedure. She has to wait until at least April 2017. Miss Henderly says she's in pain. She says it's hard for her to work and do physical activities with her children. Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Henderly has a question for the Minister. It's this -- the Minister's wife or mother need today have surgery but there was no more funding left for them and they had to wait a year or longer. And he saw them in such pain on a daily basis, would the Minister find this acceptable

>> Min. Hoskins: Well, thank god, Mr. Speaker, that Mrs. Henderson and her family that they didn't need that hip surgery 15 years ago when that government was in power because it would have taken her twice as long, Mr. Speaker. We've reduced the length of time to wait for hip surgery by 50%, Mr. Speaker, since we came into government and in fact 86% of Ontarians receive a knee or hip replacement within six months in this province, and that's 7% better than the national average and it's better than almost every jurisdiction around this world. They didn't vote for this budget. They voted against additional investments to further reduce those wait times, Mr. Speaker. When we came into government, they had -- they didn't even measure it. When we started measuring wait times they left the worst wait times in this country to us to fix. We fixed it. We're continuing to do the job. No thanks to you

MPP DiNovo to Minister Del Duca Re: Hurontario LRT

>> MPP Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. This week we learned Hurontario L.R.T. is going to be run by a private company. It will not be run by any public transit agency. The NDP Strongly supports the L.R.T. Project but we strongly oppose the government's aggressive push into privatized transit. Privatized transit is more expensive, and since this government refuses to provide funding for local transit operations we this that Mississauga riders will pay much higher fares. Will the Premier keep Mississauga public transit public by removing maintenance operations from the scope of the Hurontario L.R.T. Contract?

>> Min. Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I do thank the member opposite for the question and for her interest in this particular project, a project in Peel region, Speaker, that will help transform not only Mississauga and southern brampton but the entire greater Toronto and Hamilton area as it relates to building a seamless and integrated transit network that we are committed to build. Speaker, I can tell you just a couple of days ago I was very proud to be in Mississauga at Mississauga city hall alongside my Colleague the member from Mississauga east-cooksville, the Minister responsible for seniors, the mayor of mississauga, members of council and somewhere in the neighbourhood of a couple of hundred residents who were there for an open House on this particular project, Speaker. This as most members in the House will know is a project, this L.R.T. Line along Hurontario that will have 22 stops including three stops within downtown mississauga, Speaker. It will connect into some of our go corridors that will connect and support the municipal aspirations. And as per usual on the transit file, the leader of Ontario's NDP And that particular member. And that entire caucus are, Speaker, misguided. Thank you.

>> MPP. DiNovo: Thank you, Speaker. Again back to the Premier. The auditor general found that Ontario's public-private partnership cost \$8 billion above base cost. This is equivalent to a 30% cost overrun on every single p3 project. Most of this extra money went to buy street and the banks. P3s take longer to build as well. The TTC Has a century's worth of exp Erience with surface rail transit and could get the Hurontario L.R.T. Running in four years. But the government will waste an extra two years just to package this into an investment vehicle for private financiers. Will the Premier save time and hundreds of millions of dollars by keeping this public transit project public?

>> Min. Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I don't think members in this legislature need to take my word for exactly how transformational the Hurontario L.R.T. Will be, Speaker. In today's "Toronto star," Speaker, there is a wonderful article entitled "15 years to mid-rise Manhattan." It is all about the renaissance that Mississauga is going through, Speaker. This article in today's "Toronto star" highlights specifically that this government's L.R.T. Project along Hurontario will help with a \$56 million inves ent and a brand-new Mississauga research and development facility, Speaker. It will lead to along the L.R.T. Corridor a planned 166-acre urban farm including historic farm buildings and about 33 acres of mid-rise residential development, including street-level cafes, restaurant boutiques. Speaker, the article goes on to deliver so much more good news. Because we're investing in mississauga, because we're investing in this L.R.T. We're getting it right. The question is --

#### MPP Kiwala to Minister Damerla Re: Seniors' Supports

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister responsible for seniors' affairs. Minister, many Ontarians who have lived and contribute today their communities their entire lives are beginning to enter their golden years. Their communities are also growing older and with that comes a new set of challenges. A few weeks ago you told us about the ambitious seniors community grant program, which is funding programs for seniors' organizations across Ontario. And with our good friend the Minister of health you announced free shingles vaccinations for seniors aged 65 to 70, providing peace of mind and financial relief to 850,000 seniors. But even with these important investments, it is still vital to support basic accessibility projects that help seniors continue living in their communities. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of seniors affairs please inform the House what supports the Ontario seniors secretariat is providing communities in order to meet the needs of their seniors?

>> Min. Dipika Damerla: Thank you, Speaker. And I'd like to start by thanking the hard working member from Kingston and the Islands for her question. Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to update the House and let them know that, since becoming the Minister responsible for seniors, I've toured the province to learn firsthand how our seniors are benefitting from the programs that this province has created specifically for seniors. One area that I do want to focus on today, Mr. Speaker, is the idea of age-friendly communities.

As Ontario ages, the one thing Ontarians are telling us is they want to live on their own for as long as they can and that is why, Mr. Speaker, we are funding 56 communities across Ontario to help them become more age friendly. Thanks to this program, communities from ... To wawa will now have the tools and knowledge to make the communities easier places for seniors to live in.

>> MPP Kiwala: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister for her answer. I'm please today hear that this government is making investment that is help seniors who want to stay in their communities, and I'm proud to be part of a caucus that recognizes the valuable contributions that seniors make to Ontario. As our population ages, it is vital that we make these investments today in order to accommodate the needs of tomorrow. And by sharing exp Erience and guidance with local communities, we eliminate messy or ineffective guesswork. I am, however, still very interested to hear how the senior secretariat helps communities prepare for the future needs of seniors. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister please inform the House about the specific supports that are offered to communities who are working to become age friendly?

>> Min. Damerla: Mr. Speaker, again I want to thank the member for her very important question, and I'm happy to speak more specifically as to what we are doing around age friendly communities. In 2013 as you may know, Mr. Speaker, we released the age friendly community planning guide which offers age friendly planners a great deal of resources. In 2014, we launched the age friendly community planning grant, which provides \$1.5 million to 56 communities across Ontario. Let me give you some examples of the communities we are funding as my neighbour the MPP For Ottawa-orléans just reminded me. The city of Ottawa has received funding to help develop a plan to install automatic doors in city buildings and add benches to parks and roadways. In Hamilton this program has improved accessibility to retail centres and raised awareness. Services for seniors. So, Mr. Speaker, here are some examples of how we are making Ontario age friendly one city at a time.

#### MPP MacLeod to Minister Hoskins Re: Compassionate Care Plan

>> MPP Lisa MacLeod: Thanks very much, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of health. Ottawa resident Lisa Garland has three beautiful children and two of them have cancer. If that's not horrific and stressful enough, Lisa tells me that the injections alone cost \$3,000 a month. The anti-vomiting drugs cost over \$800 a month. And that's not all. Special food, taking time off work and parking at the hospital added up for Lisa and her family. They were forced to fund-raise, which is why I think Ontario needs a compassionate and catastrophic care plan for our patients in exceptional circumstances like Lisa Garland's family. Minister, a top priority for all Ontarians is health care. I just want you to be part of this plan and I'm hoping that you agree with me that Lisa's family shouldn't be fund-raising for her children with cancer.

>> Min. Eric Hoskins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. I do agree with you that there are families, regrettably often -- it's too common, families that are facing catastrophic situations, particularly when they involve children. They're difficult I think for all of us to imagine, just how challenging that can be for a family to cope with and manage. We do in the province, as the member opposite does know, we do have a catastrophic drug program that does provide that support to families including families with children for a variety of medical and drug challenges that they might face. It is an important program which has provided I think, together with other programs offered by the province, it does provide a degree of support which is reassuring to a lot of families that do find themselves regrettably and unfortunately in that extremely challenging and difficult situation.

>> MPP MacLeod: I appreciate the words from the Minister but I think that we need to be doing more because more and more people are maxing out their credit cards. They're setting up go fund me campaigns or other fund-raising events. Others rely on the generosity of drug companies. Brian Monte and his wife Erica also live near Ottawa. His wife has multiple melanoma and incurable cancer from blood plasma. She's undergone a stem cell transplant. Was prescribed Prevalin and it has kept her alive for three years. Private medical insurance covers up to \$100,000 a year but that runs out by September leaving \$36,000 left at the mercy of the drug company for the rest of the year. This year that's changed and Brian is afraid his wife might die without the drug. That is why Ontario needs a compassionate and catastrophic care plan. She's only alive at the mercy of the drug companies. Will the Minister take the lead on this today? Will you support my motion for compassionate and catastrophic care plan for the province of Ontario?

>> Min. Hoskins: So -- I appreciate the clarification at the end because this is actually about the member's private member's bill or motion this afternoon, which I think I do understand that it actually goes quite beyond what we've been discussing at least in the first aspect. It talks about creating a fund to fund experimental treatment for individuals. And I think Ontarians appreciate the fact that we do have Trillium which does provide support for individuals and families that do find themselves in catastrophic or extremely challenging financially challenging situations but we also fund and 96% of the applicants that come forward, many, many thousands, we do fund treatments and procedures for them that may not be available in this province. I know the private member's bill that the member opposite referenced at the very end actually speaks largely about a different fund which is to fund experimental treatment. We need to make sure our fund something focused on evidence best clinical practice and guided quite frankly by the specialists that should be making this decision in the first place.

#### MPP French to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Affordability

>> MPP Jennifer French: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Last month I began collecting hydro bills from my constituents to show the Premier what the reality is for hydro users in Ontario. Families in my community are at a breaking point and I have got over 100 bills sitting here on my desk to prove it. While dropping their bills off, I've heard from families and seniors in Oshawa that set alarms to do their laundry in the middle of the night and lower their food budget just to keep the lights on. This is the reality in my community. Will the Premier offer real solutions to hydro users in Oshawa or should we just continue living in the dark?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and answer the question from the member of the opposition. It is important for us as a party to ensure that we do put programs in place to help families like those in Oshawa, like those in all parts of the province, Mr. Speaker, and that's why yesterday I was so pleased to see that our bill that's helping families with the 8% reduction passed through this House unanimously, Mr. Speaker. I think that's very important. We also have the OESP program which I know, Mr. Speaker, helps families save up to \$45 a month and in some cases -- they qualify, Mr. Speaker, if they have a medical condition that they need to use equipment for they can get up to \$75 a month. And some other good news that's going to help families, Mr. Speaker, is yesterday the Ontario energy board has announced that residential and small business electricity prices will not increase, Mr. Speaker, for next six-month period. So we've got the O.E.B. As a quasi-judicial organization. Making sure that they're protecting Ontario ratepayers as well, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

>> MPP French: Thank you, Speaker. Under the Liberal government, hydro bills have nearly quadrupled since 2003. And it's Ontarians that have been forced today pay for Liberal mismanagement and mistakes. While dropping a hydro bill off at my office, a constituent named Jeff told me that his plan for the winter is to turn his thermostat down to 62° and rely on a heavy House coat and warm slippers. Again, this is the

reality in my community. Will the Premier commit to lowering hydro rates in Ontario, or should my constituents just keep turning the thermostat down instead?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again thanks for the supplementary question, and I think the important thing that we can tell all of our constituents is, as of January 1st, rates will be going down in this province by 8%, Mr. Speaker. That's something that I know this government is very proud of, Mr. Speaker, because we recognize, Mr. Speaker, that some folks are having a difficult time when it comes to paying their electricity bills. We understand that, Mr. Speaker, and that's why we acted. We had to do all the heavy lifting, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we have a clean, safe, reliable system and we've done that, Mr. Speaker. We've got the oesp program. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So to ensure that they have the O.S.E.P. Program. There's the leap program in place, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned we've also ... the debt retirement charge and also making sure come January 1st that they will actually have an 8% reduction on their buys, Mr. Speaker. We're doing a lot to help families right across the province.

MPP Fraser to Minister Del Duca Re: School Bus Safety

>> MPP John Fraser: Thank you very much, Speaker. Speaker, my question's for the Minister of transportation. We all know that school buses carry a precious cargo. When a parent or caregiver waves goodbye to a child stepping onto a school bus, they want to know that their child will have a safe ride to and from school. Ontario is known for the safety of its roads and I know the Minister reminds us often that our roads are among the safest in Ontario. Speaker, we all know when it comes to safety of our children Ontarians need an extra sense of security that, safety it our top priority. Speaker, would the Minister please let the members of this House know what our government is doing to ensure the safety of children on school buses, not only today but for years to come?

>> Min. Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member from Ottawa South for the question of course. Speaker, this is something that I as the Minister of transportation do think about year-round. But it is particularly at the forefront of my mind this week, as it is school bus safety week. The member from Ottawa South is absolutely correct. Parents and all caregivers deserve the extra assurance that at the end of the day, school day their child will return home safe and sound. That's why I'm proud to say that school bus transportation is the safest form of transport for schoolchildren in Ontario. According to research by transport Canada, travelling on a school bus is 16 times safer than travelling in a regular motor vehicle based on the number of passengers and kilometres travelled. Speaker, we'll continue to work diligently on this file because our government is committed to continually improving school bus safety and we want to ensure all families that safety will always be a top poirity for our government. Thank you.

>> MPP Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Minister for the answer to that question. Our government and indeed everyone in this legislature is committed to the safety of our children. Not only when they are in our schools but also when they're on the road to get there. Transporting over 800,000 students a day is a huge safety responsibility and I know the families in my community and communities across Ontario will be reassured by the safety record of school buses in this province. It is especially critical for all of us to have the opportunity to talk about the importance of public awareness in ensuring the safety -- the success of safety campaigns like school bus safety week. Mr. Speaker, would the Minister please be able to provide members of this House with any additional information on the importance of school bus safety week?

>> Min. Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. Again I thank the member from Ottawa South for the follow-up question. I want to start off by saying that I'm extremely pleased, as always, to work alongside

many of our ongoing safety partners and all aspects of road user safety, Speaker. And these campaigns, the campaign that is our partners are responsible for developing and delivering alongside M.T.O. Are critical drivers with respect to raising public awareness about road safety and issues specifically around school bus safety, Speaker. School bus safety week sees such success stories because there are organizations in the province of Ontario that care as much about the safety of our roads as we do, Speaker. This is another great example of how we can make Ontario stronger by working together. So, Speaker, it's my privilege to say to the member from Ottawa South and of course all of our road safety partners how grateful we at M.T.O. Are for their extraordinary work and I look forward to having the chance to work alongside them for many years to come. Thanks very much, Speaker.

#### MPP Hardeman to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rates

>> MPP Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Premier, I've heard from hundreds of people about the hardships caused by their hydro bills. They've told me their stories and wanted me to ask the Premier for her response. One pensioner said he has to work two part-time jobs just to make ends meet because of the hydro increases. His wife is on disability. He has said he wants to stay in his own home and not be forced to move at his age. But the price of hydro is making this harder and harder. The government assistance programs aren't solving the problem. What does the Premier have to say to this pensioner working two jobs just to pay his hydro bill?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable member for the question, and it is very important for us on this side of the House to ensure that all families, all seniors know the programs that are available and one of the important things that we do have is the .... program. The one section of the oesp program gives seniors up to \$75 a month, Mr. Speaker. I hope this senior has contacted his local L.D.C. To find out what he qualifies for, Mr. Speaker, because that \$75 I know can go a long way. When you put that on top of the things that we've already done, Mr. Speaker, to help, making sure we have eliminated the debt retirement charge which is a \$70 a year piece, Mr. Speaker, as well on top of the 8% that he will see on his bills, Mr. Speaker, come January 1st. So we recognize some families and some seniors are having a hard time with those bills, Mr. Speaker, and that's why we contacted and we're very proud that bill passed yesterday, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, if the Premier cares, I think my constituents to like to hear her response. The rebate and assistance programs the Minister speaks about are not enough. Another story I received come from the a senior who lives on a fixed income in a mobile home that is 12-by-60 feet. Since 2010 her hydro rates have increased by 150%. After paying for hydro each month, she only has \$57 left to cover the cost of food. Soon she will have to make difficult choices between eating and paying for her prescription drugs. What does the Premier have to say to this senior who is choosing between paying for hydro or basic necessity? And I'd like to hear that, Mr. Speaker, from the Premier.

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I do again acknowledge that -- the question from the Honourable member and making sure there are programs in place to help families and to help individuals, Mr. Speaker, with their electricity bills. We have done a lot of heavy lifting, Mr. Speaker. We've invest under making sure that we can have a clean, safe, reliable system, Mr. Speaker. I've talked about the oesp program, Mr. Speaker. You know, in his riding, Mr. Speaker, I hope he's talking about the oesp program and also talking about the Ontario energy and property tax credit that these families and individuals can apply for, Mr. Speaker. If they need help, Mr. Speaker, right away in an emergency situation we have the leap program, Mr. Speaker. Families can even make sure, Mr. Speaker, that they can apply for the save on energy program. Conservation, Mr. Speaker, helps them reduce their bills and helps the overall supply, Mr. Speaker. It's very important program. And something very key for families to be part of, Mr. Speaker. We have many programs that are in place. 8% coming January 1st, Mr. Speaker.