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Unedited Transcript

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

Table of Contents

MPP Smith to Minister Duguid	
Re: Goreway Gas Plant.....	2
MPP Fedeli (N. Miller, Romano) to Minister Zimmer (Sousa, Mauro)	
Re: Transportation in Northern Ontario	4
MPP Vanthof to Minister Duguid	
Re: Goreway Gas Plant.....	6
MPP Vanthof to Minister Duguid	
Re: Goreway Gas Plant.....	8
MPP Thompson to Minister Flynn	
Re: Minimum Wage Increase	10
MPP Gates to Minister Duguid	
Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan	12
MPP Kiwala to Minister Naidoo-Harris	
Re: Gender-Based Violence	14
MPP Clark to Minister Del Duca	
Re: Highway 401 Safety	16
MPP Gretzky to Minister Hoskins	
Re: Unlicensed Group Homes	18
MPP MacLaren to Minister Milczyn	
Re: Landlord and Tenant Board	20
MPP Hoggarth to Minister Duguid	
Re: Economic Growth in Ontario.....	22
MPP Scott to Minister Coteau	
Re: Group Home Workers	24
MPP Hatfield to Minister Sousa	
Re: Alcohol Sales.....	26
MPP Potts to Minister Hoskins	
Re: Hospital Investments	27

MPP Smith to Minister Duguid Re: Goreway Gas Plant

>> MPP Todd Smith: Thanks, Speaker. My question this morning is for the acting Premier. It's about the Liberals' latest gas plant scandal. The Ontario energy board warned the government in 2009 -- this was back in 2009, that ratepayers could be bilked out of millions and the Liberals did nothing about it. They warned the Liberals again in 2011 and again the Liberal government did nothing. Now we know that Goreway wasn't the only gas plant that decided to treat Ontario ratepayers like their own piggy banks. This government tried to hide that for years. Mr. Speaker, this looks like a smoke screen on the part of the government and it's happened under a succession of energy Minister s. Both the members from Scarborough Centre and Ottawa West Nepean were Minister s of energy during this misappropriation. So, Mr. Speaker, how many Liberals does it take -- To cover up a \$100 million scandal?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Handling another Minister 's file like this is kind of like being a grandparent in some ways. I get to handle the file and work with you on this today, and after the weekend I probably get to hand it back to the Minister when I probably had enough of it. So I'm pleased to be acting on behalf of the Minister of energy today. Again, Mr. Speaker, let's put this all back into perspective. The ieso was made aware of some potential ineligible costs going on within the system. They fully investigated those costs. They recovered the vast majority of those costs, Mr. Speaker. They levied a \$10 million fine, the biggest ever levied in these kind of circumstances. They posted the report and the record on the O.E.B. Website, Mr. Speaker, so it's there for all to see. They've taken steps to insure -- That the system's been strengthened so it won't occur again. And, Mr. Speaker, I'll continue more about what some future actions are going to be.

>> MPP Smith: Speaker, the member opposite was the Minister of energy when some of this gaming was going on and his seat mate was also a Minister of energy while this gaming was going on at Goreway. Speaker, this Goreway natural gas plant got the final draft of the report from the E.O. -- O.E.B. In July. The government got the report in September. It was made public November 2nd but amazingly the Goreway executive that was helping write the new electricity market rules didn't resign until last Friday. That was after the Cabinet office received their advance copy of today's report by the auditor general. Speaker, if we pull the phone records for the energy ministry and the Cabinet office for the end of last week, would we find calls to Goreway power or the ieso pressuring them for a resignation?

>> Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, this entire process is conducted as appropriately it should be by the ieso, the independent electricity supplier for Ontario systems operator for Ontario. I say that because I think a lot of people

don't know what the ieso is. Mr. Speaker, their job is to ensure that our electricity system is regulated -- Mr. Speaker, their job is to ensure that the electricity system is properly regulated. They've done that. They're doing that job. They found shineligible costs that a company and in fact there were some other companies, as the member indicated -- That they have been here. They've taken action. They've cleaned up the system, Mr. Speaker, strengthened the system to ensure it can't occur in the future and they've recovered the vast majority of funds, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Smith: Thanks, Speaker. The member opposite can try and distance himself from this all he wants. But again he was the Minister of energy when this gaming was brought to light by the energy board, and so was his seat mate. Speaker, these Liberal scandals have a pattern. First there's the mind-numbing incompetence. Then there's the lack of oversight. We wonder who's minding the store over there when hundreds of millions of dollars are being wasted in this sector. Then there's the clumsy smoke screen that comes up. Then like a child called into the principal's office the government Minister hangs their head and tells Ontarians how sorry they are. But because no one's ever held accountable over there by the Premier or anyone in that government, no one actually learns anything. So the same mistakes continue to occur over and over again. There are two former energy Minister s in Cabinet who both fell asleep -- At the switch. No one's minding the store. To the acting Premier, why are those Minister s still in Cabinet?

>> Minister Duguid: Speaker, I've been pretty forthright in my responses to the member on two consecutive questions, and the member persists on trying to get political with this. So, Mr. Speaker, perhaps I should respond in kind. Let me remind that member, Mr. Speaker, that he's part of a party that better be very careful when they're making allegations of exploitation and gaming. When you look at the tabloid, Mr. Speaker, that they recently put out, talk about gaming people, Mr. Speaker. Claiming a 22% income tax cut when it's nothing of the sort, Mr. Speaker. You look at the Bogus claim. You look further Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, and you see \$12 billion cuts, none of which are transparent, none of which are defined. Mr. Speaker, what kind of energy programs are they going to cut? What kind of education programs are they going to cut? What kind of healthare programs? Mr. Speaker, they're on pretty thin ice over there. To make these political allegations if you ask me.

MPP Fedeli (N. Miller) (Romano) to Minister Zimmer (Sousa) (Mauro) Re: Transportation in Northern Ontario

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you and good morning, Speaker. My question's for the acting Premier. Citing nonexistent savings, this government callously cancelled passenger rail service to northeastern Ontario as part of a plan to sell off Ontario northlands. It was only after we called in the auditor general who revealed there were no savings to be had and in fact it would actually cost taxpayers \$820 million to sell off Ontario north lands that this government partially halted the sale. Today northerners are left without rail service while options in southern Ontario are expanded. Northerners were rightfully furious with the Liberal decision to cancel the service fearing job losses and the end of an historic transportation option to and from Toronto. For medical and other purposes. Speaker, to the acting Premier, does she agree with the P.C. Plan to bring back passenger rail service?

>> Minister David Zimmer: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, people living in northern Ontario do have the right to rely on public transportation to travel between their communities, especially in those remote communities. They rely on that transportation for essential access to essential services. So what have we done? We are improving the intercommunity bus services in northern Ontario. And that's why just this past Friday we announced that we would work with existing private carriers to continue improving the intercommunity bus services and what that has led to, Speaker, is that communities are going to benefit from that announcement. Those communities include Hurst, hornepayne, white river, red lake, Emo, Rainy River, fort Frances, at Coe can, red rock and other communities. We are going to provide -- Provide return service five day as week between all communities covered by the ontc thanks to this new funding.

>> MPP Norm Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the acting Premier. While some northern Ontario yans relied on the train, for remote northern communities, including many first nations, air travel is the only reliable year-round mode of transportation. This government has shown they do not care about the needs of northerners in many ways, including when they increased the aviation fuel tax by 148%. As a direct result of this increase, northerners have seen the cost of everything from food to fuel to personal travel for medical appointments go up. Our Ontario P.C. Leader has recognized this issue and committed to reversing the 148% increase to the aviation fuel tax for all northern airports, large and small. Will the Deputy Premier admit that this increase has created unnecessary hardships for Ontarians living in remote northern communities. Will she agree to reverse this tax for northern Ontario?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member knows, aviation fuel tax was previously amended. In 1992 -- and it was at 2 cents a litre.

The majority of aviation fuel is the federal tax and we have made it clear that the recent decrease in jet fuel prices created enforcement for leader has been phased out between 2014 and '17. As we know, what we're trying to do is ensure we provide support for those municipalities in regions of the north to ensure they get more funding which these members on the other side have consistently denied them. We have put forward increased funding for the ompf and other support systems for the region, aviation fuel tax is meant to provide even greater revenue for the communities. The member opposite knows the majority of that is federal government and our proportion of that is 1 cent per litre.

>> MPP Ross Romano: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the acting Premier. Investments in northern Ontario will not be confined simply to bringing back the northlander or reversing the aviation fuel tax. It's about economic development as well. The ring of fire is the single greatest opportunity, economically, that northern Ontario has ever seen. It's estimated that it will create 5,500 sustainable jobs and increases of upwards of \$2 billion of government revenues. Under the people's guarantee, Patrick Brown and the P.C. Government will ensure that we are committed to building roads to the ring of fire. Since discovered, this government has done nothing but made broken promises and entered into bad faith negotiations with respect to the ring. After ten years since its discovery, construction of roads are still not -- still not under way. Ring of fire is not mentioned in the recent fall economic statement. So, Mr. Speaker, to the acting Premier, will this government finally admit that any reference they make to the ring of fire is nothing more than an empty ploy?

>> Minister Bill Mauro: The member opposite missed the announcement in August of this year. The Premier is in Thunder Bay with the Minister of indigenous relations, Minister of northern development and mines and myself as we made the announcement follow through on our commitment. First nations were in attendance at the announcement at the same time, Speaker. And everybody is aware that they have signed on moving forward not only with one road in east/west but also with the north/south from Natina north straight into Marten Falls as well. A very exciting announcement. Speaker still remains surprising to me that members of the Conservative party will stand in this place and pretend as best they are able that they will somehow provide more fiscal capacity for northern Ontario municipalities, when in fact they are the party, when in power, that downloaded massive amounts of financial responsibilities onto the backs of residential property taxpayers. Not only in northern Ontario but in every one of the 444 municipalities across this province.

MPP Vanthof to Minister Duguid Re: Goreway Gas Plant

>> MPP John Vanthof: Thank you. My question's to the acting Premier. Yesterday we learned that a private gas plant in brampton gamed the Liberal government system from private contracts to the tune of \$100 million. We know the company was fined for \$10 million by the O.E.B. For the fraud. And the Minister of economic development and growth told reporters they had also paid back the full 100 million. But the amount paid back by the private gas plant is blacked out in the Ontario N.G. Report. Whether will the acting Premier tell us when the people of Ontario will be able to see for themselves that this private gas plant company has paid them back in full?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll share with the member some of the facts on this as they come forward. And some actually reported today. In all 92 -- In all the ieso negotiated 92% of the costs coming back, that includes the \$10 million fine. The challenge here, Mr. Speaker, is some of these are disputed inappropriate costs that the company would take a different view on as to whether they're inappropriate or not. So there was a -- call it a negotiation between the ieso and the company to determine which of these costs were really deemed to be ineligible, and the fact that 92% -- Was recovered in the eyes of the ieso was deemed to be fair to the company but more so fair to ratepayers.

>> MPP Vanthof: Again to the acting Premier. If it's indeed true that the vast majority of these costs have been repaid by the company, can the acting Premier tell us when the people will see that on their hydro bills? When will they be paid back for this fraud?

>> Minister Duguid: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that yes, indeed, the 92% of the costs have been -- are in the process of being paid back. I can't confirm that indeed that those dollars have flowed yet but they will. My understanding is they go right back into the ieso and the rate system. But you'd have to check with finance and our accountants to determine exactly how that cash flow happens. But I appreciate the question and certainly we may be able to determine a more in depth answer and checking with the finance officials down the road.

>> MPP Vanthof: Ontario families and businesses are struggling under the weight of soaring hydro bills. Rates have gone up by 300% under this Liberal kboft. Now we learn in addition to paying for the hydro they use, families were forced to pay \$100 million to a private gas plant company for no resale. I'll ask the acting Premier again. How will she ensure that the people of Ontario who paid those hydro bills get their money back?

>> Minister Duguid: Again, Mr. Speaker, let's be very, very clear. \$100 million has not been lost. \$100 million in fact has been -- In addition, Mr. Speaker, the

company that was accused of exploiting the process has been fined \$10 million. So that money has flowed back into the system, Mr. Speaker. Ratepayers are not going to be out. There is a dispute in terms of some of these costs. There's no question. And, you know, I think that speaks to the system, the definition of what appropriate costs ought to have been. The ieso has strengthened that system as well to ensure this can't happen in the future. It's an unfortunate circumstance. The company, Mr. Speaker. But tow end of the day the ieso took the actions that it ought to have taken and ratepayers have been compensated, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Vanthof to Minister Duguid Re: Goreway Gas Plant

>> MPP John Vanthof: Once again to the acting Premier. The O.E.B. Report on the newest gas plant scandal says the team that mondís electricity company has been raising red flags about this kind of activity for years. The Liberal government's loopholes have allowed private companies to take money from Ontario families and businesses with very few consequences. If the Liberal government knew about the \$100 million fraud and the loopholes let the private gas plants get away with stealing money for so long, why didn't anyone do anything about it until now?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ieso is the organization, Mr. Speaker, that add in Mrs these matters and deals with these matters, Mr. Speaker. It's not the Minister or the government that engages in these kind of discussions and these kind of negotiations with these companies, nor do we do the procurement. It's the ieso that does that. They identified that there was an issue going on. They investigated the issue. The issue did take some time. It was apparently very complex and difficult to determine. At the end of the day they determined there were some ineligible costs that were claimed by this company and a few others, Mr. Speaker. And they took the action to recover the vast majority of the fund that had been deemed to be ineligible claims and they fined this company \$10 million in addition to that. So, Mr. Speaker, I believe they've taken the action they ought to have taken. And certainly at the surface it seems like it's a pretty fair result.

>> MPP Vanthof: This is a long-standing issue. The brampton gas plant alone was able to defraud the people of this province for almost three years before it was discovered. The O.E.B. Report says -- that create opportunities for exploitation to the serious financial disadvantage of Ontario ratepayers. Why this is had a Liberal government allowed private energy companies to exploit the people of Ontario for so long?

>> Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, once again let me repeat the ieso has recovered the vast majority of the fund than in dispute and indeed levied a fine to the company in question. Ratepayers are not out here, Mr. Speaker, for the vast majority of those ineligible funds. So that's I think point number one. Point number two, when something like this occurs it does mean that there must have been some kind of a problem or a flaw with the system that was in place. In this case it would appear that the definition of eligible costs were probably not clear enough and the ieso has taken measures to correct that, Mr. Speaker, which is the appropriate course of action for them to take. So the dollars have been recovered. The ieso has taken appropriate action to ensure this doesn't happen in the future and indeed, Mr. Speaker, market renewable systems being put into place where this will never, ever happen in the future.

>> MPP Vanthof: This is not an isolated incident. There is a systemic issue with how this government allows private energy companies to operate in Ontario. The government knew about this fraud and they did nothing for years. The O.E.B. Report went on to say that, and I quote, the panel has frequently commented on the substantial inefficiencies and opportunities for exploitation that are associated with different elements of the design of the wholesale electricity market. You knew about it. You did nothing. I'll ask the acting Premier again, why has her government allowed the people of Ontario to foot the bill the shenanigans every private energy companies for so long?

>> Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I have to correct the member again. The funds that are in question have for the most part been recovered. So when he says "Foot the bill," indeed ieso has involved the vast majority of the fund and levied a \$10 million fine to the company. There's no defending a company that exploited this system, Mr. Speaker. At the same time we need to ensure the ieso is very aware of this that they need to be more vigilant, Mr. Speaker, when they put those systems in place to ensure that there is clarity in what eligible costs ought to be or ought not to be, Mr. Speaker. They've made the changes they need to make to that system. They've recovered the vast majority of funds on behalf of Ontario ratepayers. I think Ontario ratepayers would expect that as well. And they've levied a \$10 million fine, the largest ever, Mr. Speaker, on that much can. I think Ontario ratepayers would expect that as well.

MPP Thompson to Minister Flynn Re: Minimum Wage Increase

>> MPP Lisa M. Thompson: Thanks very much, Speaker. Speaker, the Russian olympic team were not the only hosts to receive a ban yesterday. Last night CTV London reported port Albert general store is closing this winter for the first time in 150 years. A direct result of this government's bad policies. Six employees will be out of work this winter just before Christmas. When it reopens this spring, Speaker, the Deputy Premier, a summer client, will no longer be welcome there. Can the Deputy Premier explain to the House why she has been banned from the port Albert general store and tell us how many other Liberal caucus members have been banned from small pises throughout the province because of the bad decisions?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Speaker, perhaps the member opposite can explain, when you had the chance to stand up for working people. In the province of Ontario, because you've turned your back on them. Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, a third of people in the province of Ontario currently make less than \$15 an hour. Half of those people, more than half of those people, Speaker, are between the ages of 25 and 64. These the time when they're trying to raise families, pay rent, buy clothes for if their kids, put the kids through school, put food on the table, Speaker. This party opposite has denied these families the opportunity to do that and now they pull out a gimmicky question like this, Speaker ? Speaker, we all had an opportunity -- To stand up for working people in Ontario. These guys turned their backs on them, Speaker .

>> MPP Thompson: Mr. Speaker, again back to the Deputy Premier. This party, this government just doesn't get it, because these six people will be earning zero dollars per hour, because they're losing their incomes through the winter months, because this owner has no other options but to close. And, Speaker, I am sure this is just one example of many more to come and the peep's guarantee, we will still move forward with minimum Wayne increases, just more slowly. This is an approach that the Ontario chamber of commerce said would mitigate job impacts by 74%. So, Speaker, will the Deputy Premier sign on to the people's guarantee and help us fix the mess that her government has made and save jobs and small businesses throughout Ontario?

>> Minister Flynn: Speaker, quite the contrary to what the member's asserting, when the opportunity was given to this House to support working people -- Thank you, Speaker. To support working people in the province of Ontario, these guys refused to stand up and be counted, Speaker. The Ontario economy is leading the g-7 in economic growth. We've got unemployment numbers so low, Speaker, that we haven't seen in decades, Speaker. The Ontario economy is doing well, Speaker, and when this party had an opportunity to vote just last week, they voted against paid sick days for Ontario workers. They voted against child death

leave, crime related leave, disappearance leave, pregnancy leave, domestic violence and sexual violence leave, Speaker. These folks had an opportunity to stand up for working people in the province of Ontario -- Speaker, and then they put out the glossy magazine. To tell us they lost \$12 billion in cuts. At the don't know what to do with it, Speaker. Then they tell us they're going to roll back the minimum wage, Speaker --

MPP Gates to Minister Duguid Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Wayne Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the acting Premier. Yesterday a publicly owned niagara-on-the-lake hydro issued a simple and straight straightforward request, keep your political message off our residents' bill. Nobody likes to receive a bill but right now the Ontario energy board forces local distributors to print local messages on their bill. They're forcing utilities to include lines that refer to savings from their hydro scheme, savings that aren't actually there. The so-called savings this government is forcing them to print is nothing more than costs they kick down the road. A plan which won't lower bills and won't bring hydro back into public hands. My question is simple, Mr. Speaker. Local distributors are asking the Liberals to stop forcing them to produce bills that contain their political advertising for a plan they don't believe is actually creating savings. Will the acting Premier listen to local distributors?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Speaker, I think the only people in this province that don't want ratepayers to know they're getting a 25% cut on their energy rate are the NDP And maybe the P.C.S, Mr. Speaker. So I understand why the member would be upset that ratepayers are being informed that their bills are going down by 25%. Mr. Speaker, this government doesn't design the energy bills. In fact we've heard -- and I'm sitting beside a previous energy Minister. We've heard time and time again from ratepayers, Mr. Speaker, that they want to see ways to ensure that the bills are easier for ratepayers to understand. That's what the O.E.B. Is looking at, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of ratepayers. I think they're doing some good work in that respect. But I do understand why the member would want them to be aware of their 25% cuts to their energy rates, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the acting Premier. Locate me quote Jim Ryan, the chair of the publicly owned niagara-on-the-lake hydro utility. He said -- putting political messages on invoices is simply wrong, and frankly we agree with him. Keep your political spin off our people's hydro bills. Residents -- to answer his response -- residents are smart enough to know their bills have gone up 300%, they aren't seeing saiflgs no matter how many times you write it on their bill. Will the acting Premier stop insulting people whose bills have skyrocketed because of bad decisions and remove and remove the political messages from the hydro bills as requested by local distributors? Thank you.

>> Minister Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are no political messages on the bills at all, Mr. Speaker. Informing ratepayers that they're getting 25% off their energy costs is information. Information that they deserve to have, in spite of the efforts of the NDP To ensure that they don't know that they're getting 25% off. Why would the member not want his constituents to know, Mr. Speaker, that their energy rates have gone down by 25%? The only reason I can think of, Mr. Speaker, is the political reason on their part that they don't want their members to

know that we've brought energy rates down in the province of Ontario by 25%. We're very proud of that. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, he ought to let his constituents know that we've also built a clean, reliable and affordable energy system in the province of Ontario, Mr. Speaker. It hasn't been easy. A lot of investment. It's taken a lot of time but, Mr. Speaker, Ontarians have a clean, reliable affordable energy system that they can be proud of.

MPP Kiwala to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Gender-Based Violence

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of the status of women. Today is a day of national remembrance and action on violence against women. It is an emotional day for women and Canadians across the country who remember with great sadness the events of December 6, 1989. We will hold an annual commemorative event in my riding of Kingston and the Islands and sisom united street's church organized by Lee Martins. On December 6, 1989, 14 young women were murdered at lecole polytechnique in Montreal. They were young women engineers and their lives were cut short by a senseless act of misogyny by a man who said he wanted to kill feminists. Minister, can you tell me what this province is doing to challenge every day the deeply rooted attitudes that lead to violence against women?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member from Kingston and the Islands for this very important question. Speaker, 28 years have passed, but we will never forget what happened to those 14 young women and to the women and girls who have suffered violence in this province. As the Minister of the status of women, it is my priority to ensure that women and girls feel safe in this province and to help build a society where women can live free from the fear of threat of violence. 83% of domestic violence victims are women. Women are four times more likely to be victims of homicide. The reality is that one in three women will experience some form of sexual violence or harassment in their lives. Speaker, that is why we are working tirelessly to improve the province's response to domestic violence and to create a gender based violence strategy. Our strategy will integrate the action plan ending violence against indigenous women plan and update the domestic violence plan.

>> MPP Kiwala: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister for her answer, and the statistics are truly alarming. My Colleague is right. We need to take action, to change attitude and perspectives on gender violence because this affects us all. Speaker hashtags like me too have shone a light on how prevalent sexual violence and harassment are in our homes, our workplaces and our communities. Women are showing enormous courage and strength by speaking out, and we need to make sure they know we are listening. Gender based violence impacts not only survivors but their families, their workplaces, their communities and their relationships forever. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister please outline specific new policies -- That address the needs of survivors of violence and their families in our communities across the province?

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Speaker. And thanks to the member from Kingston and the islands. Speaker, I'm pleased to speak about the cross-

government supports we are providing to Ontario women and here's what we're doing. Speaker, working with the ministry of labour we will be providing paid leave for survivors of domestic and sexual violence. This means a survivor can keep their job and escape a violent and abusive relationship to seek support and safety for themselves and their families. And with the ministry of housing we are helping survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking escape violent situations by providing faster access to housing through our portable housing benefits. These survivors will receive priority access to income-based social housing. Speaker, I'm also pleased to report that frontline workers in the hospitality, health, education and community services sector are now able to access training, to help them recognize and respond to sexual violence and harassment on the job. It's part of "It's your shift." Speaker, we're working hard to build a future free from the threat and fear of violence for women.

MPP Clark to Minister Del Duca Re: Highway 401 Safety

>> MPP Steve Clark: My question's for the Minister of transportation. Last week saw another tragic crash on highway 401 in my riding that left two people dead and four injured. Mayors in Leeds- Grenville took their concern about highway safety to the Minister way back in March, after a horrific fatal collision involved a hazardous chemical. They demanded action to make the highway safer and protect motorists and first responders. And the Minister ignored them for six months. Here's how Prescott mayor Brett Todd described the Minister 's response. We waited six months to get the first meeting. We lost a great deal of time. The Speaker is meeting with frustrated mayors on December 15th. Having wasted so much time spinning his wheels, what measures will he announce to end the carnage on our highways?

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: Speaker, thanks very much. I want to thank the member for his question. Of course I've said many times in this chamber that whenever we have any injury, in particular any fatality on a highway anywhere in the province, it is something that the ministry obviously takes very seriously and our condolences go out to the families of the loved ones that are involved. I have had the opportunity and the member from Leeds- Grenville would know this. He and I have actually specifically chatted. He's come to see me about this particular challenge that municipal leaders and the travelling public in eastern Ontario are facing. The member did neglect to mention I've already had one in-person meeting in Kingston with his mayor and a Collection of other mayors from eastern Ontario took place a number of weeks ago. I found it to be a very productive meeting. I heard a variety of opinions and input provided by the mayors from eastern Ontario. I think that they felt that that first meeting -- Weeks ago was a worthwhile meeting and set a very solid foundation for how we intend to move forward, and as I committed to at that meeting that took place weeks ago. I expect we'll have an update in the next number of days to provide for the --

>> MPP Clark: Back to the Minister. I want to remind the Minister that the mayors aren't coming to the table just to hear him talk. The only commitment this Minister has made is that widening the increasingly congested highway to six lanes we need isn't happening. Despite the dangerous conditions, he says eastern Ontario can wait. Let me tell the Minister that's unacceptable and we need to hear real solutions. Since may, there have been 16 people killed and 18 people injured in a dozen crashes on the 401 between Trenton and Cornwall. Speaker, the slowest line ant busy -- the snow and the busy holiday season is upon us. Why did the Minister waste so much time? And what measures is he going to announce to make eastern Ontario highways safer and save lives?

>> Minister Del Duca: Speaker, thanks very much. You know as I said in the first answer to this member, we as a ministry, I specifically take this area of responsibility extremely seriously. I have said on many occasions the safety of our roads and highways from my perspective is not meant to be nor should it ever be a partisan issue, Mr. Speaker. I have to say, despite my best efforts to convey that message not only to that member -- message, to his leader and team, and to our municipal partners, it is borderline shameful this member would stand and try to take some sort of partisan jab over an issue that is extremely important to me, to the ministry, to the travelling public and ultimately to his constituents -- Speaker, as I was saying, as members in this House know for the last 16 consecutive years. The province of Ontario has ranked first or second across North America for road or highway safety. It will be my pleasure to continue to work with mayor Todd and the rest of the eastern region mayors and the OPP. Ministry to make sure we get this right. Thank you very much.

MPP Gretzky to Minister Hoskins Re: Unlicensed Group Homes

>> MPP Lisa Gretzky: Than; you, Speaker. To the acting Premier. Yesterday I rose in this House to talk about a man named esa who died trying to escape the horrific conditions in an unlicensed group home. Esa paid the landlord almost \$4,000 for one month in that mouse-infested basement, where he frequently was locked inside. Sadly esa's situation is not unique. You could see the cockroaches swarming, almost like a moving carpet, one man said of his time in an illegal home. Countless other residents have reported unsanitary linens, overcrowding and going days without food. My Colleague from welland introduced bill 135 in may, which would establish a framework for the licensing of these homes. If the government is not willing to create more spaces in long-term care and affordable, accessible housing. Then the very least they could do is establish a framework for licensing. Is this Liberal government willing to make the commitment today, pass bill 135. And licence and regulate these group homes?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to speak to this important question. And I share the concern that's raised by the member opposite that this - - that these stories from individuals who rely on their -- these environments, care homes, group homes to provide the necessary supports, to provide an environment which is conducive to their getting well and staying well, Mr. Speaker, that these reports are definitely troubling. So that's why as a result -- I think the member understands that there are a variety of individuals who may avail themselves of these types of residences, so this is necessarily an effort that requires work across ministries, but I've asked my ministry to take the lead to look at the situation in care homes and group homes. Particularly those where we find vulnerable individuals and to interact with stakeholders and clients and residents themselves to find out what more --

>> MPP Gretzky: Back to the acting Premier. We finally know who's responsible for this issue the Minister of health who yesterday said it was a cross ministry issue meaning that the people who have lived and died in these horrendous conditions should look to all the ministries that have failed them. The ministry of health has failed to ensure there are enough long-term care beds, mental health supports and housing for people leaving hospitals. The ministry of community and social services has failed people with developmental disabilities who face decades-long wait lists for housing. The ministry of seniors affairs has failed to address dire issues of seniors living in poverty. The Minister of housing and poverty reduction has failed to crack down on these licensed homes with numerous safety violations. Saying that this is a complex multiministerial issue does not excuse this Liberal government for ignoring this problem for years. Will we get a commitment for immediate action today so that nobody else has to live or die in these horrendous conditions?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite surely knows that municipalities have oversight. They have the regulatory ability to pass bylaws and many if not most of them do. I know she's heckling right now. This is a very serious issue and we're taking it seriously, Mr. Speaker. But there is no government before this government that has stood up for and created stronger regulatory environments for long-term care homes, Mr. Speaker. We've strengthened oversight and responsibility for child care, for day care, for retirement homes which were completely -- all of those were completely unlicensed under an NDP Government, Mr. Speaker, and unregulated. So we have provided the strongest regulatory environment for these facilities in the history of Ontario, and I have committed to have my ministry take the lead to look at group homes and care homes, Mr. Speaker, which contain a variety of individuals. Under municipal oversight. We'll look at it with stakeholders, with residents to see what might be done, Mr. Speaker .

MPP MacLaren to Minister Milczyn Re: Landlord and Tenant Board

>> MPP Jack MacLaren: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of housing. Eli Santini is a landlord who is suffering the unfairness of the landlord and tenant board and the rules which heavily favour the tenant. Eli had a tenant who did not pay the rent on August 1st. He filed the landlord and tenant board n4 form on August 2nd. The landlord and tenant board l1 form on August 16 went to a landlord and tenant board hearing on September 18th, got an eviction notice for September 30th and called the sheriff on October 2nd to post an eviction notice on the tenant's door to leave by October 12. The tenant left two --. Tie and a half months had passed and Eli is out of pocket \$4,000 plus costs. This isn't fair. Minister -- Can you help Eli by restoring fairness for him and all landlords?

>> Minister Peter Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from Carleton-mississippi mills for the question and express empathy toward Eli Santini and ensure we understand their concerns and that there are protections in place for situations like these. Small land lords have a critical role to play in providing housing throughout the province. And we know that the vast majority of landlords are fair and reasonable and are hard working. The R.T.A. Which came in effect in January 2007, legal framework for governing landlord relationships in Ontario. And it also created the landlord and tenant board. We're proud that the landlord tenant board is able to answer approximately half a million calls per year from tenants and landlords and process about 80,000 applications per year. Tenants and landlords -- L.T. B., as well as go to small claims court to resolve disputes. We're committed to supporting this co-operative system that helps both landlords and tenants, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP MacLaren: To the Minister of housing again. Eli santinsi a small businessman who is struggling to cope with the landlord tenants rules that are not fair to landlords. Eli offers the following suggestions for changes. Number one, create a problem tenants directory. Number two, allow landlords to Collect a damage deposit. Number three, shoten -- shorten the time for the n4 form notice of application from two weeks to one day. Number four, shorten the time for the l1 form application to the hearing from four weeks to one week. And number five, reduce the landlord application fee from \$190 to \$50, the same as the tenants'. These changes would create fairness for landlords and tenants. Minister, will you make these changes?

>> Minister Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the House that we're committed to ensuring that landlords and tenants are always protected under the law. And this government also knows that small business people have so much to offer this province and we understand the pressures that are

sometimes put on them. So, Mr. Speaker, I note the member's listed a number of suggestions that he has, but I want to remind the House that before a tenancy starts under the residential tenancy act, it allows landlords to do the due diligence to do credit checks, check on past rental history references, guarantees with the human rights -- Ontario human rights code when they ask these questions. Landlords do have the opportunity to do this due diligence. We maintain. That by doing this, landlords can protect themselves. It provides for a fast track eviction process. It allows landlords to evict when deliberate damage is done to the unit and it protects other --

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Duguid Re: Economic Growth in Ontario

>> MPP Ann Hoggarth: There's a lot going on with the global economy and a lot of uncertainty. It appears that here we can be confident that Ontario's economy is headed in the right direction. Parents in my community want to know that their kids are going to have access to employment. Workers want to know that their jobs are safe for the foreseeable future and business owners want to know that Ontario is a good place to invest in rural business. Mr. Speaker, I want to ensure the people and families in my riding of Barrie just how strong our economy is today. Account Minister please -- can the Minister please provide an update on Ontario's economic progress in light of this month's jobs number?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to inform the member this past month we've seen a record amount of job growth in Ontario. We're up 43,500 net new jobs in the province of Ontario, Mr. Speaker. That is the largest increase since February 2008. Before the global recession. We also passed another milestone last Friday, Mr. Speaker. We've now created over 800,000 net new jobs since the global recession. More accurately that's 843,200 net new jobs. We continue to lead the country in growth, the g-7 in growth. Our unemployment rate also hit a new low, Mr. Speaker, at 5.5%. That's the lowest unemployment rate we've seen in 17 and a half years in the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, there's every reason to be confident -- Economy is doing well today and we're headed in the right direction, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Hoggarth: Thank you to the Minister for that answer. This is great news to the families all across Ontario. There's no question that our investments in people and infrastructure and our business growth initiatives are paying off for the people of this province. There's no question that this economy is doing extremely well. This is shown again by the fantastic job numbers this month. 43,500 net new jobs in one month is remarkable along with the lowest unemployment rate in 17.5 years at 5.5%. In fact last year, in my riding of Barrie, unemployment was the highest in the province at 7.9%. Now it is at 3.4%, the lowest -- the lowest in the province and second-lowest in the country. That translates to over 17,000 jobs in my home town of Barrie in the last year alone. However, Speaker, there are uncertainties today in the global economy, whether it's nafta, Brexit or emerging technologies. Can the Minister outline to this House what risks -- Exist in our economy going --

>> Minister Duguid: Ontario is in a position of strength. And being in a position of strength means if we stay the course, Mr. Speaker, we can withstand any risks that emerge in the changing global economy. Via rifts from nafta or emerging technologies or any other types of global change. We've also stepped up when it comes to the new economy, Mr. Speaker. We want to ensure that we're at the

cutting edge of technological development. I say, Mr. Speaker, today that Ontario's not only a leader in economic growth for today's economy. We're going to be a leader in economic growth for many decades ahead, Mr. Speaker, which means we will be able to pass on to our next generation an economy, Mr. Speaker, that we can be proud to pass on to them, that comes with the opportunities that many of us have had in the past, main even -- maybe even greater opportunities, Mr. Speaker. That would not be happening, Mr. Speaker, without the investments we've made in our people, our talent and innovation, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Scott to Minister Coteau Re: Group Home Workers

>> MPP Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of children and youth services. Ten months ago a group home in Oakwood in my riding burned to the ground, killing two people, including one child. This sad incident highlights many flaws in our province's management of group homes. This past week we saw a disturbing article in the "Toronto Star" about the abuse and violence faced by group home staff as well as the lack of training and oversight by the ministry. As a member of the government's panel reviewing residential care system put it, you know your system is based on the flimsiest of foundations when you have absolutely no standards on who can do this work. The Ontario provincial advocate for children and youth had previously said he is fed up with the situation, but we have seen little action from this government. Why is the government allowing our children and care workers. Such terrible conditions?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for the question. The events that took place in her riding were very tragic. My heart goes out to everyone who's involved, the workers, the family, the community as a whole. The experiences shared with the group home workers with the "Toronto Star" I know is a very difficult article for many to read. I wanted to take a moment just to acknowledge the bravery in the folks sharing their stories that were captured in that article. Service providers and workers play an important role in the lives of young people in care, and they have a strong influence in the day-to-day lives of young people who are in their care. Immediately following the fire, multiple investigations were started by local and provincial authorities, some which are continuing, Mr. Speaker. The ministry continues to offer its full support and co-operation in those investigations. The places that children and youth live in must be welcoming and must immediately address their needs. And we're doing work reform to ensure we better position young people.

>> MPP Scott: Well, Mr. Speaker, the government needs to start treating our group home workers in high-needs children like people, not statistics. I had written to the Minister about the tragic state of our group homes this past April. I even filed an order paper question to see if I could get some real answers from this government. Unfortunately the "Toronto Star" article showed that this government just isn't listening. First they failed to implement key recommendations from the residential services review panel, to create a single oversight body for the system, even though they would have included that in bill 89. Now we learn that even when my local children's aid society tried to reach out to the ministry to address an increase in violence, quote, there was silence. Will the Minister stop ignoring these calls for action and take this issue with the seriousness that it deserves?

>> Minister Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, we've taken immediate action to address some of the issues the member's raising. We increased the number of unannounced inspections of licensed residents. We've confirmed licensed residents are compliant with the current fire code and established an intensive site review team to conduct enhanced inspections of the sites, Mr. Speaker. ., Mr. Speaker, the interesting thing about this question -- and I don't want to make this question a contentious back and forth. But we put forward a whole new framework for residential services for young people and we've put forward a blueprint. In bill 9 we've modernized many of the aspects we're talking about today and still we don't know why the Conservative party voted against bill 89, which modernized services for children in this province. So I -- Ask why didn't we have co-operation with the Conservative party --

MPP Hatfield to Minister Sousa Re: Alcohol Sales

>> MPP Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Deputy Premier. Good morning. Seven months ago, I had a private member's bill pass second reading. It called for a change in the law to allow Canadian club whiskey to be sold where it's been made in Windsor for the past 130 years. Speaker, you may recall that the owners of hi walker sold the Canadian club brand but it's still made under contract by the same people in the same place. Red tape and the current regulations don't allow whiskey bottled under contract to be sold where it's produced. I've been told Liberal senior policy advisors claim changing the law might impact international trade policies. Speaker, can someone over there point me to the exact language or clause in some agreement that states the simple change is just too much work for Liberals to undertake?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member opposite who's been advocating strongly for his community to maintain the heritage centre for Canadian club heritage centre open, recognizing how important it is for tourism and his community. I applaud you for the tremendous work you're doing. He also recognizes a private member's bill is before the committee and there are some elements of the bill that would cause precedence in respect to selling liquor and alcohol outside of an lcbo store. Recognizing that, we have made and tried to accommodate the new owners of Canadian club, who have yet to state that they will in fact maintain it open even after we put forward this issue, but I welcome and I can talk more about this in supplementary.

>> MPP Hatfield: Speaker, Canadian club heritage brand centre, as the Minister has referenced, is a plagues building, one of the most significant in -- palatial building, one of the most significant in Ontario if not north America. 15,000 people a year used to tour the building every year. It's Windsor's second most visited most popular tourist attraction after Caesar's. It's been closed since March since this issue erupted. Why won't the Liberals pull out all the stops, put on their thinking caps and find a solution so that the bottling of whiskey can be sold, or a few bottles of whiskey can be sold after a tour and the tours at the brand centre can reopen to the public?

>> Minister Sousa: So, Mr. Speaker, as the moment also knows we do offer some of those privileges when it's being produced within those locations. That's not the case here. The member opposite I know doesn't want unintended consequences in regards to social responsibility and other measures. And again the owners of the heritage centre hasn't yet even requested this. I know the member wants it and so do I, but the owners have not stood up and owners are not guaranteeing that they'll maintain it open even after we put this forward, and the precedent it would set would be precarious right across the province. I know the member doesn't want that but I do feel for his need and I would like to see a solution in that respect too.

MPP Potts to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Investments

>> MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, speaker. My question is to the minister of health and long-term care. Providing ontarians with timely access to the care they need when they're at home, in the community or one of our many institutions, community or outstanding hospitals is of the utmost importance to our government. Over the past 14 years, our health system has improved significantly. We've increased our investment in health care each and every year, allowing us to treat more patients and provide better care, reduce wait times to some of the shortest in the country. Our government has increased funding for health care by \$23 billion since 2003 and in our most recent budget we announced an additional 9 billion to support hospital construction projects across the province. Today across Ontario there are 34 major hospital projects under way that will provide additional capacity, state of the art facilities for people across the province including planning for a major rebuild. In my riding of beaches-east York. Will the minister of health and long-term care please inform the house of the great news he shares with surgeons at Toronto western hospital.

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So in the last few days we've had two great hospital related announcements. On Friday I had the honour of being in Windsor. In fact I have to give a shout out to the three Windsor and Essex M.P.P.S because we announced a brand new multibillion-dollar hospital for Windsor and Essex. State of the art that's going to be providing the absolute highest quality of care to the residents of both Windsor county and Essex county of course yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I was at Toronto western hospital here in Toronto with the member from trinity-spadina to announce an investment in the order of \$100 million to completely renew and renovate and expand the operating theatres, the surgical suites at Toronto western hospital, a hospital that we all know is so well known for their advanced care, Trang and capacity in areas like neurosurgery and many other surgical specialties. So big shout-out to the people at Toronto western, an important investment that will enable those doctors, surgeons and -- Do even better.