

CO Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Monday, October 23, 2017

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Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Monday, October 23, 2017.

MCI did not receive any questions of interest.

MSA did not receive any questions of interest.

Official opposition questions were on a number of topics including the fall economic statement, opioids in Ontario, and Ring of Fire. NDP Questions today included the hydro-rate reduction plan, the selling of Hydro One shares and the college strike.

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

http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/house-proceedings/house_proceedings_home.do?locale=en

Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Monday, October 23, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Romano to Minister Zimmer Re: Ring of Fire

>> MPP Ross Romano: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation. Recently I travelled to the matawa first nations of anybody bin wick, to see the conditions there. Their power system may not survive the winter. They along with nichcantica have been on a boil water for decades. Imagine an entire generation of youth not knowing as simple as turning on the tap for a glass of water. These and many other poor conditions are causing an even greater tragedy. There's a suicide epidemic claiming the lives of too many young children. Can you even fathom the state of hopelessness when kids as young as 12 are taking their own lives? These conditions exist in Ontario, Mr. Speaker, and they are unacceptable. So to the Minister, what will you do to bring immediate relief to these first nations? Will you end the power and the water crisis now? Will you take action to end the tragic suicide epidemic that is killing Ontario's youth?

>> Minister David Zimmer: Thank you for that important question. The water issue of clean water issue is of utmost paramountcy to this government, indeed the first nations, and I should add to the federal government. And that's why this government is working closely with the federal government to resolve this cleaning water issue. The federal government has responsibility for on-reserve matters, clean drinking water, but the provincial government plays an important role in working with the federal government, in working with first nations, in providing provincial expertise in water treatment. Speaker, I have been to 119 or 120 first nations. Especially in the remote northern communities. A part of my visits always includes a treatment to the water treatment facility, if there is one. First nations, there is not a water treatment facility in some. When you see the difficulties with the water treatment facilities and then you go to other first nations. And you see that they don't even have a water treatment facility –

>> MPP Romano: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister. The socioeconomic and infrastructure challenges within these communities are similar to those we would see in third-world countries. Following the discovery of the ring of fire, the Liberal government signed a regional framework agreement, the R.F.A., with all the matawa first nation communities so that these living conditions could be addressed in the consultation process. The Liberals then hired high-priced consultants to negotiate the ring of fire road development. It's been 11 years now and there has been no progress on the road beyond Liberal announcement filled with empty election promises.

Could these failed negotiations have wasted taxpayers in excess of \$30 million. Mr. Speaker, after all this wasted money, these communities continue to live in third-world conditions and are in desperate need of help. So to the Minister -- wouldn't you think all this money would have been better spent on solutions for the living conditions in these communities as opposed to padding the pockets of high-priced Liberal consultants?

>> Minister Zimmer: Speaker, thank you for that question. Look, a necessary component to relieving the conditions, the difficult conditions we find in the far north is economic development, resource development and finding a way for first nations to share responsibly and fairly in the benefits of resource development. I know the member opposite was on a tour of the ring of fire recently. I too about two weeks ago was at the ring of fire with Minister Mauro, with Minister Gravelle and myself, executives from noront and chiefs from the matawa tribal council. We had an on-site meeting. We sat in a ring in the outdoors, at the ring of fire. We received a briefing from the chiefs, from noront and from the political people that attended that meeting. I can tell you that there is a willingness from the first nation. From noront and from government to develop the ring of fire so that we can provide the economic opportunities which will go a long, long way to improving conditions --

>> MPP Romano: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister. The road that was initially proposed to unlock the economic opportunity in the ring of fire runs through matawa first nation land and as such requires their consent. To obtain that consent, the Liberal government signed an R.F.A. With these communities promising to negotiate in good faith. They have not agreed to this development fearing the road alone will not address or improve their community living conditions. The Premier's answer to this road block was to change the rules of the R.F.A.. Now she plans to reroute the road to avoid their land so that they won't have a say. However I can't be mad and angry, this is a slap in the face to those negotiations. To the Minister, is this your government's idea of good-faith negotiations?

>> Minister Zimmer: So the reason that Minister Gravelle and I and Minister Mauro, noront executives and the ring of fire chiefs went to the ring of fire about two weeks ago. We spent the day there in extensive briefings, extensive consultations to find out how best to deal with the transportation corridor issue. Obviously if we're going to extract minerals with the involvement and the participation of first nations, there has to be a transportation corridor to remove those minerals, those assets to smelters and other places. That was the purpose of the meeting. That's why this government has invested -- set aside \$1 billion for a transportation corridor, and we are presently in negotiations with -- counterparts. We are in negotiations with the private sector to execute a plan that is satisfactory, that is satisfactory to the nine --

MPP Fedeli to Minister Sousa (Thibeault) Re: Fall Economic Statement

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you and good morning, Speaker. My question's for the acting Premier. Under the fiscal transparency and accountability act, the finance Minister is required to provide a fall economic statement. Over the last 30 days we've all heard the warnings made about this government's documents. The legislature's financial accountability office says the budget will not balance because the numbers are based on, quote, unlikely assumptions. Last month the auditor general said this government has, quote, significantly misstated the numbers for two years running. Last week the A.G. said, quote, the government is making up its own accounting rules. Speaker, to the acting Premier, is there even a remote chance we're going to see any numbers we can believe?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I reject the premise of this question -- Individual is trying to also reflect the fact that Ontario, by all accounts, is leading in Canada in the lowest unemployment in 1 year. Almost 800,000 net new jobs from the depth of the recession. Mr. Speaker, we've been very open and transparent and we've beaten our targets consistently year over year as attested by public accounts, which the auditor general does confirm. So, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite may talk about expectations and exaggerations. We deal with the facts, Mr. Speaker, and we are exceeding and delivering for the people of Ontario.

>> MPP Fedeli: Thank you. Back to the acting Premier. That's certainly not what the auditor general told us last week. The transparency act also requires the finance Minister to release August and February reports every year but sadly this Minister has missed issuing almost all of them since his appointment. Considering the lack of trust in this government's numbers, we can see why they choose to snub their nose at our laws. The Minister 's also required to publish a pre-election finance report to be reviewed by the auditor general. The government must provide detailed accounts, the very numbers that the financial accountability officer says would be, quote, not be achieved. The very numbers the auditor general says, quote, we cannot rely on. Speaker, will the government produce a pre-election report? And will there be any numbers in it we can actually believe?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, this is a good question, and I'll tell you why. That party, when they were in power -- They gave -- that would contain five and a half -- In the past, Mr. Speaker. We passed the law requiring that all governments going forward must be open and transparent and deliver those very opportunities for the entire province to see before the next election. We are doing that, Mr. Speaker. The fall economic statement is going to be delivered very shortly, as will the future report that is being questioned here, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

>> MPP Fedeli: Again to the acting Premier. The two reports aren't the only documents the members of the House are waiting for, Speaker. The government has withheld thousands of emails from the auditor general and spent \$500,000 on hiring lawyers to stall their release. The auditor general and this legislature are entitled to those documents, not some of them, Speaker. All of them. And we want them now. Not only that, but the media, we're told, in a response to freedom of information request. That no documents on consultants exist when clearly they do. Speaker, to the acting Premier, the last Liberals that said there were no documents are now in a courtroom down the street. Is that where this one is heading?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government remains committed to being open and transparent and continues to co-operate -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to co-operate with the office of the auditor general. For example, the independent electricity system operator has so far provided 1,200 records to the auditor general. O.P.G. Has provided hundreds of records. The Ontario financing authority has provided -- Treasury board has provided thousands of records. We've provided 13,212, and in this process, Mr. Speaker, and throughout every day -- We're adhering to all document retention standards. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the ministry has informed me that we're continuing to release additional information to the auditor general, and we're doing this because we understand the importance of providing the auditor. With everything that she's asked for, Mr. Speaker. The ministry has been regularly providing the auditor general with additional responsive documents each week and we'll continue to adhere to this process.

MPP Horwath to Minister Sousa (Sandals) (Thibeault) Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my question's for the acting Premier. Thanks to the auditor general, we now know that the Premier and her Liberal government are forcing Ontario families to pay \$4 billion just to hide the damage that her hydro borrowing scheme will do in the long run. We know that she was warned about the costs. We know she was given other options and we know she went ahead anyways. Account acting Premier tell us who made the decision to ignore staff warnings and push ahead with a \$4 billion scheme?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, again the premise of the question is erroneous. The estimation by the financial accountability officer made reference to what he felt were estimated numbers based on estimated borrowing, which were remind -- we're reminding everyone that is not actually what has taken place. So, Mr. Speaker, the premise of the question is erroneous. There is a plan before us which reduces hydro rates, electricity rates for Ontarians across the province by 25%, enabling us to do so in a responsible manner which the opposition has now declined. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

>> Andrea Horwath: Trust the estimations of the F.A.O. And auditor general much more than I would expect to trust the estimations of a government -- As you'll recall, this government estimated a \$40 million cost of the gas plant scandal. And that was \$1.1 billion, Speaker. I'm not going to take their estimation. Definitely not. In addition to the \$4 billion, Speaker, that this Premier spent to hide the real cost of her \$40 billion borrowing scheme, they also forked over another \$2 million to consultants to help design said scheme. Since they won't tell us about the \$4 billion, will the Liberal government at least make these consultants' contracts public so Ontarians know who exactly it is that's advising the Premier and what direction she was given?

>> Minister Liz Sandals: Yes. Thank you very much, Speaker. And first of all I think it's important to understand -- That the numbers that the leader of the third party is throwing around were estimates of something or other, projections that came from the F.A.O.. H. They were not documents that were ever presented to Cabinet on which to base a decision. They were projections that came after the fact. They were not Cabinet decision making documents. The decision that Cabinet did make was an important policy decision to say that things that actually have to do with electricity production belong on the rate base from an accounting and from a real perspective, financial fiscal plan perspective. Things which have social policy impacts -- Belong on the tax base. And that's exactly what the accounting is based on, is that policy decision. To put electricity on the rate base.

>> Andrea Horwath: I've not been gobsmacked in this place for a long time, but for a Minister to get up and talk about estimations of something or other is pretty worrisome. For a governing party to do that is pretty worrisome. We know that the Liberals knew how much it was going to cost to hide the disastrous effect of their borrowing scheme from the public. We know that they knew it was going to cost Ontario families \$4 billion to do, and clearly they just didn't care that they were going to spend \$4 billion to cook up this scheme. We also know that the people of this province paid an additional \$2 million for consultants to tell them how to pull it off. Why is the Liberal government putting themselves and their party ahead of families once again? They're looking after their political interests, the interests of the Liberals, and this Premier, instead of putting the interests of the families of this province who are struggling just to make ends meet and pay their skyrocketing hydro bill shs.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to our policy decision, we actually made a decision that helps every single family in this province, Mr. Speaker, by reducing their electricity bills by 25%. But then we went even further, Mr. Speaker. We brought forward our social programs, the oesp program, the rrrpprogram. Those those folks who live in rural or northern parts. They're going to see up to 50% off their bills. We made sure that we kept electricity generating assets on the electricity side, Mr. Speaker, and those social programs that I talked about, we've pulled those off the rate base to lower the rates even more and we put that on the tax base, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to putting families first, it's this government that does so, Mr. Speaker. It's this government that brought forward the reduction, this government that continues to bring forward plans and policies that will continue to help the families -- help the families -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is this government, not the opposition, that is making a difference in the lives of families in this province each and every day.

MPP Horwath to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My next question's also for the acting Premier. Hydro bills in Ontario have gone up 300% under this Liberal government. They've gone up 50% just under the Premier's reign alone. But instead of reversing her wrong-headed decision to sell off Hydro One, the Premier paid consultants \$2 million to design a \$4 billion financial scheme designed to hide the fact that she's costing Ontario families \$40 billion more than necessary. Instead of remortgaging the cost of hydro on the backs of Ontarians, why didn't this Liberal government come up with a real solution to address the skyrocketing hydro prices in this province?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The solution that we brought forward is a 25% reduction for all homes in this province, for all families and for 500,000 small businesses and farms, Mr. Speaker. Their plan doesn't do anything to even address taking 1 cent off anyone's bills, Mr. Speaker. They didn't even include first nations or even contemplate what we can do for low-income individuals where we did, Mr. Speaker. We brought forward the Ontario electricity support program. We have an on-reserve first nation delivery credit removal and we've also created the rrrrp. We've made sure, Mr. Speaker, that we've looked after the individuals in our province and we know we've got more work to do. We'll continue to have consultations to talk about small businesses, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to work with our large industries, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the opposition party. That has no plan and one that has a plan that won't work. This plan on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, is saving all families in this province money.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, sadly, sadly, sadly -- this is my second, Speaker. Second from -- sadly, sadly, sadly, the people of Ontario have seen all too closely the Liberal plan. That's why the hydro rates are going up in this province, because of Liberal plans, because of what the Liberals have done to our electricity system over 14 years. Look, the Premier has taken responsibility already for the high cost of hydro in Ontario. She actually said it was her own fault. When will the Liberal government take responsibility for using billions of public dollars to try to deceive Ontario families into believing she actually fixed the problem that she caused?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to helping families in this province, 25% reduction means that rates are going down, Mr. Speaker. They're going down for every single House hold. They're going down for 500,000 small businesses and farms, and we're continuing to work to reduce our rates even more. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? We did have to make sure that we invested in a system. \$70 billion in a system to make sure that we can have a clean system and a reliable system. I know today, Mr. Speaker, that system that we have is over 90% g.h.g.-free. We're making sure there is no coal in our electricity supply mix. We are the tip of the spear when it comes to north America, Mr. Speaker. I know the other opposition parties will talk about it. But this is action that we've done. We're lowered our emotions. We've made sure we're helping on the health care system because these are saving dollars to our health care side, Mr. Speaker. These were the right things to do at the end of the day. We'll continue to help families --

>> Andrea Horwath: The running tab for the cost of the Premier's hydro borrowing scheme is this. \$40 billion for the plan itself. \$4 billion to hide the long-term cost of the plan. 2 million on consultants to design the \$4 billion financial scheme and \$500,000 for a lawyer to screen emails going to the auditor general as she attempts to tell the people of Ontario just how bad this hydro scheme is for them. Does the government plan to spend any more public money on that desperate attempt to convince voters that their hydro bills haven't gone up over 300% on their government's watch?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again 25% reduction. All House holds in this province. That means rates are going down in this province, Mr. Speaker. But let's talk about the savings that this government has made by investing in a clean, green reliable electricity system. When it comes to the health care system, Mr. Speaker, \$4.3 billion in health care cost savings thanks to this government closing coal plants. That's \$70 billion that we're going to see, Mr. Speaker, by 2055. That is something we need to ensure that we keep doing, Mr. Speaker, unlike the opposition parties that have no plan or no idea on actually how to do this, Mr. Speaker. 43% -- sorry 41% reduction in health care costs. 23% in health care debt thanks to the investments we have made in this system. We're going to continue to be leaders in this country, in North America when it comes to our electricity grid and making sure that it's clean -- Reliable and affordable, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Todd Smith: Thanks, Speaker. My question this morning is for the acting Premier. We learned last week, in court, that former Cabinet secretary Peter Wallace told the Premier's chief of staff,

quote -- the only organization that didn't keep any records was a criminal organization, end quote. So I'm sure that it's only a coincidence that the government lawyered up this time when the auditor general asked for what turned out to be 2 million emails from the energy ministry. Speaker, why has the government only turned over 1% -- actually less than 1% of the documents that the auditor general has asked for from the government?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So when it comes to the documents asked by the auditor general, we are in full compliance, Mr. Speaker. Since October 13th, we've provided over 13,000 documents, Mr. Speaker. And how did we get to that number? On top of all the other documents that all the other associations are getting to, we actually took the phrases that the auditor general had asked for and recognized that there were 80 custodians of those phrases and that was 40 phrases. That produced 2 million documents. Those 2 million documents were then reviewed to make sure which ones applied specifically to this act and what was close. And that provided 145,000 documents. Then the ministry of energy, Mr. Speaker, is working hard to go through all of those documents to provide all of them that relate to the fair hydro plan to the auditor general. I note the opposition member knows this. And that's something we're going to continue to talk about, Mr. Speaker, because at the end of the day we are doing everything that we're supposed to do as a government to provide these documents to the auditor general.

>> MPP Smith: Speaker, the Minister just talked about a lot of numbers. One thing we learned last week in the auditor general's report is we can't believe a single number that this government brings forward any longer. All of their numbers are in a shroud of controversy. Speaker, the last time the government stalled and stalled and stalled on handing over the documents, do you remember how much that cost the taxpayers of Ontario? Over \$1 billion. And we also got to learn about all kinds of neat things like the secret code names they were using like project vapour and project fruit salad and Pete's project that was going on and the infamous double delete. How many secret codes are we going to find about this time? We know that the lawyers are in there designing which documents that they're going to turn over to the auditor general. This latest electricity scheme is going to cost electricity customers. In Ontario \$4 billion. Speaker, this time the government lawyered up first. What are they trying to hide from Ontario now?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It begs the question as to what are they trying to hide, Mr. Speaker? When it comes to the fact that they keep talking about an idea that they may have had somewhere close to maybe a year ago that they went launch and talk about a plan that they might have. I know the only number that we know is we're getting closer and closer to 365 days before they would even talk about having doing something for the people of Ontario. We on the other hand, this government, Mr. Speaker, has provided another number that everyone knows, a 25% reduction on everyone's bills from one side of our province to the other. For those that live in rural or northern parts of the province, they will even see Mr. More -- more, Mr. Speaker. But at the end of the day we're making sure we're acting, Mr. Speaker, for the people of Ontario with a clean system, an affordable system and a reliable system. That's a plan you can count on, Mr. Speaker, not like the opposition.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro One Privatization

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question's to the acting Premier. Two years ago the Premier insisted that a privatized Hydro One would not drive up hydro rates because the Ontario energy board would keep it in check. We now know that Hydro One refuses to be regulated by the O.E.B.. Even after the O.E.B. Gave it nearly everything it asked for, including 71% of a \$2.6 billion tax give from that government. Hydro One is taking the O.E.B. To court to demand 100% of that gift. According to O.E.B. Precedent, this tax benefit should be going to ratepayers, not to shareholders. Why does the Premier think it's acceptable for Hydro One to demand 100% -- O this \$2.6 billion gift on behalf of investors while leaving nothing for ratepayers?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable member for the

question. I know we had this discussion last week as well. Really when you're looking on Hydro One's draft rate order, what we're talking about now, Mr. Speaker, it's an estimated bill impact for 2017 that would be an increase of 0.1% and 0.2% for 2018. But that being said our fair hydro plan has lowered bills by 25% on average per House hold and as many as a half million small businesses and farms this summer, Mr. Speaker. I know our rural customers have also seen even a greater decrease from this somewhere between 40 and 50%. These are truly substantial savings. We're going to continue to monitor this, Mr. Speaker, but at the end of the day we'll continue to work with all of our utilities to ensure that we continue to provide real relief. Immediate relief for the families and businesses that are in our province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Tabuns: Speaker, again to the acting Premier. Last week the government said the system was working just fine. Because the O.E.B. Had told Hydro One to reduce its revenue demands. It turns out Hydro One basically ignored the O.E.B. Decision. The privatized Hydro One came back with new revenue demands that was nearly as high as the first demand. And then it took the o.e.b.to court. Will the Premier finally admit that Hydro One will not accept regulation by the Ontario energy board and that the only way to stop private profit from driving up hydro bills is to return Hydro One to public hands?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The o.e.b.'s decision is a great example of the strong record they have of denying hydro companies all that they asked for in reviewing rate applications with the consumer in mind first and foremost. Over the past ten years the O.E.B. Has denied or reduced the outcome of rate applications many times. In 2010, in 2012, in 2011 and 2014. Again in 2011 even for example with Toronto hydro. They made a request to the O.E.B. And received a 10.8% less than requested reduction. The o.e.b.'s mandate, Mr. Speaker, is to protect the interest of ratepayers and to set just and reasonable rates. When it comes to the tax deferral piece, Mr. Speaker, as the independent arm's length regulator of the province the O.E.B. Continues to balance the interests of consumers with those of the utilities. Part of the -- answer. Included the deferral tax issue. The O.E.B. Has indicated some of the value of the tax asset should be given to ratepayers. Thank you very much.

MPP Qaadri to Minister MacCharles Re: Persons with Disabilities in the Workforce

>> MPP Shafiq Qaadri: My question's for the Minister responsible for accessibility, the hon rabble Tracy maccharles. Ontarians appreciate the government's work toward making Ontario more accessible. People of all abilities deserve to reach their social and economic potential by contributing their diverse skills and talent in Ontario's workplace. Unfortunately, Speaker, as you'll appreciate many Ontario employers are still reluctant to hire people with disabilities and yet nearly a third of Ontario's small and medium sized businesses report having difficulty filling job vacancies. Despite this studies show workers with disabilities have more loyal, have better attendance and in fact perform better than average on the job. As well most workers with disabilities only require minor accommodations to work. A more diverse work force including people with disabilities helps Ontario businesses with productivity, innovation and exports. Speaker, my question is this. Will the Minister please explain what steps our government is doing to shift attitudes about accessibility and increase the participation of persons with disabilities in Ontario's work force?

>> Minister Tracy MacCharles: Thank you. And I want to thank the member from Etobicoke North for this very important question. This summer I was very pleased, Speaker, to launch access talent. This is Ontario's employment strategy for people with disabilities and I was joined by many Colleague Minister s on this very important initiative. So access talent outlines our vision for the future, a province where everyone has a chance to reach their full potential and make a meaningful contribution to our economic prosperity and social growth. We're calling on employers to join us to take action and hire at least one more person with a disability and give people the opportunity to help further build their businesses and grow our economy. Our plan involves drawing from the knowledge and lived exp Eriences from people across all sectors including francophone communities and first nations. Indigenous people to reflect the diversity of people with disabilities. I'll be pleased

to answer more in supplementary.

>> MPP Qaadri: Thank you, Minister. I think all of us appreciate your engagement on this portfolio. Speaker, one of the frustrations that I hear about as an MPP is how particular constituents are yet unable to find work because of the barriers they may face because of their own personal disabilities. The employment rate for people with disabilities is less than 50% and a quarter of those employees feel they are working a role that does not reflect the breadth of their qualification. When we limit people's abilities as individuals, we limit our strengths -- strengths and as a province. Last month as part of access talent, the Minister responsible for access building announced the new partnership table to advise the government on innovative ways to connect people with disabilities to jobs and businesses to talent. Speaker, would the Minister please explain to the House how the new employer's table is going to advance employment for people with disabilities in the province of Ontario?

>> Minister MacCharles: Speaker, our employer's partnership table is a major step forward for Ontario's groundbreaking strategy to increase jobs for people with disabilities. As business leaders and entrepreneurs our partners know the importance of expanding their customer base include persons with disabilities while creating a work force that include as diverse nature of customers. I want to thank the members joining this partnership table. I've been telling my colleagues to the left of me. These folks are not only meeting at scheduled times. They're exchanging emails. They really want to move yardstick forward on this. They're going to advocate for hiring people with disabilities within their business circles and communities, influencing businesses, dispelling myths and misconceptions about employing people with disabilities. They have lots of professional expertise, Speaker, that is bringing to the table best practices. And it's initiatives like this, Speaker, that show our government -- is creating meaningful and positive change both socially and economically in Ontario. Thank you.

MPP Yurek to Minister Hoskins (Lalonde) Re: Opioid Crisis

>> MPP Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question's to the Minister of health. Speaker, every day we read about the opioid crisis in Ontario and the millimetre deaths resulting from overdose. Police officers who are often first to find those who have overdosed or run the risk of inadvertently ingesting illicit drugs that place their lives at risk. Back in October the government announced the expansion of naloxone. Unfortunately these first responders were ignored in the announcement. This has left many police services struggling to find the money to equip their officers with this lifesaving treatment. It's created a two tier system in the province where some officers have access to naloxone and others do not. The 10-year-old crisis has overtaken Ontario. We need leadership and support our police officers throughout the province. Will the Minister ensure a portion of the funds its government exited to the crisis help police services purchase naloxone for their officers?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I not Minister of community safety and correctional service also want to speak to this issue in the supplementary but I wanted to take the opportunity, since the member referenced appropriately the opioid crisis, public health emergency that we're facing in this province as well as across the country. I was asked last Thursday and Friday, the federal, provincial and territorial health Ministers meeting where we had opportunity on both days, Mr. Speaker, to work together on the crisis and what more we could do collectively and nationally, looking particularly to the federal leadership of ways that they could work with us to make sure that those supports that are so badly needed by our harm reduction workers and at the front line, including the safe injection services, including the providing support to those quite frankly who are dying in incredible numbers and are extremely vulnerable marginalized that we can provide that support that's needed. It includes the provision of naloxone. I think we're distributing in the order of 8,000 kits every single month through a whole myriad of opportunities. Again the Minister of community safety and correctional service also want to address this specifically in supplementary.

>> MPP Yurek: Speaker, back to the Minister. Police services have informed me that they have had to shift money in their budget to try and provide naloxone to their first -- officers. Unfortunately this comes at a cost other police services that keep our public safe. This government has been too slow to act on this crisis which has placed a heavy burden on police service budgets. Due to lack of support some regions of the province may know not have access of naloxone putting the safety of the public and officers at risk. Will the Minister commit to include our frontline police officers throughout this province being supplied with naloxone?

>> Minister Lalonde: Thank you very much. I want to say thanks to the member opposite for the questions. I know that he -- and I would say everyone in this House -- is committed to ending the opioid crisis. Several police services, frontline officers with naloxone kits and that includes a few in the members' opposite's own riding such as Elmer police services and the OPP who have equipped all their frontline officers with lifesaving naloxone, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, ultimately are in the end responsible for ensuring the respective police services that meets their needs. And as part of our strategy for safer Ontario, we are moving forward towards an outcome-based funding model. Moving forward with this modernization, police services will have more funding -- For local priorities like naloxone for police. When the bill is introduced, I strongly encourage the member to support it. Thank you very much.

MPP Sattler to Minister Duguid Re: College Strike

>> MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Speaker, on Friday, October 20, student leaders at eight Ontario Colleges urged the government to get College administrators and striking faculty back to the bargaining table so that a negotiated settlement can be reached and 500,000 College students can return to their classrooms. My Colleague, Cindy Forster and I the member for Welland reinforced their call in an open letter to the Premier. Speaker, students feel that they are caught in the middle. They worry whether they will be able to complete their program requirements. Many are paying both tuition and rent and are understandably anxious about the financial burden they are carrying when their semester might be lost. Speaker, what is this Liberal government going to do to bring the party back to the table so that a fair resolution can be achieved?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We share the member's concern obviously about the length of time this strength has been -- strike has been ongoing. I perhaps have an interest here -- maybe I have a conflict of interest. I have two sons, Mr. Speaker, one at George Brown taking construction engineering, another at Centennial College taking HVAC. Both graduate this spring. So they too are anxious about what the potential impacts this may have on their year. So we on this -- there's no monopoly here on caring about the interests of these students. I think we all care equally. I think best thing we can do at this stage is to urge both sides to stay at that bargaining table and get to a deal as soon as possible because there's no question the time being taken impacts our students. But, Mr. Speaker, I guess my -- it maybe in the supplementary question the member can tell me is her party suggesting that now's the time for us to legislate them back? Is that what -- Because that's the only tool we have --

>> MPP Sattler: Again to the acting Premier. Speaker, provincial underfunding of Ontario Colleges has resulted in tuition fees, increased to the maximum. Deleting class sizes and explosion in the use of temporary contract and part-time instructors. College student enrollment is at record highs but full-time faculty have all but disappeared. 80% of faculty are precarious part-time workers with no job security and no benefits who must reapply for their jobs every four months. This is not fair to students and it is not fair to faculty. Speaker, what is this Liberal government prepared to do to ensure a fair negotiated agreement that includes the resources necessary to implement equal pay for equal work in the College sector?

>> Minister Duguid: Asking questions on a daily basis on this, and I understand the concern that we all have for our students. But, Mr. Speaker, what are they suggest we do? The alternative is Mr.

Speaker --Mr. Speaker, we're strongly urging both sides to get to an agreement as soon as possible. That's in the interests of our students, Mr. Speaker. But is the member suggesting now's the time for us to legislate them back? If that's what you're suggesting, then come out and say it instead of hiding behind the rhetoric because, Mr. Speaker, there's been no government that's done more for the College system than ours.

MPP Anderson to Minister Thibeault Re: Nuclear Generating Stations

>> MPP Granville Anderson: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of energy. In my riding I often hear from constituents and the work of this government on the energy file. The constituents of Durham know how critical a clean reliable energy system is to Ontario being a great place to live and work, Speaker. And that's why the refurbish plans of our nuclear fleet is so important to them. But recently -- Thank you, Speaker. A new story that focused on the refurbishment south project cited cost overruns as a concern. Now my constituents are worried that the project might go over the set budget or will be delayed. They're worried because they know that the nuclear industry's not only a source of clean and safe energy but -- Substantial economic benefit to the region of Durham. Mr. Speaker, could the Minister please update the House and my constituents on how -- Project is going?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also want to thank the member for that question and for all of the hard work he puts in every day for all of his constituents. As I've said before the refurbishment of the Darlington generating station remains on time and on budget. The new story mentioned by the member from Durham focuses on only one of about 500 small sub-projects that make up the entire Darlington refurbishment program. There is adequate contingency within overall refurbishment project to fund any related to this sub project. As Ontario power generation states in their Q2 refurbishment update which you can now find on their website they are now at the quarter way point and remain on time and on budget. The Darlington refurbishment project is a made in Canada initiative with 96% of related expenditures happening in Ontario. This means more investment into our already booming economy. Mr. Speaker, I want to -- The member from Durham and this House that the Darlington refurbishment remains on time and on budget.

>> MPP Anderson: Thank you, Minister, for your answer. Since the Darlington nuclear generating station is in the great riding of Durham, the economic and job creation benefits are well celebrated by my constituents. We are also very proud of the work that is being done at the Darlington generating station, which provides about 20% of the province's electricity needs, enough to serve a city of over 2 million people. After six years of detailed planning and preparation, Ontario power generation is -- shut down the unit 2 reactor at the Darlington nuclear station. On October 15, 2016, initiating the refurbishment of the first of four units at the power plant. The refurbishment of Darlington will ensure we have safe, reliable emission-free -- Where it's needed. Minister, it's my understanding that you are releasing the government long-term energy plan later this week. Can you provide us with an update -- Regarding the nuclear plant?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct in pointing out that refurbishment of Darlington and other nuclear generating stations in our province will generate economic benefits, Mr. Speaker. Refurbishing Ontario's nuclear capacity will create almost 25,000 jobs and generate annual economic activity of 5 billion. 60 companies from across Ontario are contributing to the project. All told, it is estimated that the 10-year project, together with Darlington's an additional 30 years of operation, will boost Ontario's G.D.P. By almost 90 billion and create an average of 14,200 new jobs each and every year over that same period. This week, Mr. Speaker, our government will release the 2017 long-term energy plan, and I am pleased to say that it will take major steps towards delivering on the mandate letter by the Premier to me. Namely refurbishing the ten nuclear units in Ontario both at Darlington and at Bruce. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Lisa Thompson to Minister Leal Re: Agri-Food Careers

>> MPP Thompson: Mr. Speaker, my question's for the Minister of agriculture, food and rural affairs. On September 7th, the Ontario agricultural College at the university of Guelph published their planning for tomorrow 2.0 report. This report found the labour gap in the agri-food sector has grown from three jobs for every graduate to four in just two short years. In fact financial institutions have estimated that that gap is even higher in their sector. Clearly, Speaker, under this Minister as watch, this situation has eroded and is only getting worse. Speaker, does the Minister of agriculture, food and rural affairs not know about this report? But if he does, then why has he not taken action on my motion growing agri-food careers?

>> Minister Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member for her question this morning. I think what it reflects is the agriculture and agri-food sector of Ontario's economy is one of the fastest growing sectors in Ontario today. \$37 billion. 800,000 people employed and of course the Premier's target of 120,000 new jobs by the year 2020. We're on track to make that happen. 59,000 new jobs created to date. Putting demands of course on our labour supply. We continue to work with all educational institutions across the province of Ontario to make sure that we have adequate human resources to drive this sector forward.

>> MPP Thompson: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Minister. Unfortunately I do not agree with what he just said. When the Premier was Minister of agriculture, food and rural affairs yes, he challenged the industry to create 120,000 new jobs. They are nowhere near close to matching that number. They're not even close. My growing agri-food careers motion is a good step in helping this sector meet that -- But over the last number of years, we have not seen any action taken on this motion which I might add received support from all parties. Speaker, I've been meeting with a wide number of people including industry representatives, egg scape, O.E.C. Alumni and they all share my concern that this motion has yet to be implemented. So Speaker, on behalf of our young people and industry stakeholders and ag scape and O.A.C. And their alumni, will the Minister ofing a can culture food and rural affairs do the right thing and get this motion implemented immediately?

>> Minister Leal: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her supplementary question and I just wanted to provide this House with some information. That's why our government is partnering with university of Guelph investing more than \$7.5 billion in graduate scholarships over the past decade for our highly qualified personal scholarship programs. And again, Mr. Speaker, working with my Colleague the Minister of education, we're now embarked upon a curriculum review. I not Minister wants to enshrine agriculture education into the curriculum to make sure we have adequate people for the fastest growing sector in Ontario's economy today.

MPP Bisson to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Beds

>> MPP Gilles Bisson: Minister of health. Minister, last week in Timmins, a 16-year-old boy with mental health needs had to be treated in the emergency ward because there were no beds in that hospital to be able to treat them. This morning we hear that there's eight new beds being announced in the city of Timmins but that's cold comfort to patients who are continually having to be treated in the same way, getting hallway medicine rather than getting the beds that they need to be treated. Minister, talk of how much money your government claims to have spent is cold comfort to patients and their families across Ontario that still don't have access to the health care they need despite your claims to the contrary. No one especially, not a 16-year-old with so much life ahead of them, should suffer in today's Ontario because of the lack of access to proper health care. When will this government admit that they're not doing enough to deal with this problem?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. I'm not sure whether the member is appreciating the fact that eight new beds are being opened probably within the next two

to four weeks in Timmins hospital. I'm not sure if he's supportive of that or if he's not supportive of that, Mr. Speaker. But -- and I made an important announcement just over an houring a, Mr. Speaker, where we announced \$140 million available immediately to open up over 2,000 new hospital beds and spaces across this province. Mr. Speaker, if there's anything that's going to deal with the challenge that the member opposite has expressed, it's that. 1,200 new hospital beds opening. Many if not most in the next two to four weeks, Mr. Speaker. Approximately 600 transitional care spaces for specialized care including the humber river finch site, 150 beds. That party appears to be opposed with, Mr. Speaker. And 200 new supportive housing units specifically for seniors. If that's not good news, I don't understand the nature of the context of that question --

>> MPP Bisson: Tell you what is not good news. Minister, I will tell you what is not good news is when a government refuses to do something and only reacts when there's a crisis. Only when our leader lands in this House and asks question after question, members of this caucus, people across Ontario, hospital C.E.O.S and others who have been saying for years, you have underfunded the hospital system. You froze the budget for how many years? So now because there's an election coming this spring, you're finally doing something and announcing beds? Of course we're going to take them. You know this falls short of what needs to be done. So will you please now admit that there is a problem in our health care system --

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, with this announcement we are opening the equivalent of six new medium sized hospitals in this province in this calendar year, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the member from welland where we're opening 20 beds at Windsor -- at Windsor we're opening 20 beds at Windsor Regional Hospital or London health sciences. If the members from London, we're opening 24 new acute beds and 24 acute mental health beds effective immediately, Mr. Speaker. Or Hamilton health sciences where we're opening 30 new beds. Niagara at the welland site for the welland member, Mr. Speaker. 26 new beds or St. Joe's downtown Hamilton 24 new beds. Or at lakeridge at Oshawa. I wonder if the member from Oshawa is opposed to the 22 new beds there. I know the member from Peterborough on our side is very happy that we're opening 20 new beds in Peterborough. And the member from quinte. Opening 15 beds there. Or in Ottawa, the 45 new beds in Ottawa, or the 30 new beds, 36 new beds in Barrie, Mr. Speaker, at the Royal vic. I know it's good news on this side. I don't know why they're --

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Duguid Re: Information and Communication Technology Sector

>> MPP Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of economic development and growth. On this side of the House we know how important it is to have a plan for the future, one that ensures Ontario can grow in this fast-changing seriously competitive global economy. Mr. Speaker, the Minister has been telling us for some time now about how important the information and communication technology sector is to Ontario. If you look at the numbers, Ontario truly has become a global leading innovation hub. Ontario's now the first in Canada and second in north America in the number of I.C.T. Establishments behind only California. Ontario's now home to two of the largest start-up ecosystems in the world, Toronto and Waterloo. We know that we've seen investments in the past from major companies like Google, apple, I.B.M. And Thomson reuters. Account Minister tell us about some of the more exciting developments for Ontario's I.C.T. Sector?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member's absolutely right. This government recognized quite early that the global economy was shifting, and we needed to be at the forefront of that change. We entirely restructured our ministry of economic development and our economic development strategy. We needed to focus on investments that allow our startups to become scale-ups and our scale-ups to become globally competitive. Just this week we've seen two new exciting investments in Ontario's booming I.C.T. Sector. One example of that growth, Mr. Speaker, is shopify. A homegrown e-commerce giant located in Ottawa and a company changing the face of retail. Last week, they announced a further expansion here in Ontario of 500 new jobs in Waterloo. Another example is sidewalk labs, subsidiary of global -- Company. Mr. Speaker, after a global search they decided the best place in the world for them to locate was here in Ontario. Very

proud of that, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Hoggarth: Thank you. To the Minister for answering my question. We know that Ontario's information and communication technology sector already directly employs about 280,000 people all across this province. Most of that employment is the result of our highly skilled talent that has been created right here in Ontario and in Barrie at Georgian College. The second relies on Ontario's leading 44 universities which graduate thousands of stem students per year. These are great numbers and allow us to compete right now. But we know things are changing rapidly across the world, and in this competitive global environment, jurisdictions across the world are pulling out all the stops. To attract investments and lure talents. Account Minister please Ted us about we plan to ensure Ontario continues to be a leader in job creation and growing strong, diverse communities?

>> Minister Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No question, the member's absolutely right. Ontario is in a position every strength. We've added 800,000 net new jobs since the global recession. Our unemployment rate is at the lowest level we've seen in 17 years. Being in that position of strength gives us the ability to focus our attention on growing an innovative economy. Mr. Speaker, last week we took another step in that direction. The member's also right. Our talent is the key to our future. So last week we announced, Mr. Speaker, that we're going to expand that talent pipeline. We're going to grow the number of stem students in this province from 40,000 to 50,000 graduates every year. And over the next five years, Mr. Speaker, we're going to increase the annual graduations to 1,000 applied -- In A.I.. Mr. Speaker, that's going to make a stronger. Keep growing. We're very proud of these investments, Mr. Speaker