

CO Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript - Wednesday, April 12, 2017

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Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Wednesday, April 12, 2017.

MCI did not receive any questions of interest.

MIT did not receive any questions of interest.

OSS did not receive any questions of interest.

Questions today focused on a variety of topics including the Ontario Budget, rental costs and electricity costs.

The official Hansard will be available later today by clicking on the link below.

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period

41st Parliament, 2nd Session

Wednesday, April 12, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown to Minister Matthews (Thibeault) (Ballard) Re: Ontario Budget

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Premier. While we don't have a budget date yet, we expect a budget to come sometime soon. The P.C. Caucus is expecting to see some key planks in this budget so I will lay them out. The government's mismanagement of its finances has resulted in two credit downgrades and debt serving costs of over \$11 billion annually. The province now spends more on interest than a postsecondary education, community safety and five other ministries combined. Mr. Speaker, because of this management, the government must take action. Will this budget begin the process of paying down debt and include a long-term plan to get Ontario's debt under control?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. I think it's important people understand that when the recession hit in 2008/9, we -- Speaker, we made a very deliberate decision that we were not going to slash and burn. We were not going to fire thousands, 100,000 workers. We were going to support the continued growth of this province, Speaker. We made a deliberate choice to invest in infrastructure, and we are seeing the consequences of that very deliberate decision. Some people advocated that we cut our way to balance. Our decision was to invest and grow our way to balance and that's exactly what we've done.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Deputy Premier, and clearly no answer on getting Ontario out of debt. They seem to be satisfied by the fact we're the most indebted sub national government in the world. Another budget ask we have of the government is -- and I'm sure the government appreciates -- that millions of Ontarians are struggling with their hydro bills, from unaffordable hydro rates. Hydro scheme does nothing but add billions of dollars into debt. More into future costs on Ontarians' back for hydro. The budget must take action. Rather than just borrowing, we'd actually like to see some structural changes. Mr. Speaker, will this budget include an announcement that the Liberals will stop signing bad contracts. We do not need and stop the fire sale of Hydro One?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleased to rise and talk about Ontario's hydro plan. Of course, Mr. Speaker, what we've done to take costs out of the system. Part of one of the first things that I did, Mr. Speaker, when I became Minister of energy -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the very first things that I was able to do as Minister of energy, Mr. Speaker, is put a suspension on the Irp2, Mr.

Speaker, which is something that saved ratepayers billions of dollars. Again, Mr. Speaker, we brought forward the fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, that is going to save ratepayers up to, on average, 25%, which is something, Mr. Speaker, that -- All families across the province are look forward to, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Deputy Premier. The question was on stopping the signing of these bad contracts. There was no response. No matter how many times the Minister repeats himself. Borrowing \$25 billion to pay in interest is not a real plan if you don't deal with the structural issues. So since I can't get an answer on debt or hydro, I'll try a third budget ask, and that's on the housing affordability crisis that this government has created. They decided -- To sit on their hands and to let the taxes and reap the benefits of an out-of-control housing market. Their careless decision to wait until the last moment has resulted in unprecedented inability for families in Toronto and the G.T.A. And Ontario to afford homes. Mr. Speaker, this budget must take action. So my question to the Deputy Premier. Hopefully I can get an answer this time -- is will this budget. Slash red tape to increase the housing supply in Ontario?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the leader of the opposition for the question about housing affordability, which of course is on everyone's -- tip of everyone's tongue these days. We certainly understand the growing concern across the gtha regarding the booming housing market, which, Speaker, I can say is feeling pressured in part because of the fantastic economy that this province has created. There are, Speaker, about 100,000 people -- 100,000 people flocking to the gtha area every year because they're coming here for jobs and a wonderful quality of life. And that, Speaker, has put pressure on the economy. You know, later today we'll be meeting with -- Mayors from across the gtha to understand the continued dialogue with them about what tools they need to address housing affordability.

MPP Brown to Minister Murray (Hunter) (Sandals) Re: Ontario Budget

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Deputy Premier. And so the government, when it comes to debt, no plan. When it comes to hydro relief, no plan. And when it comes to housing, no plan. So --Speaker, to the Deputy Premier. Clearly the government's uncomfortable in trying to answer their own record. Now since we can't get an answer on debt, hydro or housing, I'm going to ask another question that needs to be in this budget. The government's current cap and trade scheme is little more than a tax grab disguised in an effort to address climate change. A big cash grab, \$1.9 billion. The current system is not only a cash grab. It's driving business out of Ontario. It is subsidizing business in California and Québec at the expense of hard working Ontario businesses. If this government is serious about protecting jobs in Ontario -- Medical make sure that cap and trade is not a cash grab that, it's revenue neutral. Can we get a commitment from this government that, in this budget, it will ensure there is no cash grab and money will go back to Ontarians?

>> Minister Glen Murray: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the opposition is such an entertaining gentleman. I have to give him credit. I'll try and square this, Mr. Speaker. Maybe you could help me because you've been watching this for a long time. He wants to increase the price from \$18 a tonne to \$74 a tonne. Gas prices by 16 cents. I've raised this with him and I think he's an honest gentleman. His work on what a B.C. -- P.C. Tax would look like. Could he justify how he could justify in today's economic environment, how that makes any sense at all, Mr. Speaker ?

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question was on returning the funds to for yans from the \$1.9 billion cash grab. Instead I get numbers out of thin air. But I'm not surprised from a Minister that actually wanted

to ban natural gas. A government that is so -- if I can't get an answer on that, I will try another tack. And that is on school closures. Maybe the government can do something in this budget if they're ignoring all the other issues. We have schools across Ontario -- Speaker -- Mr. Speaker, my question -- Budget Cycle, my first question was budget ask and my supplementary is a budget ask. I want a commitment from this government that we're going to stop seeing these school closures. I want to see a moratorium on the school closures we're seeing across this province. Too many communities. Too many parts of this province are having their communities ripped apart by these 600 potential school closures. The government is saying it's not happening but you can't go to a community in Ontario and not see a school that's being closed. My question is this -- can I get a commitment, Mr. Speaker, from the government that they will put a moratorium on these reckless --

>> Minister Mitzi Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to talk about what we are doing for schools in Ontario, because on this side of the House, we believe in publicly funded education. Since 2003, Mr. Speaker, we have built 810 new schools and we have extended 780 significantly by renovation. Mr. Speaker, we know that investing in our students is the best investment that we can make in this province, Mr. Speaker, and that's why we have increased the funding consistently for schools. Mr. Speaker, in the member's own riding we have built 11 new schools since 2003. And, Mr. Speaker, I want to remind this House that these investments in education -- Mr. Speaker, investments we're making in education are leading to results, Mr. Speaker. 85.5% of our students are now graduating high school, Mr. Speaker. As opposed to only 68% in 2003.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, I want to continue with my budget ask of this government. And since I could not get an answer, a commitment from the government on school closures, let me try one more question to the Deputy Premier on the upcoming budget. The Minister of finance's face said it all when he saw the recent federal budget. It was disappointment, disdain and dejection in terms of Ontario's request of the government of Canada. Something did not go his way, did not go the way the Minister of finance had expected. Mr. Speaker, is the government still rewriting their budget because the federal Liberals let them down? Is it too late to consider these five P.C. Requests to make sure Ontario gets on the right track?

>> Minister Liz Sandals: Yes, thank you. When we faced the recession, we set out a very responsible approach to how we would deal with the budget. We're continuing to invest, including in 11 schools in your riding, to connect it to the last question. But we also know that we needed to get to balance. We committed that we would have a balanced budget in spring of 2017. We will have a balanced budget in spring 2017. 100% certain. And we're able to do that because Ontario's economy has been growing because of our investment strategy, because of our job creation strategy, Ontario's economy is growing. Ontario's economy has been leading Canada. So we will have a balanced budget this spring.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Ballard Re: Rental Costs

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question to the acting Premier. The cost of housing is reaching ridiculous heights in Toronto and cities across Ontario. Last week the Premier and her Liberal party had a chance to help out renters facing unfair rent hikes by unscrupulous landlords, but she didn't take it. The Premier is meeting with GTA mayors today to talk about housing affordability. Will she be telling those mayors that she will actually be closing the 1991 rent control loophole?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the member of the third party for that really important question. You know, I'll say again, Mr. Speaker, the Premier has said it many times.

I've said it many times in this House but it is absolutely unacceptable that so many Ontarians are faced with housing costs that are rising so dramatically. You know, and that's why we are in the process of developing that plan to address unfair rises in rental costs. You know, in the coming weeks, Speaker, we will be rolling out a very substantive rent control reform in Ontario. I've said it again. I'm happy to stand here and say it again today, Speaker. You know, our plan is going to include a broad package of change that will help protect tenants. Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons that I could not support the member's -- Response to the member's bill that was tabled a couple weeks ago was simply that it didn't do enough. We will do more.

>> MPP Tabuns: Speaker, I take that as a no and go on to my next question. While the Premier dithers on rent control, 31 seniors in Sault Ste. Marie are facing a 31% increase in their rent. These seniors are living on a fixed income, and a 31% rent increase on top of their soaring hydro bills may mean that a number of them will lose their homes. Will the acting Premier promise these seniors that rent control, any rent control or housing reform that is brought in will be retroactive so they can hold onto their homes?

>> Minister Ballard: Well, thank you again, Speaker. It's always good to continue on with the dialogue. You know, just before we -- before I carry on, you know, Speaker, I just want to highlight some of the -- just a few of the things that this government has done to take action. You know, we've worked on secondary suites with our municipal partners to make those easier. We've passed inclusionary zoning legislation. We have frozen municipal property tax on apartment buildings. We've doubled, doubled the maximum refund for first-time home buyers, and we're continuing to Collect data. You know, Speaker, this week the leader of the third party told media when she was being interviewed, she was asked whether her party's rent control legislation doesn't do enough to protect renters and she said, Speaker, absolutely not. And I agree with her on that, Speaker. It doesn't go far enough. That answer just isn't good enough. You know, Speaker, it makes me wonder -- it makes me wonder -- Back of the napkin proposal by the NDP Will leave the 1 million Ontarians who already have rent control --

>> MPP Tabuns: Well, dialogue is not a bad thing but action is what's really needed here. Ontarians aren't impressed by photo ops of the Premier with gtha mayors. Renters need action and they need it now. While the Premier sits on the sidelines, unscrupulous landlords in Toronto are taking advantage of this moment, and in some cases doubling rents for people who can least afford t.since the Premier refuses to close the 1991 rent loophole now, will she do it retroactively to protect people who are facing economic evictions because of unscrupulous landlords?

>> Well, thank you, Speaker. And I will say that I didn't think that the NDP Would oppose the Premier meeting with our municipal leaders from across the gtha. But it sounds to me as if they don't think that's a good idea that we shouldn't be continuing the dialogue with our municipal partners. Making sure, Speaker -- Thank you, Speaker. I'll carry on. You it, on this side of the House we think it's really important to build those relationships with our municipal partners, with our federal partners. When it comes to the important issue of housing affordability. It's absolutely untenable that people think the issues they have with the rising rent. You know, we -- again, we are going to have solutions that take care of --

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Rural Hydro Rates

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. As you're well aware, photo ops are not a substitute for action. They are not. They are not. The Premier's out of touch with what the people of Ontario need. Gail -- Sorry. To the acting Premier. Thank you, Speaker. Gail, a single mom from Muskoka, wrote to the NDP To tell us she's lost her home because her hydro bills were so high. She got behind. She just couldn't catch

up. Does the acting Premier think that someone like Gail should be punished for not being able to afford the soaring hydro bills that have come with 14 years of Liberal rule?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again pleased to rise and talk about our fair hydro plan, because it is concerning when we do hear about individuals in this province, Mr. Speaker, that did have a hard time and are having a hard time paying their electricity bill, Mr. Speaker, and that's why we acted, Mr. Speaker, like we did with the fair hydro plan. We did bring forward, you know, the 8% reduction and the changes to the R.R.R.P. Back in the fall economic statement and we recognized, Mr. Speaker, that, while that did help many, that there were others that actually needed more support and that's what the fair hydro plan will do, Mr. Speaker. It's going to provide 25% reduction on average to families right across the province. If individuals are Hydro One r1 or r2 customers, Mr. Speaker, they can see a 40 to 50% reduction. And if they're in any of the low-income brackets, Mr. Speaker, there are many programs in place that will continue to help Thome. And I hope that they actually apply for these.

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the acting Premier. Gail's home in Muskoka was 1,600 square feet. She and her kids now live with her sister in Halton hills in a bigger home. But Gail's sister's hydro bill, her sister's home, are lower than Gail's were because Gail had to pay rural delivery charges. When will the Liberal government finally bring forward this plan they talk about, talk about, talk about? When will they finally bring it forward to deal with the mess in the hydro system, to deal with unfair rural hydro delivery rates?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope the Honourable member will listen to my last answer because I said we're actually bringing down distribution costs for six utilities, plus all Hydro One customers in r1 and r2 designations, Mr. Speaker. They're going to see a 40 to 50% reduction, Mr. Speaker. That's dramatic, Mr. Speaker. That is part of our fair hydro plan. It is something that we're acting on. Unlike their plan, Mr. Speaker, that doesn't even talk about low income individuals until the last page, Mr. Speaker. We're making sure that we're acting. We're helping all families in this province with a special emphasis, Mr. Speaker. We are putting special emphasis on helping those families that are in the rural or northern parts of our province, because we recognize that they were paying a higher share of the bill. Especially, Mr. Speaker, when it came to distribution costs. That's why we're seeing reductions of 40 to 50% on their bills. Hopefully, Mr. Speaker, when that bill comes forward, they will vote for it.

>> MPP Tabuns: Well, you can talk about a bill forever but you're not introducing it and we aren't seeing the action. Gail wants to know from the Liberals, how will rural Ontario promote business development and population growth with hydro costs being difficult or impossible to afford? I'd like to know what the Premier's plan is, too, since her press releases and the publicly funded radio ads are pretty short on specifics. When will the Premier -- when, when, when will her party, the Premier deal with the unfair delivery charges that Ontario rural families and businesses are dealing with just because they're outside the city?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The summer, summer, summer, summer is by the time we will actually have that in place, Mr. Speaker. But let's talk about, you know, being short on details, Mr. Speaker, and that's their pamphlet on dealing with electricity, Mr. Speaker. You know they rely on big, big principles and determined -- yet-to-be-determined expert panel that will sit down and actually find some savings, Mr. Speaker. Apparently, you know, they're basing these on calculations that are pie in the sky, Mr. Speaker, with negotiations with the federal government. I know, Mr. Speaker, I asked before how those negotiations are going. They're actually Mr. Speaker -- they have no idea on how to take off one cent from bills, Mr. Speaker. We are making sure we're taking off 25%. When it comes to rural and northern Ontario, Mr. Speaker, we're acting with a 40 to 50% reduction, Mr. Speaker. We take no lessons from that party.

MPP Martow to Minister Coteau Re: Autism Investments

>> MPP Gila Martow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of children and youth services. Mr. Speaker, many families of kids with autism spectrum disorder are back at Queen's Park today. They're disappointed and worried, upset your government does not focus on their concerns and help autism children reach their full potential. Christie is here with Lars, her 7-year-old son. He finally started I.B.I. Therapy a year ago after this government kept him on a waiting list for four long years. Chrissie feels caught between what the Minister tells her Lars deserves and what her regional office is prepared to give. Children with autism spectrum disorder, with strict guidelines for regional providers?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to welcome mother and young man here to the legislature today and thank the member opposite for the question. The member opposite knows that we put a plan in place last year and we actually cut the transition by half so we're going to implement that plan to start in June of 2017, a year earlier than we initially planned. And, Mr. Speaker, this plan is going to create 16,000 new spaces across the province of Ontario, increase the amount of A.B.A. During the transition period, and ultimately reduce wait times to six months or less. Mr. Speaker, there has been a huge transition when it comes to young people with autism in the province of Ontario, and this government's committed to making sure we put in place the right plan that works for families.

>> MPP Martow: I would remind the Minister, Mr. Speaker, that there are 21,000 children on the wait list already, and that keeps growing. Mr. Speaker, the Minister has sent a letter to our families promising inclusion for all ages in autism therapy. In contrast, the Minister's lead agencies are claiming that no children over 5 will qualify for the more intensive or enhanced A.B.A. Therapy in the new Ontario autism program. Mr. Speaker, the families don't want insolution to mean just some kind of therapy for all ages. They want comparable therapy for all ages. Will the Minister please tell us if its mandate for inclusion in autism therapy will ensure that all children get the autism therapy that they need? Thank you.

>> Minister Coteau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to remind the member opposite of a few things. So number one, this is the largest investment in autism in the history of this country. Number one. Number two, basically diagnostic hub here in the province of Ontario a couple of weeks ago we made that announcement. We're creating 16,000 new spots. We've cut our I.B.I. Wait list by almost half in the last several months. I want to remind the member opposite of something that I think's very important. We're working on research. We're looking for ways to ensure young people get the resources they need. I'll remind the member opposite when they are leader was in Ottawa and had an opportunity to vote, when he had an opportunity to vote for a national plan for autism, he voted against it.

MPP Vanthof to Minister Sandals Re: Sunshine List Addendum

>> MPP John Vanthof: Thank you. My question's to the acting Premier. This morning we learned that executives at the Canadian Hearing Society, which is funded by the Ontario government, received massive raises at the same time that their employees are walking the picket line because they haven't had a pay increase in four years. That is shameful. Even worse is the fact that the organization's vice-president was able to avoid having his massive pay raise out on the sunshine list because he chose to be paid as a consultant. Can the acting Premier tell us how many more consultants are being paid high salaries with public money while keeping themselves off the sunshine list?

>> Minister Liz Sandals: Yes. Thank you very much. And first of all let me say that the individual's salary has been given to any member of the opposition, any member of the media that has asked for it. With respect to the sunshine list, when you're dealing with tens of thousands of records, there's always -- every year there will be a few that are missed. Sometimes it's a clerical error. Sometimes when we track it down, we've got an agency that actually didn't submit the records on time to be included in the list. But what we always do in a circumstance like that, as we did in this circumstance, is we make the information available to anyone who asks and then we publish an addendum, which has all the information that was missed and we will do that this year. It will be printed in the addendum.

>> MPP Vanthof: One of the biggest issues is these people are giving themselves raises while the people who actually help deaf challenged people are out on the picket lines unable to -- Transparency is vital to good government. We all know that. And Ontarians need to be able to trust things like the sunshine list. Can the acting Premier clarify just how many executives are receiving salaries of more than \$100,000 but didn't show up in the sunshine list this year or last year or the year before? Please make that public.

>> Minister Sandals: Yes, thank you. As I just told you, if you wanted to have the answer for last year, you would go and look at last year's addendum. I'm sorry I don't have that in front of me. But anybody, in any year, as long as the sunshine list has existed, there has always been an addendum. Many years it has been not published 'til the fall. This year we're actually going to publish a preliminary addendum in the spring, and then if there's still anybody that's missing, because as I said in the first answer, sometimes we find there's an agency that's just totally missing and we have to chase. But we'll get those clerical errors out there in an early addendum this spring. And if there's anything, we still miss, it will be in an addendum in the fall.

MPP Vernile to Minister Murray (Thibeault) Re: Elimination of Coal-Fired Plants

>> MPP Daiene Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for Minister of the environment and climate change. This weekend, Ontario is going to celebrate its three-year anniversary of the phaseout of coal-fired power plants. This move was the single largest greenhouse gas reduction initiative completed in North America. The elimination of coal plants has been a major factor in improving the quality of the air that we breathe. Thanks to clean air and clean energy, Ontario has saved more than \$4 billion in annual health and environmental costs. Speaker the 2016 Toronto vital signs report shows premature deaths and hospitalizations as a result of air pollution have dropped by 23 and 41% respectively since 2004. We've also seen the number of smog days drop from 53 in 2005 to 0 in 2015. Speaker, could the Minister please explain how the elimination of coal-fired plants puts Ontario in a competitive position?

>> Minister Glen Murray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At least I know I'll get a supplemental on this one, Mr. Speaker. The electricity we consume every day is already largely carbon-free thanks in part to the early action that was taken by my friends at the ministry of energy, Mr. Speaker. To put that into terms, that's a drop from 35 million tonnes in 2005 to only 7 million tonnes in 2015, making it the largest greenhouse gas reduction ever in North American history, Mr. Speaker. We as Ontarians should be very proud of that, Mr. Speaker. And finally the other thing is your largest source of methylmercury and other contaminants were the coal plants. The overall health of the ecosystem. Continues to benefit Ontarians today, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Vernile: I would like to thank the Minister for his answer. The impact of Ontario's leadership on

our environment and our health are remarkable. As the Minister mentioned, eliminating coal was a source of generating electricity was a bold step. Such a large-scale shift away from pollution generation is unprecedented, and so Ontario had to carve its own path to build a cleaner generation. And today the province's electricity generation is 90% emissions free. Along the way, Ontario has built a strong industry in nuclear and renewable energy. Speaker, could the Minister please give us an update on the state of electricity generation in the province since we eliminated coal?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you. I would like to thank both the Minister for his previous answer, and of course the member for that question. I know, Mr. Speaker, we've recognized that the transition off of coal and the rebuilding of our electricity system over the last decade, Mr. Speaker, put a strain on Ontarians' electricity costs. So the fair hydro plan is addressing this by providing 25% off, on average, from electricity bills, Mr. Speaker. But meanwhile, as the member noted, we can be proud that our commitment to eliminating dirty coal has created new industries in our province, Mr. Speaker. Renewable industries that we know the official opposition doesn't support, Mr. Speaker, and of course the nuclear industry. That supports tens of thousands of jobs in our province. Refurbishment of our nuclear plants will support even more, Mr. Speaker. Right now I'm happy to report that o.p.g.'s refurbishment of darl ton is on both ahead of schedule and underbudget, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Fedeli to Minister Sousa Re: Ontario Budget

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of finance. The government's mismanagement has resulted in the debt climbing to over \$308 billion. That leaves taxpayers on the hook for over \$11 billion in interest each year. The auditor general tells us this debt is crowding out the services people need. So we see this government closing schools and hospital beds, firing frontline health care workers and nurses. The finance Minister says he will present a balanced budget. Sadly, this will only be an artificially balanced budget using the fire sale of assets and reserve funds. My question for the Minister. Does he really think the people of Ontario will be fooled into thinking the budget is actually balanced?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite makes interesting points and I want to reiterate them. We did choose to invest in the people of Ontario. We did choose to invest in infrastructure. We did choose to stimulate our economy and grow and, yes, we are balancing the budget this year, next year and year after that, Mr. Speaker. And we talked -- and we talked about that, he misses the point completely. We have an accumulating deficit to G.D.P. The same today as it was 25 years ago. His leader made and agreed and voted for the largest deficit in Canada's history of \$55 billion, Mr. Speaker. They raised debt and doubled it in the national -- well, by 144 billion in accumulated deficit. That's what he put forward for Canada. Our debt to G.D.P. Is falling. It's improving and we are coming to balancing. We're working for the people of Ontario.

>> MPP Fedeli: Back to the Minister. Speaker, I think me used some of the points that I made so let me expand on them. In my hometown of North Bay, you fired 350 frontline health care workers, including 100 nurses. 30 to 40 more will be fired this month. You've closed 60 beds at our brand-new hospital. So, Speaker, it's because of their constant waste, mismanagement and scandal that has --Speaker, their constant waste, mismanagement and scandals has resulted in people of Ontario paying more and getting less. So whether you're a family or a business, life in Ontario has increasingly become unaffordable. Businesses continue to flee the province, unable to keep up with hydro rates. The cap and trade rates and the red tape. Speaker, does the Minister truly believe an artificially balanced budget is going to help anyone?

>> Minister Sousa: They know a lot about artificial balances, Mr. Speaker. I think the only balance all the time that Harris government was in power four times. The last one was bogus, Mr. Speaker. It wasn't even balanced. Furthermore, he makes reference to the cost of debt. During their time, it cost 15.4 cents for every revenue dollar raised to cover their debt. Today it's 8.4 cents because we're locking in low interest rates, Mr. Speaker, and we're investing. He and his party wanted to make across-the-board cuts as a solution to battling the deficit. We chose otherwise. We chose to invest in the things that matter to people. Not to put anybody in harm's way, we chose to grow the economy. It's working. We're balancing this year and the year after that, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Fife to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Gender Wage Gap

>> MPP Catherine Fife: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the acting Premier. Today we are marking the 100th anniversary of some women getting the right to vote here in Ontario. A century ago, women formally entered public life in this province. But yesterday the women of Ontario were reminded in a property that the gender wage gap is still 30% and has barely changed in 30 years. We have been waiting. We are still waiting but we aren't going to wait anymore. Ontario needs to ensure that women are equal partners in our economy. That means -- That means access to affordable, high-quality not-for-profit child care. Does the acting Premier and this government get that?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I want to thank the member opposite for the question. Yes, absolutely we know there's a gender wage gap committee. Gender wage gap because, after all, we looked at the recommendations that came out from the steering committee. The number one and number two recommendations were about an investment in child care. Our Premier made sure that there was a Minister responsible for early years and child care. We committed to the doubling the number of spaces that are out there. We're looking forward to transforming the way we're delivering child care in this province. In addition we're increasing the number of women on boards. We're making sure that the first jurisdiction to introduce comply or explain rules. We've government a government target of 40% for women on provincial agencies, and we have -- -- Business target of 30%. So, Mr. Speaker, we're already moving on so many things. I'm so glad that they are finally --

>> MPP Fife: Thank you very much. Speaker, we know what needs to be done to empower women in Ontario. Right now this province does not have a child care strategy. We do not have a child care system and we have been waiting for 14 years. The first recommendation from our own ministry of labour's report from the gender wage gap strategy committee reads -- the government could immediately commit to developing an er child care system which is high quality, affordable, accessible, publicly funded and geared to income with sufficient spaces to meet the needs of Ontario families. We know that every dollar invested in child care leads to \$2.40 spent in benefit to the Ontario economy due to the increase in working hours and wages of women. When will this government make sure that women in Ontario can fully participate in the economy by developing a comprehensive child care strategy? You have not shown it. You have a credibility issue on this issue. What's the plan?

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: You know, Speaker, I am so pleased to answer this question because actually I think it's kind of a friendly question. Bottom line, first of all, when it comes to affordable, quality responsive and accessible child -- All of those pieces were actually included in our workbook. So just so you know, I went out on consultations across the province, spoke to people, thousands of people actually both online and directly went to more than 20 cities and centres in our province, and we took that workbook with us. The member opposite was actually asked some of those consultations. So she's very aware that when it comes to affordable, quality, responsive accessible child care, we put those ideas on the table and now she's telling me that those are her ideas and we should be acting on them.

MPP Kiwala to Minister Hunter Re: School Bullying

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of education. Minister, as you know today we recognize the international day of pink, a day where we recognize the antibullying initiative that began in Nova Scotia after a grade nine student was bullied in his school for wearing pink. Two students who witnessed the incident bought pink shirts to stand united with the student against bullying. Students, educators and people throughout my riding of Kingston and the Islands are uniting today to celebrate diversity. I know that youth in Kingston y2k, the boys and girls club, girls inc. Etc. Have worked diligently in antibullying spaces. It's important we stand together and create awareness not only today but every single day. Speaker, account Minister tell this House how we ensure our students feel safe and respected at schools across our province?

>> Minister Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member from Kingston and the Islands for this wonderful question. It's so great to see this movement which started with students that is having such an impact in a conversation around bullying in schools and frankly in the community, Mr. Speaker. Our schools must be places where everyone, where staff, students, parents and the community feel welcome, feel safe and respected and accepted, and that's why I'm proud of our accepting schools act. The act is Canada's most comprehensive antibullying legislation and as part of its definition of bullying, it also includes cyberbullying. School safety has been a priority for this government from the beginning, and that's why we require all school boards to have policies on bullying prevention and intervention. Mr. Speaker -- This government has invested over \$425 million under safe schools initiatives and are helping make Ontario's schools some of the safest in the world.

>> MPP Kiwala: Thank you, Minister. We are extremely proud of the investments made towards educating not only our students, but parents and staff. I know that this will have an impact on the young women that are here with us today in the Speaker's gallery, and I am sure they will appreciate the leadership that we have taken. For the first time ever we have defined bullying in legislation so that every single student, teacher and principal and parent knows what we are talking about when we say bullying is not ok in our schools. Minister n2015, you introduced the revised health and physical education curriculum to better reflect the advancement of technology, making information readily available to students. Can you please tell us about the benefits of the revised curriculum and how it is helping our students navigate in today's technology-driven world?

>> Minister Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really want to thank the member for this supplementary question, because the reality is that we want our children to be safe and healthy while ensuring that they have access to accurate information. We've updated our health and physical education curriculum so that students understand the importance of healthy relationships, having the confidence to say no. Safe use of technology and the internet and mental health basing, Mr. Speaker. This curriculum now offers increased support and acceptance and visibility to lgbtq and two-spirited children and youth. We will continue to support our school boards as they work closely with parents to ensure that every student feels safe at school. We will continue to work with community partners to develop awareness campaigns for schools that provide skills for youth and educators to be effective and engage role models. And allies of our schools across Ontario. Every student has the right to feel safe and accepted at school. And if students don't feel safe, they can't learn, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Thompson to Minister Murray Re: Industrial Wind Turbines

>> MPP Lisa M. Thompson: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Minister of environment. For two years Huron- Bruce has suffered night and day from incessant noise associated with industrial wind turbines built around their homes. Just last week, to their relief, ministry of environment and climate change testing proved that there were audible sounds and possibly tonal noises coming from the wind turbines that exceeded allowable sound level limits, according to regulation 09. Finally, after years of feeling ignored by this government, and helpless to defend themselves because of their rights being stripped away, they believed a resolution was finally here. But now what they were told, Speaker ? More testing needs to be done. So I ask the Minister, why should these families have to continue to suffer while waiting for more testing. Or if in fact you need more time to devise a plan that ignores your own ministry's research?

>> Minister Glen Murray: Mr. Speaker, an environment question from the party opposite finally. Thank you. The challenge here, Mr. Speaker, is that the law works. There are standards. When people call, I'm very proud of the officials. They respond quickly and they enforce the law. The law is being enforced here. If wind turbines or any other type of technology exceed sound levels, we enforce the law. I am happy to meet with the member opposite to review this case to make sure that ministry is being diligent. No one should have to suffer noise or noise pollution from any source and certainly not wind turbines in their community, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Thompson: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Minister. I look forward to that discussion because, Speaker, once and for all, it's time for this government to finally address noise concerns associated with industrial wind turbines. They can no longer ignore these hulking monoliths that serve as reminders of this Liberal government's failed policies. The Minister of environment needs to accept the good work from his own staff and the concrete data that shows noise levels are above acceptable sound limits. I look forward to this discussion, and action needs to happen today. Instead of protecting Liberal friends, will this Minister take immediate action to protect the well-being of Ontario residents, immediately stop the turbines in question, acknowledge the test results from his own staff and once and for all do right by the citizens of Ontario. Affected by industrial wind turbines?

>> Minister Murray: Mr. Speaker, we're going to enforce the law to the full extent. We are not going to treat one group of proponents of a project or one community any lesser, Mr. Speaker. There is a law. It is being enforced. If the member actually doesn't think it's being enforced, then she should raise that issue with me and I will review with the Deputy. Mr. Speaker, it's passing strange to me that I never get a question when they were in power about Mercury in grassy narrows. I never get a question about nuclear power. I never get a question about coal plant pollution. This party is just an anti --

MPP Taylor to Minister Coteau Re: Autism Investments

>> MPP Monique Taylor: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister children and youth services. Today we are joined by families and children living with autism. They are here, Speaker, because they have been let down so many times before by this government, and unfortunately they see the writing on the wall for more of the same. Despite the Minister's promises, newly diagnosed children five and over are still unable to access intensive treatments. The families of children who have been approved for treatment can't access the funds when they need them. Will the Minister tell families today that children 5 and over will receive the same intensive treatments that they need?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for the question. I've had this file for almost a year now. The one thing I can say is that, when I meet with parents from across the province of Ontario, you know I'm constantly reminded of the challenges that they have as families. Because some of the challenges that they go through are just so overwhelming for parents, Mr. Speaker. We have a Premier that is committed to making sure that we get this right. This is an issue that has -- it just hasn't popped up overnight. This is an issue that has an historical context here in the province of Ontario. The Premier, people like myself and many members on this side of the House have been working on this issue at school boards, in our local communities, and personally. So I want the member to know opposite -- I do believe parents understand there is a commitment by this government to make sure we get this right, because we cannot afford to get it wrong.

>> MPP Taylor: Speaker, just yesterday I heard zone from a mother of twins with autism who is in a constant struggle to get funding she is entitled to and to be assured that the funding will continue. Because of her uncertainty, she has had to register them for school. Even though she knows that, without intensive treatments, they will regress progress made in self-feeding and potty training will be lost. Behaviours like head banging and eating anything in their grasp will return. Right now she will be out of pocket for more than \$2,500 just for the month of May, money she does not have, because the ministry, for some reason, can't get it together and get their approved money flowing. Will the Minister ensure that approved funding is available when it's needed and that families get the information they need now?

>> Minister Coteau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite does know that money is flowing from the government to support families with children with autism. In fact currently, during the transition period, we put in the \$10,000 allocation that can be reused so that an allocation of \$10,000. Mr. Speaker, almost 2,400 families currently are using that service. And some families, over the last several months, are at the seventh installment of this funding so we're talking about a 70, \$80,000 investment into their children over seven months. We have committed to making sure we get this right. We are committed. We are committed to making sure that young people in this province of Ontario get the resources they need so they can reach their full potential. There's too much at stake. And this is a government that is committed to making sure that young children here in the province of Ontario are set up for success.

MPP Milczyn to Minister Mauro Re: Municipal Investments

>> MPP Peter Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of municipal affairs. The Minister and I and many members of the legislature started out at the municipal level of policy. And we all know the critical role that those municipalities, local governments play in Ontarians' daily lives. They provide many frontline services and they also provide the critical local infrastructure like the road we drive on, the parks we play in and the treatment facilities that keep our water clean. I'm proud our government is making the largest infrastructure investment in schools, roads, hospital, public transit and bridges in the province's history. And we're investing in the people and communities that make there are strong. Our government is also providing predictable ongoing support to municipalities through a number of programs. Will the Minister elaborate what those programs are and how they benefit municipalities across Ontario?

>> Minister Bill Mauro: Speaker, thank you very much. I want to thank the member from Etobicoke Lakeshore for the question. Speaker, as the Minister of municipal affairs, I take great pride in the relationship that we've established with the municipal sector over the years since coming into government in 2003, specifically through the Amo M.O.U. Roundtable. Speaker, through that venue and through programs in this government, we have increased significantly the financial assistance that flows to the municipal sector in Ontario. When we came to government in '03, Speaker, that was somewhere in the

neighbourhood of \$1 billion. Today, Speaker, the financial package that flows annually in support of our municipal sector in the province of Ontario is somewhere in the range of \$4 billion. An increase, Speaker, of \$3 billion. A four fold increase. I would say that if you are a municipal property taxpayer in the province of Ontario, our government has provided significant capacity -- And room for your municipal councillors to manage their budgets and provide their services to those constituents in a very affordable way.

>> MPP Milczyn: Thank you, Minister. I understand that these programs work together to benefit municipalities across Ontario. For example, the O.M.P. Now largely a northern and rural grant providing over 90% of its funding to northern and rural municipalities. Provincial transit funding to municipalities through the gas tax program benefits the nearly 100 municipalities at the province with public transit systems. And ocip provides annual funding to small northern and rural municipalities. But there's been a focus on funding for the city of Toronto in recent weeks. I understand programs like provincial uploads and gas tax provide significant ongoing support to the city in addition to provincial funding for specific projects. Would the Minister elaborate on some of the supports the province has provided to the Ty of Toronto since we've come to office?

>> Minister Mauro: A member from Etobicoke- Lakeshore asks a great question, Speaker. We recognize that the city of Toronto represents the fifth or sixth largest economy in Canada, and as such we recognize that it merits serious and specific attention. In that vein, Speaker, we have uploaded 530 million from the city of Toronto as well as providing \$170 million annually in gas tax funding, totalling about \$1.9 billion new revenues for the city of Toronto so far. People will know they've heard the Minister of transportation announce that we will be doubling that gas tax fund so long that, on an annual basis, the city of Toronto will be receiving \$340 million starting very soon. Speaker, in addition, examples of major infrastructure projects, \$5.3 billion for the Eglinton crosstown. 1.48 billion to extend the bloor- Danforth subway line in Scarborough, Speaker. Actually even in the member's riding for Etobicoke- Lakeshore very recently the Minister announced \$50 million for the Kipling mobility hub in Etobicoke-lakeshore. Some of the examples of the amazing support we have provided financially to the city of Toronto.

MPP Yakabuski to Minister Hoskins Re: Personal Support Workers

>> MPP John Yakabuski: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Back in December of 2016, the Minister received a proposal from the Ontario personal support workers association requesting the right to become the provincial governing body of personal support workers. In their request, they highlighted the greater need and increased role of our hard working P.S.W.S. Due to the increased needs for home and community care, there are many more P.S.W.S in today's health care system -- than years past. As I said, there are many more P.S.W.S in today's health care system than in years past. As such it has become apparent that there's a great need for oversight, which includes a governing body that oversees the needs of P.S.W.S and their responsibilities and more importantly the needs of their clients. Speaker, the Minister has stated that he is supportive of a health care system that protects all patients and health care providers. Therefore, can he tell us when we can expect a response or action regarding this proposal?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. The member opposite is correct that the ministry has received a proposal from the association representing our P.S.W.S. And I think I speak for everyone, Mr. Speaker, in this legislature that we have such great respect for the thousands upon thousands of P.S.W.S that are working in every facet of our health care system. They are often our unsung heroes, Mr. Speaker, doing incredibly important work to the highest quality and I want to express my appreciation for that. And part of that Mr. Speaker -- part of that appreciation has been reflected in the fact that we have increased the minimum wage for our P.S.W.S in this province by \$4 an hour so the minimum threshold for that minimum wage is now at \$15.50, Mr. Speaker. We are so invested

in elevating this profession to where it should be to be recognized for the important work that they do.

>> MPP Yakabuski: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Minister. The question wasn't about wages. The Minister 's well aware that the time to make decisions regarding health care is now. The system ant -- can't wait any longer. With an aging population and our health care services being rationed, it is imperative that his government take action. S -- the opswa's proposal is comprehensive and outlines the importance of safety, accountability, legitimacy, trust and oversight, things the government claims to uphold. Speaker, the Minister has acknowledged the important and expanding roles of our P.S.W.S in our holt care system. How much longer will all P.S.W.S have to wait for the validation they deserve?

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we as a government are validating our P.S.W.S. We've created a \$10 million annual fund for P.S.W. Training so that they can enhance their training, Mr. Speaker. We've created a common curriculum and educational standard for our P.S.W.S. Mr. Speaker, last year alone we added \$0 million to home and community care where many of our P.S.W.S work, resulting in an additional 1.3 million hours of P.S.W. Work in our homes and communities, Mr. Speaker. We've added 2,500 P.S.W.S in our long-term care homes since 2008. We're looking at this proposal. That aspect of regulation and oversight, and really to give the respect and the elevation to the profession that it deserves is one important element of -- Strat jiv. We're looking at their proposal as we're looking at other options, Mr. Speaker.