

Transcript of Provincial Question Period for September 22, 2016

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

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MPP Brown to Minister Matthews Re: Electricity Prices

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Premier. Families in Ontario can't afford their hydro bills, and nearly 567,000 House holds are in arrears. When is enough enough, Mr. Speaker ? How many people have to not be able to afford their hydro bills before the Premier and this government will take real action? 600,000, 700,000, 900,000? Will it take a million Ontarians in arrears before this government will finally act? I want to know from the Deputy Premier what is the number before you realize your hydro policy is a complete mess?

>> Min. Deb Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. And as we discussed before, we have a very clear plan to make sure we have reliable energy being delivered in this province, Speaker. We inherited an electricity system that had been badly neglected by the previous government. We've made historic investments so that we can ensure that, even on the very hottest day or the coldest winter day, Speaker, people have access to reliable energy. We've also eliminated smog days. We haven't had a smog day, Speaker, for the very reason that we have eliminated coal-fired plants in this province. Yes, that is more expensive energy, but we've saved \$4 billion in health costs because people are not going to the emergency department with asthma. So there is a cause and there is a benefit, Speaker, and we have made a choice –

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Deputy Premier. Since I can't get an answer about the 567,000 Ontario families in arrears on their hydro bills, I'm going to try a different angle. Yesterday the Premier said, I quote -- we have just come through one of the hottest Summers ever and we've had no blackouts. But on September 3rd the "Toronto star" headline read -- power slowly restored at cityplace after blackout. In fact, in fact, Mr. Speaker, there have been not one, not two, not three but four power outages in the span of two weeks. Mr. Speaker, in fact we've had four power outages in a span of two weeks. My question, Mr. Speaker, to the Deputy Premier was the Premier left in the dark about these blackouts this summer?

>> Min. Matthews: Well, Speaker, if you want to talk about being left in the dark, then, you know, I think there's somebody else in this legislature to has been left in the dark or at least claims to have been left in the dark on his position on the sex Ed -- On a very important issue, Speaker. So I can tell you that that is begging the question what other secret promises have been made in the back rooms? Who knows what deals have been made? The leader of the opposition is being kept in the dark or at least so he claims.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Deputy Premier. You know when there's 567,000 Ontario families in arrears and can't pay their hydro bills and this Minister wants to take cheap partisan shots.... Mr. Speaker, clearly the Liberals don't want to talk about hydro. I want them to think about Alex from bobcaygeon. He's on odsp. He's had his hydro threatened to be cut off. He use the help the government has to offer but it's not enough. Alec has had an organ transplant and has to eat properly. Global news says it comes down to eating or having his lights on. My question for the Deputy Premier. How can you turn your back on little guys like Alex?

>> Min. Matthews: So, Speaker, we're very proud of the investments that we've made to support people with low income on their electricity bills including, Speaker, the electricity support program. I would urge members of the opposition to make sure their constituents know about this important program, Speaker. We've also recently announced we're moving the provincial portion of the H.S.T. On electricity bills -- removing. Speaker, we have a very clear plan. What's not so clear is what's happening across the way, Speaker, and this is real concern. So what we really want to know is what other promises have been made by the chief of staff maybe, by the leader of the opposition. Who knows, Speaker, whether they've promised developers if they'll repeal or maybe scrap the greenbelt

act, Speaker. Who knows what promises have been made to developers on that front. Who knows if you promised secretly behind closed doors whether you promised the community you'll strip away labour bargaining rights, Speaker.

MPP Brown to Minister Matthews Re: Polling Research Contracts

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Premier. This week the Liberals appointed David Hurley as their chief electoral strategist and then this morning we learned that the Liberal government has given nearly \$3 million in government contracts to Hurley and his company the Gandalf group. In fact he was billing the government at \$420 an hour. Families are being forced to pay \$420 a month for their hydro and David Hurley makes it in an hour. Why? Because he's a Liberal crony. Mr. Speaker, is this the way that the Liberal government and the Deputy Premier who happens to be the Liberal campaign co-chair, is this the way of saying thank you and patting his -- padding his salary for the next election?

>> Min. Deb Matthews: Well, Speaker, I'm afraid that the leader of the opposition simply doesn't know what the process is for contracts such as this. All public opinion research conducted by the government of Ontario is procured through a fair and transparent competitive process, Speaker. Speaker, every company must be a qualified vendor of record and compete for a project against no less than five competitors, Speaker. And the final decision about which vendor is best suited for a project is made by a committee of at least -- at least three nonpartisan public servants, Speaker. So I think the leader of the opposition could familiarize themselves with the process by which contracts such as this are confirmed, Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Deputy Premier. Last time the Liberals got caught giving David Hurley taxpayer money, they claimed it was a fair, transparent competitive process. But according to Brian Lilley, senior Liberals who know how Cabinet office works says, I quote -- they disputed the idea -- Mr. Speaker, senior Liberals disputed the idea the process was completely nonpartisan and not subject to political direction from the Premier. So I imagine this time was no different. Mr. Speaker, when applying for government contracts, is one of the questions "Are you David Hurley the Liberal campaign chair"? Or do the Premier and Deputy Premier intervene after that election process? How do you find ways through Liberal spin to give your campaign strategist \$420 an hour of taxpayer money. It's shameful.

>> Min. Matthews: You know, Speaker, polling is an important way for a government to gain the effectiveness of their programs and what people are thinking on various issues, Speaker. And I must say that I think everyone recognizes that every government does that because it's a very valuable tool. Let me give you an example where we learned from public polling, Speaker, the who will you help campaign has made a tremendous difference in attitudes in this province, Speaker. Before the campaign, 37% of Ontarians felt that they had an obligation to intervene when witnessing -- Speaker, before the campaign, 37% of Ontarians felt they had an obligation to intervene when they were a witness to sexual harassment. After the who will you help campaign, that number became 58%. We knew that because we did an Ipsos-Reid poll, Speaker, and that is important information to test the impact of our --

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Deputy Premier. Putting the Liberal spin aside, \$3 million of taxpayer, taxpayer resources, \$420 an hour to their chief Liberal electoral strategist. It's just not right. If the process was fair and transparent as the Liberals say, they need to give us proof. After all, the taxpayers did pay for this polling and research, not the Liberal party. And they have a right to know what it said. So my question, Mr. Speaker, is will the Liberals release the results for all the polling and research done by David Hurley and the Gandalf group? It was paid for by the people and the people should see this data. If you have nothing to hide, release it.

>> Min. Matthews: Well, Speaker, I think it comes to when it comes to releasing information, we're actually hearing from someone who has released way more information than imaginable because he's released information supporting one position on sex Ed. Then he released information supporting another. Speaker, I think the leader of the opposition might want to check public

accounts because I think if you look at public accounts what you would see is a number of research firms that have contracts with the provincial government. Forum research, ipsos-reid, strategic counsel, ekos, enviro-nics, harris-decima. A number of firms, different firms are successful, Speaker, with different bids. That's the way the process works. It's fair. It's transparent. It's nonpartisan.

MPP Horwath to Minister Matthews (Thibeault) Re: Hydro One

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The question is to the acting Premier. Less than two weeks ago, the Premier of this province was offering or basically telling the people of Ontario that things were going to get a reset. Instead the last two weeks have been one Liberal P.R. Exercise after another. Instead of a reset, people fear things are actually getting worse here in Ontario. The people of Ontario want an actual reset, one that end the sale of Hydro One, Speaker. One that end the cuts to hospitals, one that end -- sorry, end the kind of cuts this government has been undertaking and actually starts to restore hope for the people of this province. When will this government start putting the wishes, the best interests of the people of this province ahead of the Liberal party's?

>> Min. Deb Matthews: Well, Speaker, the throne speech was an important announcement of initiatives that really are responding to the needs of the people of this province. 100,000 new child care spaces. That is a huge investment that directly respond to the needs of the people of this province but also responds to the requests of the third party. Here's the problem, Speaker. They are very good at upholding even when we do something they've been advocating for, they oppose it. So 100,000 new child care -- child care spaces, Speaker, is an important initiative. Taking the H.S.T. Off energies bills the provincial portion of the H.S.T. Is something. Because the NDP is not advocating for and now they oppose it. We have a clear plan. We're moving forward and it's working.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, over half a million people in Ontario are behind on their hydro bills. Last year 60,000 people had their hydro cut off because they couldn't keep up with the bills. The Minister of energy doesn't even know how many people have their hydro cut off this year so far. But not only did it get worse, Speaker, as Hydro One continues to be sold off by this Liberal government. This is a moment of truth for the government. This is the moment of truth for the Liberals. Will this government do the right thing and stop the privatization of Hydro One and start taking action to get those bills down?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the leader of the third party for the question. Is it important to recognize that the broadening of Hydro One will continue to build infrastructure right across the province? It's been great for us in northern Ontario. My ... the Minister of transportation announced \$173 million to help finish highway 69. We're doing great things, Mr. Speaker, with that -- with the broadening of the sale of Hydro One. When it comes to 60,000 people in this province having their electricity disconnected, Mr. Speaker, you don't want to see one person have to go through that. That's why we've put forward so many programs. The leap program for example, Mr. Speaker, helps individuals with emergency funds to help pay their bills. You know what, Mr. Speaker, we're doing everything we can to make sure we keep that number down. Right now in the province that number is less than 1%. And that's why we recognize it's difficult and with the three-point plan, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, people take pride in our health care systems in this province and expect our government to make them a priority. While this government is focused on the sale of Hydro One and the future of the Liberal party, hospitals are run down and overcrowded and kids are waiting hours and hours to get on a school bus that takes them to a crumbling school. These are the basics, Speaker, the basics, the fundamentals that any government should be able to deliver to the people of their province. The Liberals promised change, Speaker. Why are schools and hospitals still being robbed of the resources they need?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it come to the broadening of the sale of Hydro One, every dollar realized from our current assets will be reinvested in Ontario's infrastructure. This sale will support the status largest infrastructure investment in Ontario's history. More than \$160

billion over 12 years. It will have support, Mr. Speaker, 110,000 jobs a year. Our goals in broadening the own early ship of Hydro One improved more customer-focused company and more infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. I was just up in northeastern Ontario a couple weeks ago, Mr. Speaker. I announced \$5.4 million in North Bay. I announced over \$2 million in Kapuskasing and we'll continue to see more of those investments in infrastructure as we continue to improve and build Ontario up. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker

MPP Horwath to Minister Matthews (Hunter) Re: Child Care Spaces

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thanks, Speaker. My question is for the acting Premier. When young parents can't afford child care, it makes it harder to build a good life. When child care is unaffordable, it means parents can't pay down their credit card. They can't save for a house, Speaker. And if the car breaks down or someone needs to go to the dentist, it becomes a big problem. The Premier claims that she's creating 100,000 spaces for child care, but young families who could barely afford child care before the session started are still in the exact same predicament, Speaker. Why isn't this government making affordable not-for-profit child care a priority?

>> Min. Deb Matthews: Well, Speaker, I was here for the throne speech and I know that the leader of the third party was here for the throne speech, too. When the lieutenant-governor of this province announced, in our throne speech, 100,000 new child care spaces, Speaker. Point that I made earlier which is even when we do something that the NDP has advocated for in the past they oppose it. So, Speaker, we are moving forward. Starting in 2017, building 100,000 new licensed child care spaces for the reasons that the leader of the third party has given.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Liberal government might look at their throne speech as a chance to get headlines. I think it was actually an opportunity to make the big changes that people need to see. And that's the problem. Affordability of child care is the huge issue here in Ontario, and this government completely ignored it. It happens to be all about them when it should be about the people of this province who are worried about their future and worried about the future of the next generation. Without big changes it's only going to get here in Ontario. I need to know and I think the people need to know whether or not this government is ready to make those big changes that put the people at the front of the priority list.

>> Min. Mitzi Hunter: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what could be bigger than a commitment to 100,000 new child care spaces -- The need for child care from infant to 4-year-olds, Mr. Speaker. That is going to double the meeting of the demand to 40%, Mr. Speaker, from 20% today. Our focus, Mr. Speaker, is ensuring that we provide access to good, quality child care spaces across this province, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, our government has led the way when it comes to investments in child care. Since 2003, Mr. Speaker, we have doubled our funding.

>> Andrea Horwath: Mr. Speaker privatizing child care and not addressing the unaffordability of it is something that Conservatives would do. They campaign on that kind of stuff. They're the type that started the privatization of Hydro One in this province but that's not what this government told people they were all bettering services like health care, education, that's what Conservatives do, Speaker, whether it's in Ottawa or here in Ontario. Things are getting tougher for families and the government is not stepping up. Before the House came back, they said that they finally understood what people were facing. They said that they would change. So, Speaker, why is everything the same?

>> Min. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, since 2003 we have doubled the funding in the investments in child care to almost \$1 billion. Mr. Speaker, we have increased access to licensed child care spaces by 87%. Mr. Speaker, as of September the 1st, we have ended fees for wait lists in this province, Mr. Speaker, which is leading Canada on this area. Mr. Speaker, we're committed to providing supports to our children in this province and that's evidenced by our investments and our commitment to 100,000 more child care spaces over the next five years, Mr. Speaker. We're committed. We're making those changes, Mr. Speaker, because we want to ensure that our earliest learners, Mr. Speaker. Have what they need and those investments are being made today.

MPP Smith to Minister Hunter Re: EQAO Math Scores

>> MPP Todd Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question this morning is for the Minister of education. Yesterday I was looking at the eqao results and I have to say they were rather disappointing, Mr. Speaker. Disappointed that a former education Minister under the so-called education Premier, could fail our students in Ontario so dramatically. Since the Liberal math curriculum came into effect, Mr. Speaker, the numbers have steadily gone down. Test results have steadily gone down. Half of Ontario's grade 6 students failed to meet our provincial standard. Half. And that's despite the fact that education funding has almost doubled while we're educating 70,000 fewer students than we were 20 years ago. We don't need another re-announcement. We need to start getting results, Mr. Speaker. This government is failing our students. Mr. Speaker, when will the government stop failing our students when it comes to math?

>> Min. Mitzi Hunter: Thank you much --, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for this question, because when it comes to Ontario's education, Mr. Speaker, we are well above the oecd average in our scores overall. So we're very proud of that fact. The eqao results are shining a spotlight on an area that we need to improve, Mr. Speaker, and we are very well aware of that and that is why, Mr. Speaker, our former Minister of education in fact announced in the spring a commitment to a renewed math strategy, Mr. Speaker. \$60 million so that we can provide the supports in our schools where we need it. Mr. Speaker, as of September, we are ensuring that we have dedicated math leads in schools. We're ensuring that there are 60 minutes of protected time in all elementary schools. That's 300 minutes a week, Mr. Speaker. That focus on math because we know that our young people need this support so that they can compete in the future.

>> MPP Smith: Back to the Minister, Mr. Speaker. Our kids are failing at math in dramatic fashion. We have students graduating, Mr. Speaker, that can barely make change without the use of a calculator. That's completely unacceptable in Ontario. A report from the Mackenzie institute shows that the countries with the lowest youth unemployment rates also put emphasis on their math curriculum. We're not doing that here of it's not the students' fault that 50% of them aren't at grade level. It's not the teachers' fault. It's the curriculum that needs to be changed, Mr. Speaker. Students aren't even required to memorize their multiplication tables anymore. Simply throwing more money at the problem isn't going to make it go away. Now I know that 50% is a much better result than the Premier's current approval ratings in Ontario, Mr. Speaker, but why is the government leaving half of our students behind when it comes to math?

>> Min. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I want to -- you know, I want to quote from the Ottawa citizen, Mr. Speaker, because we have to listen to our educators and here's what he this say. When we are looking forward very much to the renewed math strategy. We know the ministry is providing mathematic support to all schools which is fantastic and looking at particular school that is may need intensive supports -- increasing skills will be useful. There are techniques that work very well with vulnerable learners, exp Eriential learning, visual AIDS and that will be useful for other students as well. Mr. Speaker, when it comes to our record on education, since 2003 when our graduation rates were 68%, Mr. Speaker, as of this year we have 85.5%. Mr. Speaker -- testing in education system, Mr. Speaker. Because we know we want our young people to be prepared for the world that they will enter and they have the supports to do so.

MPP P. Miller to Minister Sousa Re: US Steel Canada

>> MPP Paul Miller: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the finance Minister. Yesterday the Minister announced that the government had signed a memorandum of understanding with bed rock industries in relation to the restructuring of US Steel Canada. Over 20,000 people are waiting to see how this affect that --S their jobs, their pensions, their families and their futures. We must ensure equal treatment of workers and pensioners are done in both plants, Speaker. From day one they have sought the protection of jobs, the restoration of post employment benefits and the full funding of their pension plans. Can the Minister promise the employees and retirees that this memorandum protects the retirement promises and will fully fund the pension plan? And can the

Minister promise that the current operations will be preserved at both plants in Hamilton and nanticoke?

>> Min. Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an important question the member asks. Something that we've been deliberating over for a number of years now to US Steel, ttaa. And we've taken steps to try to protect the pensioners, salary workers and protect their jobs. The intent of the M.O.U. is all about protecting jobs. It's all about protecting pensions and also protecting the environment while developing those lands that are so precious in Hamilton. That is exactly what's being put forward. That's why -- M.O.U. With bedrock. It's the only approved bidder assigned by the court and we have to take every step necessary to foster way to improve with all stakeholders who are involved with this because it will be conditional upon everyone's agreement, including the union, including the employees, including the pensioners, including the other stakeholders and that's exactly what we're doing to foster and facilitate this going forward. I appreciate the question from the member and his advocacy as well.

>> MPP P. Miller: I'll remind the Minister this is a US Company. US Steel's ownership was nothing but a disaster for the people of this province. Promise after promise was broken and not enforced by the federal government. Employment declined. The facilities were idle and eventually retirement benefits and municipal property taxes were suspended. It is critical workers and pensioners have seats at this table, involved in every aspect of negotiations. They cannot be left in the dark and only getting partial information. People need some hope in Hamilton and nanticoke. In light of yesterday's news, the local steelworkers and my local union have asked for a meeting with the Minister of finance to find out and inform him of some of the negative parts of this. Will the Minister commit to this meeting with the steelworkers of Hamilton as soon as possible to ensure that the workers and pensioners are fully informed about the recent development?

>> Min. Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we have actually been meeting and dealing with the members from the union. We recognize how important it is to protect the oil patch, protect the ongoing support because it's been eliminated. If it wasn't for the government of Ontario providing those support ongoing to continue with the urgent health care requirements, the claims that are coming forward for dental and other aspects, we need to be there and we have. It is a very complex situation. And this is only a first step in trying to facilitate our way through it. So we will continue to advise and work with all stakeholders to ensure that we get the best deal possible for the benefit of our pensioners and our employees and the people of Hamilton and lake Erie because we know how important it is to our economy and to Ontario and the whole sector is at risk. We recognize that. We're doing everything we can, Mr. Speaker, to work together to try and ensure we protect the interests of Ontario and the people of Ontario and the workers at Hamilton. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Martins to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rebate

>> MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of energy. ... over the past few months I've heard concerns from my constituents in Davenport about their electricity bills, concerns I've raised here in the House. Hoifs -- I was very pleased last Thursday the Minister introduced the new rebate for Ontario electricity consumers act to reduce electricity rates for Ontarian consumers. Speaker, this government has passed -- spent the last 10 years making much needed investments in our electricity system to ensure it's clean, safely and reliable. These efforts included completely eliminating dirty coal as a generating source from our system. This remains the single largest climate change initiative in North America and today our electricity supply is 90% emissions free. The Minister has introduced legislation as part of a package to build on these efforts by increasing affordability of electric trusty for all Ontarians. Speaker, Thu you to the Minister can you please tell this House what the impacts of these renewed efforts will be for people across the province and my constituents in Davenport?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank member for that question and for her tireless work for the people in her riding of Davenport. There are three elements to our plan to increase affordability for the -- for Ontarians and the first is to permanently rebate the provincial

portion of the H.S.T. Of the bills, 5 million families, farms and small businesses right across the province. The average savings from this rebate will be about \$130 per year. The second is to increase support to the most rural customers in order to help with higher distribution costs in these areas. Together with the first rebate, this will represent about \$540 per year in savings for these families, Mr. Speaker. Third, Mr. Speaker, is to expand assets for industrial customers to the industrial conservation incentive. Over 1,000 Ontario businesses. Will be newly eligible for this program which can reduce their bills by as much as one third, Mr. Speaker. We're making sure. Clean, reliable and affordable.

>> MPP Martins: To the Minister for those answers. I know that these programs will be a significant step for the families and businesses in Davenport and across Ontario. I understand the measures the ministry is proposing will be in addition to existing efforts and programs to reduce costs for electricity bills. This government has taken considerable action to reduce costs at the system level, including renegotiating the green energy investment agreement, saving \$3.7 billion and deferring the construction of new nuclear reactors at Darlington, saving \$15 billion. Just as important as these system-wide efforts are the targeted programs our government will offer families like those who live in Davenport. Speaker through you to the Minister, would you inform the House on what pre-existing programs the ministry offers to all Ontarian families for their electricity bills?

>> Min. Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, it's important to mention that on top of what we're doing from the throne speech, we're actually moving forward on a number of our initiatives that we've had in place to designed and in place to help Ontarian families with their bills. The Ontario electricity support program introduced this year provides targeted support to low-income House holds, Mr. Speaker. More than 135,000 Ontarians are already receiving this benefit. The low income energy assistance plan introduced in 2011 is another program designed to help those who need it most. It provides onetime grants of emergency assistance to customers temporarily unavailable -- unable to make end meet. And yet another program I know that's important to me and many northern MPP S, the northern Ontario energy credit. It provides assistance to low to moderate-income individuals and families living in northern Ontario. Qualifying families receive up to \$224 per year. Mr. Speaker, the goal of this government, the goal as the energy Minister, I'm very proud to ensure we have affordable access for all --

MPP Martow to Minister Thibeault Re: Ontario energy support program

>> MPP Gila Martow: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of health. Serena gryp is a Thornhill mother of four. Unfortunately one of her sons requires medical equipment to stay alive including an oxygen machine, feeding pump, oxygen monitor and suction device. Due to the need for all this equipment along with Ontario increased hydro rates her electricity bills have skyrocketed. Mr. Speaker, the Grimm family does not qualify for any assistance programs. Will the Minister of health please explain his concerns, if any, on the effect of rising electricity costs for those who require medical equipment?

>> Min. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to be able to stand and rise to answer the question from the Honourable member specifically relating to the Ontario energy support program. This program is specifically geared to individuals to provide more funding to individuals that have to plug in medical equipment. They can get up to \$75 a month, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that when they have medical equipment that we recognize that there's increased costs and that they can utilize this. I would encourage the member to tell that family, to tell that individual to contact their local utility to make sure that they can find out all of the programs that are out there. There's even the save on energy program. There's many, many programs, six of them to be exact, Mr. Speaker, that these families can apply for and on top of that starting January 1st we will make sure that we can get this legislation passed so they can get that 8% rebate. It's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, because it's for families like this that we ask for unanimous consent but unfortunately the opposition voted against it.

>> MPP Martow: As I said in my initial question, the family did not qualify for any assistance from the ministry of health, from powerstream, from any government program. We're seeing energy

poverty in this province like never before. Families that are considered middle class and therefore ineligible for these subsidy's such as Sabrina's are often struggling to provide the basic necessities. Mr. Speaker, due to these skyrocketing electricity rates as a result of this government's policies, Sabrina has been unable to buy new shoes for her two growing daughters. What advice does the health Minister and perhaps the Minister of energy have for the Grimm family?

>> Min. Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I think it's important to recognize that we as a government have heard that there are some families that are having difficulty out there with their electricity bills and so that's why we acted with the three-point plan, Mr. Speaker. We put forward this relate to ensure that they can see this on their buys directly every month. But unfortunately as I keep saying over and over, Mr. Speaker, they actually voted against unanimous consent to work on this quickly, because we have 70 local utilities, Mr. Speaker, that we have to work with. And we want to ensure that these families get access as quickly as possible. I once again encourage all MPP S to tell constituents that are having a hard time to utilize and work with their L.D.C.S to make sure they can get qualified for these programs and get that money right back in their pocket, Mr. Speaker. Build a clean, reliability system that we all rely on and we're bringing it to the next level to make it as affordable as possible. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Gelinat to Minister Lalonde Re: French Language Services Act, Francophone University

>> MPP France Gelinat: My question is for the Premier. This year in Ontario there will be the 30th anniversary of the French Language Services Commissioner of Ontario. The commissioner in his report last June proposed to review the last with 16 recommendations in his report. The government has not made its recommendation, which have been tabled. It's time to do something about it. When will the French services act be reviewed?

>> Min. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all I wish a very nice day to all Franco phones, men and women, this will be celebrated on Sunday -- which will be celebrated on Sunday. For francophone Ontario. I appreciate the question from the member from Nickel Belt and very proud of the government file 30 years ago this law was enacted. And then in 2007 there was a position created, and in 2016 it was declared independent. I've read all recommendations of the commissioner and his report.

>> MPP Gelinat: Its not only the review of the French services law but also put into place the university. We are here since 400 years. We manage 400 schools, 12 school boards, two College community services and Colleges as franco-ontarians are ready to take care of this university. It's time to have a plan to put in place. When are we going to have our francophone university in Ontario?

>> Min. Lalonde: Again I wish to say thanks to the member from Nickel Belt, all the work she does on this file. I wish to -- the commitment of the government of Mrs. Matthews and the Premier. We are putting in place a planning committee, and it will be announced, announcement made very shortly, and again a good celebration for francophone Ontario men and women.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Flynn Re: Workplace Inspections

>> MPP Ann Hoggarth: My question is for the Minister of labour. There are many ways for my constituents to find out about their rights under the employment standards act and the Ontario health and safety act. I often direct community members to the online resources if they need specific assistance with an issue. I note that another tool that the ministry of labour uses to inform Ontarians of their rights under these acts is through proactive blitzes. Last session in the House, the Minister mentioned that over the summer his ministry would be taking part in several blitzes across the province. I'm very interested in knowing how the young worker blitz and the temporary foreign worker blitz ended. These workers are among the most vulnerable in our province and I think it is important that we continue to ensure that they are protected and well informed of their rights. Speaker, through you to the Minister. Is there an update on the summer blitz results that could be shared with the House ?

>> Min. Kevin Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to thank the member for that wonderful question because it really speaks to what we believe in the province of Ontario is that workers have the right to be treated fairly by their employers. They deserve to be paid for the work they do. They deserve leaves, pregnancy, personal emergency leaves and they need to be paid the minimum wage, Speaker. One of the best ways of doing that is you focus on the areas where you think you have most concern. Go into the workplaces. You conduct blitzes. What we did over the summer, we did two blitzes, Speaker. They focused on young workers and the other focused on temporary foreign workers. The goal of these blitzes was to educate employers, bring them into compliance. We did 343 inspections over the summer, Speaker. Significant number of employers we met benefitted from the visit. Before our inspectors left, Speaker -- and this is something we should all be proud of. 98 to 100% of those employers were in compliance. The blitzes are working. We recovered \$300,000 for young workers in this province.

>> MPP Hoggarth: Speaker, I want to thank the Minister for that answer. The Minister mentions an important point. Sometimes employers and employees are unaware they are neither not following the law or that they aren't getting what they're entitled to. The ministry of labour website is a great resource but blitzes are proactive. Having officers out across the province visiting businesses and educating them makes a big difference as the Minister mentioned. The voluntary kpom appliance rates show that employers want to be doing the right things but I know that there is still work to be done. We need to make sure all workers, including the most vulnerable, are protected and educated on their rights and entitlement. What can Ontarians expect with respect to proactive inspections and blitzes over the coming months?

>> Min. Flynn: Thank you once again for the question. Speaker, never in the history of Ontario has a government proactively inspected workplaces. We're the very first government to do that, Speaker. I'll tell you it's working but we don't just do that. We also inspect 3,500 ordinary employment standards inspections. We want to make sure the people are following the law, that they understand the law. But we're also focusing on those people who sometimes think that they operate outside of the law, Speaker, that the law doesn't apply to them. The repeat violators. We're sending a zero tolerance message to employers in this province deserve to be treated properly, Speaker. In addition to that we're going to focus on some other areas. We're going to be doing blitzes, Speaker, in child care centres. Doing a manufacturing blitz. We're doing tow truck blitzes, Speaker. Small manufacturing blitz and a business centre blitzes. Mr. Speaker, we're doing everything we possibly can to make sure employers know what their obligations are and to educate employees so that they know what their rights are, Speaker.

MPP Yakabuski to Minister Oraziatti Re: Protections Against Domestic & Sexual Violence

>> MPP John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of community safety and correctional services. A year ago today, everyone in this chamber was shocked and saddened by the news of the deaths of three women in and around my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. And stays Kuzyk, Natalie warm erldone and Cal Were brutally murdered allegedly by a man released on parole. I spoke with the ministry of correctional services who agreed with me we have to do much more to protect women from an abuser once that person has been released. He also assured me that action would be taken. I and the people of my riding have waited a year for that action. We have run out of patience. Can the Minister inform the House victims of violence and all the people of Ontario, when your government will take this matter seriously and do what is necessary to protect women. From being revictimized by their abuser?

>> Min. David Oraziatti: Thank you very much, Speaker and I thank the member for the question. First of all let me begin by saying my thoughts are with the victims' families, friends in the wilno and surrounding communities on the one why were anniversary of this truly devastating event. My most important priority is the safety and security of every Ontarian. As the member knows we're now investing \$208 million each year for services that support and protect women from violence. We've enhanced the tracking of offenders by improving the way domestic violence probation orders are uploaded to police information centres. Under the proceeds of crime frontline policing grant we've

invested \$1.2 million in related domestic violence initiatives, and just in fact, Speaker, this past Tuesday, we announced \$58,000 in the member's riding through the OPP Renfrew detachment to support the Renfrew county situational hub project. The project aims to bring together. Agencies from the justice, mental health and social services sectors to support and help protect individuals from violence in their communities.

>> MPP Yakabuski: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Minister. While those supports are appreciated, my requests have been very specific. Because I couldn't wait for your government to act. Within weeks of those murders I introduced my private Mel he -- member's bill, which would have required all parolees to sign and accept the terms of their release. Those who are convicted of domestic or sexual violence and who were deemed a risk to their victims would also be subject to electronic monitoring. My bill received all party support on second reading. As a result of prorogation it has died on the order paper. I will be reintroducing my bill to help victims of violence this afternoon. My preference would be for the government to introduce its own legislation. In the absence of thus, will you support my bill so that the victims of violence will have more protection than they currently have and send a clear message that this legislature places the highest priority. On protecting victims of domestic or sexual violence?

>> Min. Oraziotti: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the member, I'm certainly aware of the member's private member's bill, bill 130 that did die on the order paper. But I want to say to the member I'm certainly willing to work with him and I want to commend his advocacy on this particular issue and his efforts to champion this particular issue. What I will say as well, Speaker, is that probation orders are enforceable whether or not they're signed by the offender, and in addition we have policies in place for the supervision of high-risk offenders including electronic supervision when ... by the courts or the parole board. We've implemented additional training for officers with a specific focus on domestic violence and sex offender supervision. We've also focused offender programs and resources on medium and high risk offenders and continue to do that. I want to say to the member today. Committed to working with the member in relation to the specific elements of his private member's bill so that we can continue to improve these circumstances and protect women from domestic violence.

MPP Mantha to Minister Lalonde Re: Service Ontario

>> MPP Michael Mantha: My question is to the acting Premier. Back in June the ministry of government and consumer services announced that nine service Ontario offices across the province were under consideration for possible closure, including the blind river office which is in my riding of Algoma- Manitoulin. The decision was put on hold pending further review. However today we have yet to receive any updates from your ministry as to the results of these reassessments. These offices are vital and provide an excellent service to which all Ontarians deserve equal access. Can you please provide us with the progress in what is being made as far as the reevaluation?

>> Min. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I thank the member for his question. While at Amo I did meet with several municipalities on that particular subject. And I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that our government is extremely proud of the consumer service that our service Ontario location provides to Ontarians, including access to a wide range of services such as the drivers and vehicle registration, land registration, insurance of health cards and birth certificate. Yes, indeed recently there was an announcement but there was also an announcement, Mr. Speaker, that we would be reviewing our decision, and this was also part of my decision to take -- make -- meet with people at Amo. So at this point I want to reassure that we are reviewing the decision. And will have some answers shortly.

>> MPP Mantha: Mr. Speaker, we have seen the government overturn its decisions in the past in a veiled attempt to provide short-term satisfaction. Hence your June press release advising my office and the public, indicating and I quote -- blind river may not end up being one of the offices closed. The emphasis on "May not." A service Ontario hospice is important. Public services are being cut and squeezed across Ontario. People are really disappointed. They didn't vote for these office closures or for the threat of having these offices closed either. Now they don't know what to expect from this

government. What assurances can your ministry offer that these closures won't be reintroduced today or at a later date?

>> Min. Lalonde: Again, I say thank you to the members for raising and I understand how important those offices are as part of our access to government services. We are reviewing. That's why we are looking and that's why we share that decision with the member to let him know about the decision that we would be reviewing some. But you know, Mr. Speaker, as part of the transformation we are also looking at transformation of services. People in Ontario are using other means such as online technology has been improving. But at the same time I want to reiterate our commitment to provide the best access to government services as part of my commitment as the Minister. I thank the member for his question and we're definitely following up. Thank you.

MPP Fraser to Minister McMahon Re: Ontario 150

>> MPP John Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for Minister of sports tourism. Last Friday the Premier was in Ottawa to launch the 150th celebration Canada and will be essential -- celebration of Canada and will be essential what will be in 2017 which will celebrate 150th anniversary of Canada while in promoting the future of our community. Build pride and optimism in our province, inspire our youth and create strong economic, social and cultural legacies for all Ontarians. Speaker, with the Minister please tell the members of this House more about the exciting plans that were unveiled last week in Ottawa and how our government plans. In celebrating Ontario 150?

>> Min. Eleanor McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In particular for his advocacy on the Ottawa 2017 celebration. It was my pleasure to join him as well as the rest of our dedicated Ottawa caucus, our Premier, mayor Jim Watt son community leaders to launch Ontario 150. I'm so excited about the energy we saw at the announcement, Speaker, and look forward to building on this optimism as we reach out to communities across Ontario. As part of this commitment we've launched a series of grant programs and they include our community capital program, \$25 million to renovate, repair and retrofit existing community and cultural infrastructure. Our part per nip program \$5 million to support new partnerships and collaborations with youth and about youth and to empower them. And finally \$7 million in community celebration funding, Speaker. I have every expectation that these programs will engage our youth, celebrate our shared -- And our legacy and I look forward to more information in the supplement, Speaker. Thank you very much.

>> MPP Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister. I would like to echo the Minister's comments regarding the success of the events of launching last week. We want to celebrate Ontario 150 anniversary in Ottawa. The the 150 anniversary of Ontario is very important thing to create communities. 150 will also play the groundwork for the next 150 years so we want all Ontarians to start thinking about what this milestone means to them. I appreciate the impact of the granting programs the Minister's referred to. I note they will have provincewide impact in bringing Ontarians together and supporting our communities. The Minister also announced that there will be additional initiatives across Ontario in the year ahead. Speaker, can the Minister please. About what we can expect in the coming year?

>> Min. McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member of Ottawa south. To share the highlights of Ontario 150 with all Ontarians and with this House. They include a new logo, Speaker, an updated version of our unofficial anthem "A place to stand." Celebrations in our nation's capital and in communities across Ontario and customized programming at many of our agencies and attractions. In addition as a part of Ontario 150, Toronto will host the 2017 invictus games, an international sporting event for wounded soldiers. These games will really demonstrate the transformative power of sport, Speaker. We look forward to sharing more in the coming months and what Ontarians can expect in 2017, key investments and initiatives. Ontarians to the world, enhance tourism and welcome citizen from the across our globe. I look forward to working with our federal and community partners, Speaker. Thank you for this --

MPP McDonell to Minister Chiarelli Re: Improving Ontario Road Safety

>> MPP Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker. To the Deputy Premier. The ministry of transportation has been consistently among the top criticized agency in the Ontario government, and for good reason. Ontarians of all ages are inconvenienced at almost every interaction with the ministry. With lost files and needless billing. Medical reviews are a glaring example. But a doctor's report potentially unsafe they will suspend their licence immediately. When a doctor says the driver is ok, however, the ministry reserves the right to sit on the file for 30 business days. Speaker, the hardworking Ontarians' jobs and livelihoods at risk. How can the government justify such an insensitive and bureaucratic policy?

>> Min. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member for the question and for his initiative with his private member's bill. That's an issue that we've all dealt with on our constituency offices. It's a common issue that we face. The provincial government as you know ministry of transportation puts a very, very high priority on public safety and they put a very, very high priority on responding particularly to the senior citizens who have had to deal with medical issues. So we are currently meeting or exceeding our 30-day customer service standards, processing 90% of cases within ten days. So far in 2016 we are meeting our customer service standards 99.5% of the time. That's a very, very strong response to that particular concern. That seniors may have. Our government's mandatory reporting for physicians and optometrists is an important way. We are working to continue to make our driving safe for individuals using Ontario roads.

>> MPP McDonell: Thank you. Back to the Deputy Premier. Constituents come to my office begging for help because they are about to lose their jobs due to this unjustifiable six-week delay. They have families to feed and bills to pay. People in my region rely on driving to access health care, work and basic living necessities. Providing service means being accountable, transparent and effective. It takes an hour to enforce a physician's advice to suspend a licence. Why should it take 30 days to take his advice to reinstate it? Will the government support my motion this afternoon calling for five business-day service guarantee for the reinstatement of a driver's licence following a positive medical review?

>> Min. Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, again I want to thank the member for his interest in this particular issue. It's of interest to all of us we deal with in our constituency offices you know every week, every month, Mr. Speaker. And on June 2nd, 2015, our government passed bill 31, Speaker, which is making Ontario's roads even safer. By expanding medical reporting requirements, clarifying mandatory and discretionary reporting requirements in future regulations and setting out what specific driver information must be provided by mandatory reporting forms. To mandatory medical reporting, Speaker, the ministry of transportation applies consistent medical standards that are designed to balance road safety and mobility for Ontarians. These standards are -- Basic medical standards under the highway traffic act and detailed national medical standards established by the Canadian council of motor transport administrators....

MPP DiNovo to Minister Chiarelli Re: Presto Card

>> MPP Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Transit riders hope the throne speech would have a plan to improve transit service and lower fares. They were let down, Mr. Speaker, not only is presto expensive. There is a cost just to buy an empty card. This makes it extremely difficult for social service agencies to give out transit passes especially as tokens and tickets are phased out. The city of Ottawa is threatening to take the province to court because presto is using its -- its monopoly to demand higher commissions from Ottawa transit riders. Ottawa riders pay 2% of their fares to presto. Presto wants 10. This outrageous cash grab will drive up fares, reduce transit ridership and harm low-income people. Why is the government making low-income people pay for the government's decision to force this costly fare payment system onto Ontarians?

>> Min. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the TTC is working closely with presto on implementation across the entire TTC System. This includes making single fares available to users and developing a system that works best for those commuting in Toronto. And while the TTC and

presto work to iron out the details of this rollout, Speaker, specific questions on this issue should be directed to the TTC Speaker, the TTC is managing the system. The TTC is working and the city of Toronto is working with the province to iron out the issues around presto, but the responsibility for operations, responsibility for service, Mr. Speaker, rests with the TTC Thank you, Speaker .