

Transcript of Provincial Question Period
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Unedited Transcript

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Fedeli to Premier Wynne (Sousa) Re: Moody's Credit Rating

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you. Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Ontario has suffered another fiscal setback due solely to the actions of this Premier moody's credit rating agency has down graded the province's credit outlook from stable to negative as a direct result of their election documents budget. Moody's said, quote -- spending pressure will challenge the province's ability to sustain balanced fiscal results across multiple years. Moody's also assumes the budget will lead to, quote, an upward trend in the debt burden and a faster rate in est expense thanpreviously anticipated. Speaker, why is this Premier, in her shameless bid to cling to power, putting Ontario in an even more precarious financial position and harming Ontario's reputation in the process?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of finance is going to want to comment in the supplementary. Let me just say -- and this is part of the message that the member opposite neglected, which is tt moody's has confirmed our double-a credit rating, Mr. Speaker. They have adjusted their outlook. We know that. But this is not a credit rating downgrade. Ontario's debt continues to be highly marketable and that reflects, Mr. Speaker, the confidence of investors in our economy. We do value the input of the rating agencies, Mr. Speaker. Our responsibility is, and it always will be, to support the C and opportunity for people in this province. That's the role of goverto do the things that people cannot do by themselves. I know that the Minister of finance is working with the rating agencies and he will comment, Mr. Speaker. But our credit rating has been confirmed, Mr. Speaker. And we will continue to work to make sure people in this province have -- the people of the province have everything that they need, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Fedeli: Back to the Premier. Speaker, this is not any kind of a forecast for moody's. This is an outright condemnation of this government's fiscal policies. The Premier likes to say she is making, quote, conscious choices that plunged Ontario into deficit. But the fact is that this government used money from reserves and the sale of assets to try to artificially balance the budget. Speaker, it's not a conscious choice. It's a consequence of onetime money running out. They ran out of things to sell, Speaker. This means we need more money to pay interest on our debt and less money is now available for needed services. So, Speaker, moody's sees right through this cling to power. Does the Premier really expect Ontario families won't?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, and the member quotes moody's so I'm going to quote moody as well. Here it is word for word -- the affirmation of the double-a rating for the rovince of Ontario reflects& the province's ability to rely on a large, diversified economic base with sound wealth generation that support as strong provincial revenue base and greater degree of flexibility to accommodate

revenue and expenditure pressures and prudent debt management, Mr. Speaker. Investors are investing in Ontario for a reason, because we're making it ham and we're relying on our economic engine of the economy to support all of Canada. We're the largest net contributor to the federation as well. Thank you.

>> MPP Fedeli: Back to the Premier. What the Minister failed to mention was how many down grades we had, and that's why we're only at aa, Speaker. The worst part of all this is the Premier has been warned time and time again about the consequences of her spend-at-all-costs approach. The auditor general repeatedly told us that increasing debt interest payments will crowd out the services families rely on. That's why the Liberals have closed hospital beds and fir 1,600 nurses, and that's why 100 front-line health care workers in Sudbury are worried about this jobs this very morning. The government's lack of financial discipline is exactly why they received a condemnation from moody's. They can't be trusted, Speaker. Is this Premier proud that Liberal self-interests and a desperate attempt to cling to powers hurting Ontario's reputation?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, it's exactly because our fiscal discipline that we beat our targets year over year. Ninth year in a row, Mr. Speaker. We balanced the budget last year. We have a surplus of \$600 million. Furthermore we're the leanest government in all of Canada. Our interest on debt is a function of our revenue. Mr. Speaker, it was 15 cents for every dollar when they wereower. Today it's under 8 cents, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to take what steps are necessary to invest unlike what this Minister is suggesting in this budget we have tremendous investments to provide for health care, public education, social programs, infrastructure spending. The very things that they say we should do, they're voting against, Mr. Speaker. The people of Ontario need a strong economy. We're diversifying that economy and moody's has affirmed that the province of Ontario is being prudent in our debt management.

MPP Pettapiece (Scott) (McNaughton) to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro One Executive Salaries

>> MPP Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Mr. Speaker, does the Premier believe \$6 million is an acceptable salary for the C.E.O. Of Hydro One?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, you know, I'm pleased to rise and talk to the same question. You know, we recognize that the executive style where you said Hydro One are high compared to the vast majority of Ontario salaries and we remain committed to regulation, accountability and transparency through our government's involvement as a majority shareholder. You know, Mr. Speaker, the gimmick that we're seeing from the other side, especially from the leader of that party, Mr. Speaker, is going to drive us down the same mess that we're seeing south of the border, Mr. Speaker. You know, this isn't going to do anything to actually take a single cent off of anyone's hydro bills, Mr. Speaker. Not one single cent. But you know what did, Mr. Speaker? Was our fair hydro plan. Our fair hydro plan makes sure that we reduce rates. By 25% on average, Mr. Speaker, and we'll continue to put forward policy and not bumper stickers. Like the gimmick that they're doing, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Premier. Mr. Speaker, to the Premier, is \$6 million an acceptable salary for the C.E.O. Of Hydro One?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, is voting against 25% reductions for families right across this province something that, you know, everyone should do, Mr. Speaker? Yes, it should, Mr. Speaker. And it's this party that did it. On that side of the House, we used to talk about them as being the party that had no plan, Mr. Speaker, and then they had a weekend where they brought forward a plan, and they were K the fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, and that was something that we thought was great but they should have voted for it when they had a chance. But now that plan has disappeared again, Mr. Speaker, and they are once again the party that has no plan. The only thing that they can talk about, Mr. Speaker, is Hydro One C.E.O. Salaries. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that executive salaries are high, but when it comes to actually making a difference in taking costs. Bills, Mr. Speaker, we reduced those especially in one areas by up to 50% because of our action, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Monte McNaughton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Premier. It is shocking to see the Liberals defend their \$6 million man. Mr. Speaker, how does the Premier defend the salaries of the Hydro One C.E.O.?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker. You know, Mr. Speaker, it's our government that understands that affordability is critical for families and businesses and, as I've said before, Mr. Speaker, that's why we launched Ontario's fair hydro plan reducing rates by 25% on average for all residential consumers as well as many a half a million small businesses and farms. And our plan is working, Mr. Speaker. You know, a recent report by the Environmental Commissioner reconfirmed Ontario's families and small businesses pay less on average than many other North American jurisdictions. Families in cities like New York, Boston and San Francisco pay more than double the average of Ontario and consumers in Charlottetown, Regina, Halifax and Moncton are paying more than the Ontario average, Mr. Speaker. By bringing down surprise -- prices for customers we're continue to increase fairness and create more opportunities for Ontario families, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to find ways and bring forward policy that help. They can keep bringing forward bumper sticker policies, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Gelinas to Premier Wynne Re: Access to Healthcare in Northern Ontario

>> MPP France Gelinas: [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Prime Minister . The Premier. [End of Translation] Hospital. And the Premier refuses to admit it. Over the last 15 years, it is that government that created this crisis, and after 15 years they are still ignoring it and denying it. The C.E.O. Of lake of the woods hospital said and I quote -- we did not receive the average 4.6% increase that was mentioned in the provincial budget. We received significantly less than that. The Premier needs to admit there is a problem and she needs to explain to Canadians from Kenora to King street why she isn't fixing this crisis. Why is it the Premier refuses to. Properly fund our hospitals?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege this morning of being at one of the -- sunnybrook, the orthopaedic centre at Holland centre, and reaffirmed our announcement, Mr. Speaker, of the near billion-dollar investment in health care that's included in our budget, Mr. Speaker, that will specifically go to hospitals to reduce wait times, Mr. Speaker, and I recognize that there's variability across the province, Mr. Speaker, which is exactly why health quality Ontario has a northern Ontario health equity strategy. It's very important that, you know, on just about every policy file, Mr. Speaker, in Ontario, at one point or another you will run up against geography because this is a massive province, Mr. Speaker, and the population is unevenly distributed. So that's why having an equity policy is important, Mr. Speaker. I'll talk more about it in the supplementary. But the member opposite knows that, overall the increasing in funding to hospitals in Ontario is 4.6% and there was variation among hospitals in terms of the increases that they got.

>> MPP Gelinas: When the C.E.O. Of a hospital comes out publicly and says they are being underfunded, we have a problem. Here's what he said -- we have many unmet needs here. There is a lot to be dealt with. We are hoping that there will be some additional support. Why, for yet another year, is the Premier ignoring the needs of our hospital system?

>> Premier Wynne: Speaker, you know we recognize that there's a need for more investment in hospitals. Let me just talk about the health equity strategy, because I'd love to, as the Premier, have a conversation with the C.E.O. Of that hospital or any of the C.E.O.s of hospitals around the province, Mr. Speaker, because they are -- they are on the front line, and we work with them as we developed our budget, Mr. Speaker. We listened to them and we made the increases that they and the O.H.A. Deemed were necessary, Mr. Speaker. But the health equity policy recognizes that there's a need for different strategies in different parts of the province, Mr. Speaker. And last year for example we announced

\$222 million over three years to support Ontario's first ever first nations health action plan including an additional \$145 million every year, Mr. Speaker, recognizing that -- There are needs. Announcing \$19 million in capital funding to support a facility at health sciences north for the northern Ontario school of medicine and a new wing in Thunder Bay to consolidate specialized --

>> MPP Gelinas: The Liberals have had 15 long years to see the crisis in our hospitals coming. They've had 15 long years to step up and address the aging of the population and change that we could see coming for decades. Now the countdown on to 50 days to go, they're still pretending that the problem does not exist. The good news for people is that hope is coming. New Democrats are going to end hallway medicine. Why did the Premier let this crisis happen in our hospitals?

>> Premier Wynne: Speaker, as I said yesterday to the member opposite, we invested an increased funding to health sciences north, the health system in the jurisdiction that she represents and our terrific member from Sudbury. We increased over two years that funding by \$10 million, Mr. Speaker. That is a substantial increase for health sciences north. And, you know, we have recognized that across the province there's a need for an increase in funding, Mr. Speaker. But that builds on the investments that every year we have made. There has been a huge investment in home care, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that more people want to stay in their homes. We need to make sure that those supports are in place. We need to make sure acute care beds continue to be supported. We increased the acute care beds in the province by 1,200 as a result of the surge, the flu surge this winter, Mr. Speaker, and we will move to make those beds permanent. Mr. Speaker, we recognize that there's more that needs to be done.

MPP Forster to Premier Wynne Re: Long-Term Care Homes

>> MPP Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. When a person needs long-term care, they deserve to know that they will be safe. They deserve to be treated with dignity and with respect. But yesterday we learned there's a home in Thunder Bay that has 44 -- yes, I repeat 44 compliance, noncompliance orders. The Liberals have been in power for 15 long years. How did the Premier let this happen?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Speaker, as I just said in my previous answer, more people want to stay in their homes. And what that has meant, Mr. Speaker, is that there has been substantial investments in home care, Mr. Speaker. We also have re-renovated, have upgraded thousands of long-term care beds across the province, Mr. Speaker. We are building more. We have -- we are in the process of building 5,000 new long-term care beds right now, Mr. Speaker. But we're also, we're also looking at and funding models like what are called naturally occurring retirement communities, Mr. Speaker. So where there is a group of seniors who are already living in an apartment and there's an example in Kingston, Mr. Speaker, oasis I believe it's called, Mr. Speaker, where these seniors are living together. They want to stay there. If they have medical support like a personal support worker they can stay and age in place. Eaker, the range of supports that we have put in place. We recognize there's more to be done.

>> MPP Forster: Speaker, what about staffing existing long-term care beds? Bethany nursing home, many of the residents were given only a single bath during the month of January. One bath in a month per resident. Seniors are wise. They've lived through a lot and we should be treasuring their contributions. These are our parents. These are the people who built Ontario to what it is today. New democrats! immediately fix that problem. We'll find and fix with an inquiry in our long-term care system so that we can start to fix these problems, which have developed over the last 15 years. Why does the Premier allow our long-term care system to get like this?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the member opposite referenced a specific situation in Thunder Bay. I know that the member for Atikokan is going to B meeting with folks on the ground there tomorrow. But, Mr. Speaker, you know, the reality is that in terms of long-term care in this province, all long-term care homes are overseen by a rigorous inspection system, a regulatory framework, Mr. Speaker, which includes an annual inspection to ensure compliance. And we have reinforced and increased that oversight, Mr. Speaker. All the results from every inspection are posted online and in the homes themselves. I recognize, Mr. Speaker, that we have to be vigilant. These are some of the most vulnerable people in our society, which is why we have increased. Er Wynne: The oversight

and, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work with long-term care providers to make sure that those are enforced.

>> MPP Forster: Speaker those 44 noncompliance issues didn't happen overnight. Staff at Bethany Thursday ining home are doing their best, dedicated and caring. They are being worked off their feet, understaffed. Sometimes it takes more than an hour for a resident to have a call answer under their room and for the staff to respond. The stories we've heard out of Bethany are heartbreaking. They're too hard to tell. Everyone feels really bad what is happening here at Bethany, and when did the Premier learn about those problems in our long-term care system and why hasn't she fixed them?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, as I've said, we have been over som time been taking action to support our growing and aging population and to reinforce and increase the vigilance in the long-term care system, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that, as I said, these are some of the most vulnerable people in our society and they deserve to have, they deserve to have every care possible. So, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to make sure that homes are compliant,, our members work with local homes but there is a system of oversight and a system of inspection. And, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very legitimate that there would be questions asked in a situation like this. Those questions need answers and that's exactly what the system, the framework of oversight is in place to do is to answer those questions. And determine why such a situation would have arisen.

MPP Wilson to Premier Wynne (Naqvi) Re: 2018 Budget

>> MPP Jim Wilson: Thank you, Speaker. This question's to the Premier. Speaker, the Premier held another campaign-style event T morning, this time at a Toronto hospital, and she's heading downtown later today for another platform announcement. This egregious abuse of years' money must come to an end. Speaker, how much are these campaign-style events costing taxpayers today?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, again I understand why the member opposite would focus on that and not the substance of the announcements THA are making relevant to our budget, Mr. Speaker, because making a nearly billion-dollar investment in hospitals, Mr. Speaker, could increase wait times when we are already, Mr. Speaker, . We are already leading the country in terms of wait times, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I'll be talking -- I'll be talking about climate change, Mr. Speaker, with Michael Bloomberg and climate change in the of corporate responsibility. I am -- Quite sure that's a subject the member opposite really doesn't want to touch. Doesn't want to talk about climate change and reining in corporate pollution, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Wilson: Back to the Premier. Even if the Premier wants to pretend otherwise, she's early campaigning on the taxpayers' dime. It's shady and it's unethical and it needs to stop. Withdraw, Mr. Speaker. Once again the Liberals had Minister s out this morning using taxpayers' money for campaign-style photo ops. Shame on you, Premier. Speaker, will the Liberal party do the GHT thing and pay back the taxpayers for these campaign-style events? You're out talking about your budget. You told us that was your platform. These are campaign-style events and they've got to stop.

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much. Thanks to the member opposite for highlighting the Minister s are doing their job. Talking about things that is important to Ontarians. we're out to do our jobs and will continue to do our jobs. But I think it's kind of really evident, Speaker, that the party opposite and Doug Ford are panicked. They're panicked because they worried that they're going to -- people are going to find out that they are going to cut ohip plus, that they are going to cut expansion to ohip plus. That they are going to cut in significant investments to bring wait times down, that they're going tout supports for students through osap where 225,000 students are going to Colleges and universities without paying any tuition fees. They are worried about, speaker, that these important policies. Are making difference in people's lives, that they are going to cut those things and they don't want people to know about those things.

MPP Forster to Minister Hunter Re: York University Strike

>> MPP Cindy Forster: Thank you. My question is to the Premier. 3,000 York university aculty are still on strike taking a stand against insecure academic jobs and chronic underfunding of the university postsecondary system, even though the Liberal government is not. Tens of thousands of York university students now face a real threat of not graduating as they have planned they have planned their lives, careers and their futures which are now uncertain. I received a letter from a nursing student at York. She's been told by the university they need to make up all their practical hours in order to graate, which is impossible ashe strike drags on and they run the real risk of losing their placement. What does the Premier have to say to the students about why their graduation is now in jeopardy?

>> Minister Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, you know this situation is certainly very challenging, and it's challenging particularly for the students at York university. Since the beginning of the strike, Speaker, I made it very, very clear that our priority is on the students, on getting both sides to come together to reach a fair resolution to both sides on this issue so that we can put our students at the forefront and bring them back to the learning that they're there to do. You know, Mr. Speaker, it's disappointing that an agreement has not yet been reached. The ministry of labour has provided support all the way through this process and this week appointed a commissioner to talk to both sides. A number of meetings have already been held, Mr. Speaker, and, you know, we need to get both sides talking and looking at a resolution.

>> MPP Forster: Back to the Premier. Another York student actually contacted me yesterday. He's a political science major and he's concerned that, for the second time in their four-year program adispute has threatened their ability to actually graduate. One side has been at the table and has been there for the last six weeks. The publicly funded administration at York university has not been at the table. The government appointed an industrial relations commission to examine the outstanding issues in dispute. But having the lowest per-student funding I think in Canada is part of dispute inostsecondary education under this Liberal government. The Premier can still apply pressure to the publicly funded administration of York university to tell them to get back to the table. Two sides at the table to actually reach an agreement.

>> Minister Hunter: Mr. Speaker, our focus and our priority is on the students. York university has -- Speaker, York university has remained open and students are attending classes. So, you know, this is a very challenging situation. I've connected with both sides multiple times, Mr. Speaker. It's a very, very tough situation. We respect the Collective bargaining process and we are calling on both sides in this situation to Thi about a compromise. Put the needs of the students first. Get back to the table. And resolve this issue that is fair and

equitable to both sides.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Thibeault Re: Quebec Electricity Trade Agreement

>> MPP Ann Hoggarth: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of energy. In 2014, Ontario signed a memorandum of understanding with Québec regarding electricity trade. In 2016, we announced an expanded seven-year deal that will help make electricity in Ontario more affordable, clean and reliable. Speaker, this deal was beneficial for both provinces because it helped ensure electricity supply for when it was needed most. In Québec they need electricity during the coldest winter days due that their use of electric heat. In Ontario we need it at the height of the summer. This M.O.U. Helped to ensure both our provinces had the supply we needed at those times. Just as importantly, the imports of cheap hydroelectricity from Québec will offset reliance on natural gas power plants, reducing Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions. By 1 million tonnes each year. Today the financial accountability officer released a report on this deal. Minister, can you please update us on the findings?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for that question and of course her tireless work for her constituents. I also want to thank, Mr. Speaker, the financial accountability officer for his report and the analysis of our electricity trade agreement with Québec. As the member noted, electricity demand peaks at different times in our province. That means there is the opportunity to coordinate our electricity systems in ways that are beneficial to both provinces and through the expanded electricity trade, in this deal our province is set to import up to 2 terawatts of clean hydroelectric power from Québec annually. That's enough power to power the entire city of Kitchener for a year, for example, Mr. Speaker. The report confirms that E've always said about this agreement is strengthen system reliability and cost effectiveness for both provinces and the F.A.O. Report outlines that this deal will reduce system costs in our province by 38 million over the life of the deal. This our savings both to ratepayers across the province and I look forward to talking more about this in the supplementary Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Hoggarth: Thank you to the Minister for the response. An additional part of this deal is an agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Over the past 15 years, O has become a leader in the global fight against climate change. Just last year our electricity system was over 95% free of emissions that caused climate change. This is due to the nearly \$70 billion that has been invested to modernize the system since 2003, which included the elimination of dirty coal fired electricity generation. However we must continue to work hard on reducing our carbon footprint. Just two days ago governor Jerry Brown warned us what could happen if polluters are given a free pass. Something the official opposition wants to do. Speaker, through you to the Minister, could the Minister of energy

please explain how this electricity trade agreement reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right in pointing out that Ontario has become a leader in the fight against climate change. Just last week the province's environmental commissioner D that out be some --, Mr. Speaker. replacing coal fired electricity with renewable natural gas has cleaned our air, reduced greenhouse gas emissions and increased electrical grid capacity and resilience, Mr. Speaker. She also said that taking coal out of the electricity system dramatically reduced Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions and has improved air quality and public health. And now the f.a.o.'s report confirms that the trade agreement will result in Q imports continuing to replace 2.3 terawatt hours of natural gas generation each year and reduces G.H.G. Emissions by almost 1 million tonnes per year. Some real action on climate change, Mr. Speaker. Our government is continuing to ensure that our electricity is clean, reliable and affordable, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Hillier to Minister Naqvi Re: Tribunal Court Case

>> MPP Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker. To the Premier. Speaker, this Premier likes to talk the talk about fairness. But when it comes to actions, she certainly doesn't walk the walk. The latest example is this government argues against transparency in our tribunals. The Premier is using the -- Thank you. The latest example is this government arguing against transparency in our tribunals. The Premier is using the public purse to fight a court battle with the "Toronto star," who will be challenging the secrecy of our tribunals that keep *ajude kaifb* decisions and records which are public property paid for by the taxpayer from the public. This legal battle is the epitome of an old and tired government. They are using our money to fight against releasing our records. Abusing the public purse in order to keep the tribunal hidden and secret behind closed doors breaks a fundamental tenet that justice must be seen to be done. Speaker, what is fair about that?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. And thank the member for the question. I think, Speaker, as you heard the member reference a court case that is ongoing. It will be highly inappropriate for me to discuss and debate the merits of this -- of that case in the House. What I will say, Speaker, broadly that of course we very much value transparency and to make sure that that information is available as readily as possible. But, Speaker, one has to be also mindful of privacy and confidentiality as well. So when one is looking at records that may be before courts or tribunals, there are considerations around privacy and confidentiality. But as I said Minister, Speaker this matter is before the courts and we will leave it up to -- for determination.

>> MPP Hillier: Again to the Premier. It is this government who's arguing in the court. They're arguing that tribunals which adjudicate disputes, that impose heavy fines and punishments and sanctions and can revoke people's licences and accreditations and take away their livelihoods, they're arguing that these are not really courts. Tribunals such as human rights, TOLRB, the L.A. T., and dozens more have both the form and function of our courts, but none of the safeguards of impartiality, openness and due process. Speaker, the Premier's willingness to fight Canada's largest circulation newspaper in court, to hide the records and decisions of these public matters raise red flags. Speaker, it's time for this Premier -- Mandate tribunal make their records open and accessible and why is this Premier working to frustrate and distort the basic principles of an open court which are -- To our judicial system?

>> Minister Naqvi: Speaker, the member opposite very well knows that this is not a matter to be litigated in the House. This is a matter that is before the courts, and that is the most appropriate place for it to be heard. Speaker, I think as you

have noted in the past and members know of the sub Judice rules that requires all entities not to engage in making comments about matters that are before the courts. And as the Attorney General, it is my responsibility to ensure that administration of justice in our province is independent of any partisan concerns. So therefore, Speaker, I'm not going to comment on the specifics of this case but to say that transparency and accountability's a very fundamental as a principle that the government holds very dear to us. But -- Mindful around confidentiality and privacy of information as well. Thank you.

MPP Gates to Premier Wynne Re: Healthcare Investments

>> MPP Wayne Gates: Thank you, mrspeaker. My question's to the Premier. Last night in my riding in Niagara Falls, I hosted a health care town hall with my Colleague from Nickel Belt. You can say there isn't a crisis in health care. Well, we had people talk about issues like long-term care, mental health access, hallway medicine and so many other province lems. I can assure you -- problems. I can assure you there is a crisis. I would like the Premier to respond to one story. One Speaker told us about a young girl who is struggling to get mental health supports. The wait lists are so long that she finds herself going to the emergency department for help. Only to be discharged back onto the wait list. Speaker, 12,000 young people just like her on wait lists for mental health support. With the resources waste in this province, how has the Premier and Liberal government allowed this to happen to our young people?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am very sympathetic to -- and I use the example of families with children who are looking for mental health supports all the time, Mr. Speaker. I recognize, and I think we all can recognize in this House, that as a society, Mr. Speaker, we have had to and do have to up our game in terms of supporting mental health. There have been wonderful campaigns in the last decade, Mr. Speaker, that have shone a light on mental health and have raised awareness of mental health. Bell Let's Talk is one of the examples of that, Mr. Speaker. There are members in each one of our hospices that have worked very, very hard in their own communities and across the province to raise awareness of mental health challenges. The reality is that 25 years ago, as a society, we didn't acknowledge mental health as much of a challenge as it is. So, Mr. Speaker, while -- We have been building in supports in school boards and in community services, Mr. Speaker, there's more that has to be done and that's why we're putting billions of dollars into health care. Into mental health care as part of our budget, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Premier. I can tell you last night the stories were shocking and there were tears everywhere, including mine. At our health care town hall night we heard from individuals whose grandmother was in hospital. She was waiting for a bed in long-term care. She needed to be in long-term care, and while waiting in the hospital for long-term care bed, she was being charged by the Niagara health system. She received a bill for over \$3,000. Speaker, will the Premier explain why seniors in our province are getting charged thousands of dollars for a stay in a publicly funded hospital simply because her Liberal government has created a shortage of long-term beds? Thank you.

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I would have to have the details -- details of that situation. I don't know the details of that situation and, Mr. Speaker, certainly, certainly we recognize that if someone needs long-term care Mr. Speaker -- Then

they have every right to get that care, Mr. Speaker. What we do is that, in Ontario right now, there is a range of supports that's needed. We are building more long-term care beds, Mr. Speaker. We're upgrading thousands. We're building 5,000 new and 30,000 over the next ten years, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that -- There is more that needs to be done. But there also are transition beds needed. We need to make sure people get the whole care they need. There's a whole range of supports in which we are investing as part of our budget.

MPP Martins to Minister Vernile Re: Sports Symposium

>> MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of tourism, culture and sport. This past weekend the ministry of tourism, culture and sport held their sports symposium in Toronto. The theme of this year's symposium was from playground to podium. The idea behind the scene was to explore ways in which the sport sector can engage children and youth and keep them involved in sports throughout their lives. As a soccer mom to Andre and David, I know and we all know that children who participate in organized sports or experience positive benefits in all aspects of their lives, not just physical health. Through conversations and feedback that our government received during this year's sports symposium, we will continue to build on the strides made to encourage children and youth to get moving. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister, can you tell the members of this House what we have already done to support participation in sport?

>> Minister Daiene Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member for Davenport for that question, who is also a fabulous soccer mom. The sport symposium was very special. We relaunched the Ontario sport awards. Ontario's children and youth need to know that they are entering into a system that's always going to support them. Now last year alone, Speaker, we released the advancing women and girls in sport action plan giving women and girls equal access to opportunities in sport, and through Rowan's law, we passed groundbreaking concussion safety legislation to protect athletes. We have also supported a number of high-profile sporting competitions such as the 2018 Ontario winter games in Orillia and, Speaker, I attended the opening ceremonies and let me tell you those kids were really pumped to be there. The games had over 3,000 participants. They competed in about 25 different sports. So, Speaker, our commitments to bring a quality of life people shows that the strides that we've made to continue. Are going to make life better for people to come in the future. Thank you.

>> MPP Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for the response. I'm sure that my girls from girls government here today are happy that we did release the advancing women and girls in sport action plan. It's amazing to see that over the last year alone your ministry has supported 24 events through the sport hosting program, a program that provides funding to help applicants of national and international amateur sport events in Ontario. These events promote tourism and boost local economies by providing major sport events to local communities. And I think it's safe to say that our hard work is paying off for Ontario's athletes. But there's always more to do and there's always room for improvement. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister, can the Minister speak to other programs in place to support an active lifestyle?

>> Minister Vernile: Thank you and thanks to the member from davrt. I've got good news for young girls who are sitting up there in the visitors' gallery today. In the past year we invested \$50 million to promote participation in sport and to build capacity. We've also committed to continual investment in Ontario's after-school programs, which provides 22,000 children and youth with opportunities to access sport, recreation, nutrition and personal wellness. Just this past weekend we presented the game on progress support, annual sport symposium. Offers athletes, coaches and officials a chance to excel in sport, and it supports 60 sport organizations all across the province. Are committed to boosting active living, Speaker, and that's why we're also investing over 90 million this year in cycling alone to build more bike lanes and trails right across the province. And I want to highlight, Speaker, that we've gone a step further in introducing the toughest road safety legislation in North America keeping cyclists, pedestrians -- And other vulnerable road users safe. Thank you very much.

MPP Walker to Premier Wynne Re: Hospital Overcrowding

>> MPP Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the Premier. Let me read you a passage from a recent "Toronto life" article. They discovered that her bed was in what sunnybrook staff called the Orange zone. Essentially a holding area for patients when no rooms are available. Her bed was pushed up against a wall with the I.V. Pole and other paraphernalia wedged in beside her. He had nowhere to sit so he stood awkwardly next to her until a nurse kindly brought him a chair of there was a curtain but no switch to turn off the lights at night. That location would be the patient's home for the next 19 hours. Premier that, stha a hea care system that you're proud of?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, you know, as I have said many times, we have recognized and we have been investing in hospitals \$500 million in our budget last year of new money, Mr. Speaker. This year \$822 million. We recognize, a the population ages, Mr. Speaker, there are more concerns. People are sicker. There are more of them, Mr. Speaker, who need care. So that's exactly why, in our budget, we have mad such a significant investment. We're investing more than an additional \$5 billion over the next three years to provide better access and more services in Ontario, Mr. Speaker. And what that includes is \$2.1 billion for better and faster access to mental health and addiction services. We'rng to expand ohip plus to make prescriptions completely free for everyone 65 and over. They already are free to everyone up to their 25th birthday, Mr. Speaker. D we're reducing wait times. By investing an additional \$822 million and that's the single. Largest investment in hospitals.

>> MPP Walker: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier. Let as --'S not forget you wasted \$8 billion on health and there's nothing to show for that. This government, your government hasad 15 years to fix this and instead we get this. You've made things worse. Let me read you another paragraph -- 38 hours had elapsed since the patient had arrived so her husband was surprised that she hadn't been moved into a room but was instead in a hallway. She had a dressing on her right arm that stretched from her bicep down to her fingers and on her left arm went from the elbow to the fingers. There she was lying in the hallway of one of Canada's Premier hospitals still waiting for surgery. 38 hours. Does the Premier really think 38 hours is acceptable to wait in a hallway? Is this really Ontario health care system the Premier wants to leave behind?

>> Premier Wynne: You know, I -- I guess I understand why the member opposite would want to talk down a terrifinstitution like sunnybrook. But, Mr. Speaker, I was at sunnybrook -- I was at sunnybrook this morning and of course, Mr. Speaker, when there are specific instances like this -- and I don't ow the details of this Mr. Speaker -- but wn there are situations like this, then they're unacceptable absolutely. But, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that there are

remarkable things happening in sunnybrook and in hospitals around the province, Mr. Speaker. What we know is that the \$822 million that we are investing as part of our budget, Mr. Speaker, will provide 26 though additional M.R.I. Operating hours, 14,000 more surgical and medical procedures. 3,000 more cardiac procedures, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we know that these investments are needed but, Mr. Speaker, already the front-line workers across this province are doing remarkable work for the people of Ontario.

MPP French to Minister Flynn Re: Auto Workers Access to Leave

>> MPP Jennifer French: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Premier. Earlier this week I was disappointed when the Minister refused to commit ending the unfair limits to auto workers leave days. Again I say this isn't right and it isn't fair. Auto workers deserve the same employment standards and rights as every other worker in this province. I have since learned that not only are cleaners in auto plants finding their job titles redesignated as auto workers so that their leave days can be clawed back but there also have been employers across this province who have taken their cue from the government and have issued notices that they will now only allow 7 personal emergency leave days. These are employers who had previously been giving their workers 10 days. Speaker, oians deserve set in the workplace. We should not be competing in a race to the bottom, and once again I ask will you commit to immediately ending this under exemption for auto workers?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Mr. Speaker, thank you for that question. Speaker, January the 1st of 2017, we went out. We talked to the industry stakeholders. We talked to others that were engaged in auto, organized labour, Speaker, business, anybody who was involved in the auto sector in the province of Ontario, which is very healthy, which is Ver competitive and has received tremendous support from this government. And from time to time other members of the House. What we put in place, Speaker, was a pilot project. We wanted to look at the auto sector and we wanted to examine if there was a different way of providing -- emergency leave that made sense and took into account the competitive nature and other unique parts of the auto sector, Speaker. Speaker, we've been out there for about a year with the pilot sector -- with the pilot project we continue to talk to those that are involved in this issue, Speaker. It is a pilot projects and you have my commitment that when we exami it we're going to do a very thorough examination, Speaker .

>> MPP French: Thank you, Speaker. Calling something a pilot project isn't enough to smooth over the fact that it's still discriminatory. Again to the Premier. If you won't do the right thing, then I will. This average I am going to be joined by members of unifor and I will table my private member's bill the fairness for auto sector workers act. My bill will do what both the Liberals and servatives have voted against in bill 38. Ensure every er in Ontario will have access to the same minimum number of leave days without accepting. -- Exception. Premier, I've doesn't heavy lifting of drafting the bill, and will you do the right thing and ensure that my bill fairness for the auto sector act, becomes law before this session ends?

>> Minister Flynn: Speaker, thank you. Thank you for the supplementary, Speaker. Just last week the Minister of transportation and I met with Jerry dias from unifor, Speaker. A number of unionized members of the auto sector and we went with the nonunionized auto workers on this issue, Speaker. I believe we're all on the same page right now, Speaker. Now is the time to evaluate the efficacy of the project. Works to see if it needs to be changed. So I'm proud -- Speaker, I'm proud to announce today that we've appointed buzz Hargrove. And Stacey Allison, the former vice-president of human resources. Former director of human resources for Ford in the United States, Speaker. But I find it passing strange when bill 148 -- Through the House --

MPP Fraser to Minister Coteau Re: Children's Treatment Centres

>> MPP John Fraser: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of children and youth services. Minister, children's treatment centres provide rehabilitation services for children and youth with special needs and their families. There are 21 of these centres across the province providing services to more than 81,000 children and youth with special needs. Last month I was very proud to join the Premier at the children's hospital of eastern Ontario to announce our commitment to the Ottawa children's treatment centre. And I know last week the government announced in Oakville the opening of a new erinoaks kids facility. Minister, can you share with the House the details of this announcement?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take a moment just to recognize the advocacy and work for the Minister, member from Ottawa South and his continued work. To support children's hospital in Ottawa. Mr. Speaker, I join the Premier, the Minister of labour, the treasurer, the Minister of education at erinoaks earlier this week. And we got to meet some incredible families, and I'm very, very happy that this government has invested over \$163 million to complete this project. Mr. Speaker, this is an expansion of doubling the space to over 300,000 square feet and the footprint will take place in Mississauga, Brampton and Oakville. Minister of labour, the MPP For Oakville, has been advocating for this project for years and I want to. an opportunity to thank him for really building a better facility in his community to serve many families across that region.

>> MPP Fraser: Thank you, Speaker, and thanks to the Minister for that response. Speaker, centres like erinoaks and the Ottawa children's treatment centre allow children with cognitive and physical disabilities to get the support they need in their home communities. And, Speaker, I know that we will Ontario to support children's treatment centres and children and youth with special needs. And while it is incredibly important to invest in the centres themselves, we also need to invest in high-quality services. So, Speaker, through you to the Minister, could he tell us more about our government's investments in special needs services? Thank you.

>> Minister Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week when I joined members of this government at erinoaks I got to witness first hand the high quality coordinated integrated services developed through the Ontario special needs strategy help connect children services that they need as early as possible. Mr. Speaker, my ministry is investing over \$630 million in services this year alone. Investments include-- Almost \$320 million in services, almost 120 for children's treatment rehabilitation services, over 100 million to complex special needs, 85 million for healthy child development programs. And in our 2018 budget, we're allocating more than 300 million in new funding over three years for additional 2,000 new teachers, specialized support staff. Educational workers. Mr. Speaker,

this is how we make a difference for Ontarians, by making sure that we add services, not cuts. Thank you.

MPP Nicholls to Minister Mauro Re: Ice Storm Damage

>> MPP Rick Nicholls: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of municipal affairs. The recent ice storm had a devastating effect on cities and towns throughout southwestern Ontario. My riding of Chatham- Kent Essex was especially hit hard. The reports describe strong winds and heavy rain which sent huge waves crashing in on the shore of lake Erie in Chatham- Kent in point Pelee and Leamington areas. I've already spoken to John Patterson mayor of Leamington who has confirmed the levee station. There was break wall damage and shore line erosion and roads were completely washed out. Water levels were so high in the Wheatley harbour that fishing boats ended up on top of the docks and the boat launch was completely destroyed. Residents are saying that the ice storm and flooding are the worst disaster they've seen in the past several decades. Minister, have any of your officials yesterday visited the area to assess the damage?

>> Minister Bill Mauro: Thank you to the member for the question. I first want to acknowledge the work of the first responders and I know the Minister of M.C.S. -- Has been involved in providing a coordinating function to ensure that any support that's needed from first responders can be directed and help to be coordinated. Also natural resources and forestry I know is provide a monitoring function when it comes to these sort of flooding incidents. Speaker, what I would say directly to the member in response to his question that in the first instance, this sounds like it is more about municipal infrastructure, not so much about flooding in people's homes, although that is yet to be determined with final certainty. But because of that, we know that the municipal crews are on the ground doing their work. They will ultimately at some point provide information back to us as a ministry and then we will determine if we will activate our program. I would add, Speaker, to that. That we have changed the program. We have lowered the threshold for municipal infrastructure to be eligible under the new program from 4% to 3% of -- Revenue. There's a possibility based on their information that it may be --

>> MPP Nicholls: Thank you. Back to the Minister and I appreciate that response, Minister. You know more than 35,000 hydro customers were without power over the weekend, and property has been destroyed. Houses have been ruined. Hydro One crews worked around the clock to restore power and our first responders -- and I appreciate your comments regarding them -- our first responders rescued many residents stranded due to flooding and road erosion. They were responsible for saving lives and preventing serious injuries and I want to thank them personally, as you did as well. But as I mentioned the damage has been severe. Minister, your ministry promised help in the last bout of flooding in southwestern Ontario. That was a few days ago, as you may recall, and I truly appreciated your visit to the riding of Chatham- Kent Essex -- Minister,

you and I, we need to work. It's not about us. It's about the constituents in the riding. My question is what specifically will you do to help us out this time?

>> Minister Mauro: Speaker, in addition to the municipal portion I know that there's been a phone line set up for residents to in and advise of any impacts on their own homes, that information will come to us and we'll determine whether or not our drago team visits the city to determine any personal circumstances. As the member states, Speaker, this is about people. This is an emergency. This is an acute situation. It's a very, very serious issue, but I cannot help but make the comment that will, at some point, there has to be some signal from the other side and you and your leader that you're going to get it and you're going to buy in that things have changed on the ground. I'll give you some stats, Speaker. From 2005 to 2010, 17 declared disasters requiring 18 million -- or 8 million of provincial assistance. 2010 to '15, 43 disaster requiring 36 million. And this continues to increase in severity. Your leader is taking a position on this file. Appears to believe or imply that he's not taking it seriously at all. This is about people. We're taking it seriously. We have programs to respond. I would hope that you'd buy in on this.

MPP Taylor to Minister MacCharles Re: Accessibility Law Compliance

>> MPP Monique Taylor: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Speaker areport released today by the aoda alliance contains some shameful facts. Ontarians with disabilities still face too many Barriers when they apply for jobs, try and access public transit, go to school, access hospitals or try and/or go out to eat, activities that many of us take for granted. Worse, there is little or no ment of the laws that would ensure this access. In the five years since the law passed, 57% of businesses have not even filed the required accessibility reports. Only two fine versus ever been levied for noncompliance. What is the Premier going to do to ensure that accessibility laws in Ontario are followed?

>> Minister Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. So we know that Ontario is a global lr when it comes to accessibility. Canada's first jurisdiction to adopt accessibility standards. We remain committed to our goals of having an accessible province by 2025. Although there's always been resources dedicated to compliance and enforcement, to respond to my expanded mandate, Speaker, we reorganized accessibility directorate to reflect and create a dedicated branch on compliance and enforcement. And I'm pleased to say Speaker, that compliance reporting rates continue to increase. Around 24 how businesses completed their 2017 accessibility compliance report by this past December. And, Speaker, that represents a 20% increase over the previous reporting deadline. And more than 6,000 businesses. Filed their compliance reports for the very first time this year. We've also exp Erienced increased reporting rates amongst businesses, not-for-profits. Andcontinue to work with them and make us accessible.