

CO Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Tuesday, May 30, 2017

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Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Tuesday, May 30, 2017.

MCI did not receive a question of interest.

MIT did not receive a question of interest.

MSA did not receive any questions of interest.

The opposition today asked about hydro rates and advertising, affordable housing in Toronto, workers' rights, among other topics.

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

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From: Electronic Media
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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Tuesday, May 30, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown to Minister McMahon Re: Giant Rubber Duck Purchase

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of tourism, culture and sport. Was a giant rubber ducky really worth \$120,000 of hard-earned taxpayer dollars, yes or no?

>> Minister Eleanor McMahon: Speaker, thank you to the Honourable member for his question. I guess, Speaker, you know this really does point to the differences between that party's approach to investing in Ontarians and ours. Here's precisely what we're doing. And I want to use this opportunity to get some facts on the record, because I know facts don't matter over there, but on this side of the House they do, Mr. Speaker. So here we go. You know, Speaker, it's interesting that the party opposite is not taking an interest in investing in tourism. Here's what is important. Tourism in this province generates 30 billion a year in productivity. 4% of our G.D.P. 300,000 jobs. If that's not enough for the leader of the opposition here's what we're doing in his own riding, Speaker. A message I got from warden ferry. I'll use that in the supplementary because I look forward to speaking as to why these investments are important, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister. When I think of Canada, I think of compassion, unity, respect, families and responsibilities. I think of freedom of speech, worship and assembly. Mr. Speaker, I think of the rule of law. When I think of Canada, we think of hockey, poutine, maple syrup and our beautiful outdoors. What I don't think of, Mr. Speaker, are rubber ducks. Never have, never will. That's not part of Canada's -- Mr. Speaker, putting all the government Liberal spin aside, what does a rubber duck have to do with celebrating Canada's 150th birthday?

>> Minister McMahon: Thank you, Speaker. You know, the past three years our government has supported the Redpath waterfront festival. This year -- this year we're granting them \$121,000, Speaker.

It's an annual summer event that provides on-land and on-water programming. This grant has been enormously successful. Let's talk a little bit about what it's done, Speaker. In 2015, the festival enticed tourists to spend nearly \$6 million, Speaker. And I also want to point out that not only are we contributing to this but two other important groups r.number one the city of Toronto has given the festival a \$75,000 contribution, Speaker. That's also very important. But I want to quote something closer to home that the member opposite might appreciate. bring these four tall ships and we saw \$1 million in tourism spent. Bring it on.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister. The Minister says she cautions focusing too much on the duck. Well, of course she does. Because the Liberals are embarrassed. They're embarrassed they signed off on \$121,000 for a giant rubber duck. That doesn't promote tourism. They can hide behind all their lines but they know it's wrong. Mr. Speaker, there is -- They waste taxpayer dollars and then they come up with P.R. To explain why they wasted Ontario's precious taxpayer dollars. So my question is again, do the right thing. Just apologize for wasting \$121,000 on a rubber duck.

>> Minister McMahon: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, I can tell you soundly and clearly on this side of the House we will never apologize for investing in tourism and economic development. Ever. We will never do that. You know, Speaker, this is a -- this is a festival -- I spoke a moment ago in my original response about the \$6 million that it generated in Toronto. Here's a few other places that this touring festival would be going and I think the member opposite might find this interesting. Member from Owen Sound might find it interesting, because the travelling festival is going there. Sault Ste. Marie, Midland, interesting the leader of the opposition. Travelling festival is also going -- Jobs and economic development and by the way promote fun in the amherstburg and Brockville, Speaker.

MPP Brown to Minister Naqvi (Duguid) Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the government House leader. I'm going to quote the head of Ontario public service employees union, Mr. Smoky Thomas. He said -- and it's important the government actually listens to this. He said bill 132 is terrible, terrible legislation, and I urge you to stop it. Mr. Speaker, will the government do just that? Will they stop their \$93 billion unfair hydro scheme?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Well, Speaker, our objective on this side of the House is to cut hydro rates for hard working Ontarians, Speaker. And that is why our government and the leadership of our Premier is focused on cutting the hydro rates by 25%. Now of course, Speaker, from the opposite side, we have heard that they have had no plan whatsoever when it comes to energy. They kept talking about they're going to have a hydro plan. They're going to keep telling Ontarians somehow they will be able to magically cut hydro rates for Ontarians but we have seen no plan whatsoever. Speaker, what we have done through the fair hydro plan act is put forward a concrete plan by which hydro rates will be cut by 25%. And the only reasonable and sensible thing for the opposition to do. Is to support that plan, to support that legislation so that Ontarians can have the relief they deserve so much.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the government House leader. I know why the Liberals' favourite pastime is attacking the nonpartisan independent watchdogs are seen auditor general. She too has had an interesting comment I'd like to share. She said -- we would recommend the government reconsider this bill 132. Mr. Speaker, I'll give the government another chance to take the a.g.'s advice. We've got civil service workers saying this is a big problem. You've got the auditor general saying it's a big problem. Ontarians are concerned their buys are going to skyrocket because of this. Will you do the right thing? Take the a.g.'s advice and reconsider this unfair hydro scheme?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the leader of the opposition said something that I think was historic in this legislature. He actually made a policy declaration. What he said yesterday, Mr. Speaker, is I will not invest in energy infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, we've heard that line before and we saw the impact of not investing in energy infrastructure. My parents and Ernie Eves said exactly the same thing and, Mr. Speaker, they did exactly the same thing. They had no plan to invest in energy infrastructure and they left the energy system in a mess, Mr. Speaker. Not only do we have a clean and reliable energy -- Mr. Speaker, not only do we have a clean reliable energy system. We're moving now to make that system more affordable for everyday Ontarians by reducing costs by 25%. The leader the opposition won't support

that either.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the government House leader. The Minister 's right, I will not invest in bad Liberal contracts. It's not right. The people of Ontario are paying too much because of these bad contracts. The Liberals have benefitted too long and it's hurt the people. So let's hear another assessment on this unfair hydro scheme. Cupe's Fred Hann made interesting comments about bill 132. He said the following to this government -- I want you to know the people of Ontario will not be fooled. They were members in the long-term what you have done to mess up our look tristy future in the province of Ontario. The unfair hydro scheme will not fool anyone. Hydro rates are going to skyrocket. Every independent assessment says that very clearly. We can't afford our hydro bills. It's not right. Mr. Speaker, one more chance for the government House leader to come clean and say this is going to cause hydro rates to spike and we're going to stop it.

>> Minister Duguid: If the member really believed what he just said, he wouldn't have started out his question period talking about rubber ducks, Mr. Speaker. The fact is you want to talk about ducking, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about ducking questions on sex Ed. Let's talk about ducking questions on the carbon tax. Let's talk about ducking questions on the energy plan that we're still waiting to hear, Mr. Speaker. All he does is duck every time anybody asks him a question on the energy plan. Let's talk about ducking questions about your own caucus members. Let's talk about ducking questions, Mr. Speaker, about just about anything of substantive policy. Mr. Speaker, we're moving forward with a clean reliable energy plan that's going to ensure it's more affordable for everyday Ontarians. We're proud of that plan. No wonder you don't want Ontarians to know about it, Mr. Speaker. That might be bad policy for you. But it's good for the people of Ontario. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Horwath to Minister Sandals Re: Hydro Advertising

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the acting Premier. Last week it became clear just how far the Premier's willing to go to try to revive her personal and political fortunes. She's planning to force utility companies to deliver political inserts containing a message aimed at saving the Liberal party. Does the Premier believe that by forcing, by regulation, private companies to campaign on her behalf, does she believe, Speaker, that this is aboveboard and honest?

>> Minister Liz Sandals: Well, thank you, Speaker. I do need to start by reminding people that Canada is the only jurisdiction -- or Ontario is the only jurisdiction in Canada that actually has a law that outlaws partisan advertising. No other province in Canada has that. We are unique. And on anything that we publish, any advertising is compliant with that law. Now if you want to look at getting information -- If you want to look at information that's inserted in hydro bills, one of the exp Eriences I have in my constituency office -- and I'm sure lots of other folks do, too -- is that people don't understand their hydro bills. They call the local distributor. They call Hydro One. They call the constit office. They're trying to figure out their hydro bills. They want information in their hydro bill.

>> Andrea Horwath: The Premier is doing nothing more than looking out for her own best interests with these political inserts and everybody knows it. By forcing companies to carry these ads during election campaigns, during an election campaign, Speaker, she is playing sneaky political games and trying to manipulate the very election laws that we're talking about. Will this Premier and the Liberal party admit that mandating politically motivated, politically convenient inserts to be included in people's hydro bills during an election campaign is just too far to go even for the Liberals?

>> Minister Sandals: Another thing we've discovered in my constituency office is a lot of people who would qualify for the oesp, the Ontario electricity support program, don't know about it. Do you know, Speaker, what's in that partisan advertising, which are what she calls -- wants to call partisan advertising? It is information about the Ontario electricity support program. We actually think it's important that people all over Ontario get information about the Ontario electricity support program so that if they qualify, they can get more than 25% off their hydro bill. They can qualify for more money off if they are lower income, and we want people to know that because we want to help the people of Ontario.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the next election is just over a year away. That's the same time frame, coincidentally, that the Premier is mandating these political inserts appear in every House hold and every

business in our province. Does the Premier and the Liberal party really think that the people of this province don't see what they're doing?

>> Minister Sandals: I think that what the people of Ontario want to know is when they qualify for help. They want to know that if they're ever in a rural or remote part of Ontario that they can get extra help off their hydro bill, because we recognize that if you live in rural or northern Ontario, you need extra help. And you could qualify for up to 40 to 50% off your hydro bill. We think that people who are Ontario hydro consumers deserve to know that they should apply for the oesp. We don't think that's partisan. We think that's just giving people all over Ontario, the people -- the information that they need to reduce their hydro bills to the maximum. Because we have a fair hydro plan so that we can reduce rates all across this province.

MPP Horwath to Minister Matthews Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> NDP leader Andrea Horwath: This question's for the acting Premier, Speaker. But I think what people want to see is the government stop using precious public dollars to promote the Liberal party and Kathleen Wynne. That's what I think people want to see. Clearly the electricity companies who will be forced to deliver this politically motivated message on behalf of the Premier didn't think it was necessary, Speaker, or else they would have provided the information themselves on their own. Does the Premier know something that every electricity in the province -- somehow doesn't need to know or doesn't know? Is there something that they're aware of that every electricity company isn't aware of, Speaker ?

>> Minister Deb Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. I'm glad we're having the chance to talk about hydro prices today and I'm particularly disturbed to hear that yesterday it was announced that the NDP Will not support, in fact will repeal the bill that will bring hydro relief for people across this province. They announced yesterday that they will actually increase hydro prices, that they will take the 25% back, Speaker, that the 40% that many people in rural and northern Ontario, relief that they will get will be rescinded under the NDP They said the Ontario electricity support program that provides energy relief for the most vulnerable in this province will be repealed. Speaker, it's no surprise that the opposition is asking about our insert in an envelope because they are not prepared to talk about their plan. To repeal this whole bill.

>> Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. We replaced it with a plan that actually creates systemic change and bringing --S Hydro One back into public hands and creates savings for the long term for people of Ontario. It's really shocking actually. We announced this almost a month ago and the Minister just realized yesterday that this was the NDP's position? Shame on her. Look, when the Premier forces electricity companies, Speaker, to do something that they deem unnecessary, it's a political tactic, plainly and simple. That tactic is meant to harness the power of the office of the Premier for political gain. There is no way around that fact. And it's time the Premier takes responsibility for this manipulation. Will she revoke the regulation now and apologize to the people of Ontario for misusing the power of her office?

>> Minister Matthews: Speaker, let's be really clear. The MPP Wants to the cancel the decreases to hydro prices for the people of Ontario. That in my opinion is a shameful position for the third party to be taking. They claim they will replace it with something but they have no idea what they are going to replace it with, Speaker. But what we do know for sure that it will take away relief from the people of this province. And they will also take money from health and from education, because part of their plan is to buy back the shares in Hydro One, Speaker. Let's just be really clear. Anyone who is watching, anyone who is paying attention to this, the NDP Want to increase your hydro bill. They want to take away the support for the most vulnerable people. They want to take away the -- The delivery costs for on reserve first nations, Speaker, and now --

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I think you can get your bottom dollar that every person in Ontario is watching the mess the Liberals have made of our electricity system and what it's costing people today and for generations to come. The F.A.O., the financial accountability officer, an independent officer of this legislature, said that the Premier's \$45 billion hydro borrowing seme will cost Ontarians, will cost Ontario families and businesses more money and that it will actually drive bills up. Now that's not me as a partisan saying that. That's the financial accountability officer. There is no hiding the fact, Speaker. Even though it's conveniently excluded from the Premier's regulation forcing companies to promote her and her political

party. The Premier has decided to use her position, her office as Premier, to mandate that the Liberal party's politically motivated description of this scheme is delivered to Ontario doorsteps regularly now and throughout the next election.

>> Minister Matthews: You know, Speaker, for months in this House the third party came with examples of people who were really suffering with high electricity prices. Speaker, we heard those stories in our own ridings, too. We went to work. We rolled up our sleeves and we developed a plan that will provide immediate relief, 25% reduction electricity bills, Speaker, and more than that for people who are paying the highest rates. We have a plan. We've been very transparent about that plan. It's a plan that reduces electricity bills, and to think that the NDP Party will stand in their place day after day after day after day to complain about a problem and then when we develop a solution say no to that, Speaker, without coming up with their own is just not ok. We've got a plan.—it wil—

MPP Scott to Minister Naidoo-Harris (Naqvi) Re: Sexual Assault Prevention

MPP Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker . My question is for the Minister of the status of women. As we come to the end of sexual assault awareness month, we see the government paying lip service to sexual assault victims while ignoring victim service organizations like hope 24/7 a sexual assault centre in Peel that struggles to help its clients because of this government's mismanagement. Organizations tell me that the government's so-called review of the ineffective funding formula for victim services is taking place under a cloud of secrecy. The government refuses to commit to sharing the details of the review or even to consult affected organizations like hope 24-7. So my question is does the Minister think it's acceptable to exclude sexual assault centres, the real experts, from the conversation about the future of services for victims of sexual assault?

>>Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: I want to thank the member opposite for the question. I want to make sure that people understand that our government takes the job of supporting women and their children who have experienced domestic violence very seriously. Because violence against women is something that has a huge impact on families and on our communities and on our society. Essentially violence against women and the agencies provide crucial services in our province like emergency shelters, counselling, transition and housing supports to help women and children rebuild their lives. So Speaker, for women facing violence, a shelter is often the first step to rebuilding their personal and financial independence. Our government funds 96 emergency shelter agencies across Ontario that operate more than 2,000 beds a year. We've increased our investment in violence against women services by 61% since 2003.

>>MPP Scott: Well, Mr. Speaker, the truth is that this government has been stalling on this file for almost five years. In 2013 the auditor general reported that the government has made little or no progress in meeting the demand for victim services in our province, and here we are in 2017 and nothing has changed. They refuse to consult, they refuse to act and they're continuing to hide behind band-aid solutions and decade old funding formulas. Meanwhile victim services and survivors are suffering. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister, what does this review actually entail and when can we finally expect to hear the results?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. And let's put some facts on the table on this very important issue, Speaker. First of all we obviously appreciate the work that hope 24-7 does and we have provided them funding for over 20 years now. Since 2003, Speaker, our funding for all sexual assault centre programs have increased by 45%. In 2015, Speaker, we increased hope 24-7's budget by over \$31,000 as part of our "It's never ok" action plan to increase funding to all sexual assault centres by 7%. By that, Speaker, hope 24/7 currently receives almost \$500,000, that's half a million dollars sixth funding highest allocation in Ontario. We are committed to reviewing counselling services and we ask hope 24-7 to be part of this conversation. Working group of sexual assault centres currently reviewing the program and I hope. To report the findings of that review.

MPP Forster to Minister Matthews Re: Employee Rights

MPP Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. After 14 years of Liberal

government inaction, hard working Ontarians wanted real change now. Like the one in ten in this province who struggle on minimum wage, like the majority of new job holders who struggle to make part time -- like the majority of women who actually are juggling multiple jobs, which is increased by 20% under the Liberal watch. Union jobs are good jobs and new Democrats believe that it should be easier for workers to join a union, not harder. Will the acting Premier commit to implement card-based union certification and first contract arbitration for all workers in Ontario who wish to join a union? And if not, why not?

>>Minister Deb Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. I thank the member opposite for the question. The reality is that our economy in Ontario is growing. It's the leading jurisdiction in the country. Our growth is strong, Speaker. But not everyone is sharing in that growth. It's become very clear that in this new economy there are those who are doing very, very well and others who are struggling just to prevent themselves from falling back, which is exactly why we are introducing the changing workplaces legislation, Speaker. We are very proud of the work that has been done and the action that we are taking that the Premier has announced today with the Minister of labour, Speaker. So we will be hiking the minimum wage, Speaker. We will be assuring that part-time workers are paid the same as full-time workers, Speaker. We're introducing paid sick days for every worker. We're setting up enforcement of employment laws. This is a very big day in the province, Speaker and I look forward to the MPP S supporting these changes.

>>MPP Forster: Well, Speaker, if you're a bay street trader or the head of a big bank in Ontario, you've a lot to cheer about over the last 14 years. But if you're one of the hard working little people, to quote the lib Minister this morning, you've earned your disillusionment. The Premier gave a campaign speech this morning but millions of part-time temporary and multiple job holders are still struggling to support their families. Three weeks' vacation is a bit of a stretch after five years. It's one of those Liberal stretch goals. Impact for many, many Ontarians who may not have a job after five years with the same employer. Will the acting Premier guarantee that in fact there are paid sick days for all Ontario workers under this plan that was announced today and that in fact every Ontarian worker will get that three weeks of vacation?

>>Minister Matthews: Speaker, we have -- we really have been paying attention, Speaker, to all of the people in this province, including most particularly those who are struggling the most. So there has been a lot of good news recently on that front, Speaker. Free tuition for one third of our postsecondary students and better than free tuition for many. Ohip plus. Free drugs for children, Speaker. These are big initiatives that we are very happy to champion. And today's announcement builds on that, Speaker, because we are absolutely determined to make sure that we live in a society, that we build a society where every person has the opportunity to achieve their full potential, to contribute to and participate in. A wonderful life in Ontario. We need to do better, Speaker. This legislation takes us a big step in that direction.

MPP Martins to Minister Naqvi Re: Abortion Safety Zones

MPP Christina Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question this morning is to the Attorney General. Yesterday I was very pleased to see the A.G. Defending the principle that every woman in this province has the fundamental right to make her own decisions about her health care. I am certain that every member in this legislature would also agree that women have the fundamental right to access health care without fear for her safety, privacy or dignity. I speak for my constituents when I say that I was terribly disheartened to hear of the acts of the harassment and intimidation directed at Ottawa women exercising the right to choose. Speaker, that kind of hatred, aggression toward women is absolutely unacceptable. That is why I was very pleased to hear the government intend to introduce legislation that would create safe access Zones outside abortion clinics and ensure women across Ontario have safe access to health care services. Can the Attorney General inform this House about the government's planned legislation to be introduced this fall?

>>Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I really want to thank the member for asking a very important question. Speaker, this is an important issue to me both as a citizen of 09 wa and as a person who has always been a strong believer in a woman's fundamental right to choose. Speaker, it is also my steadfast belief that every woman in Ontario has the right to make decisions about our own health care, and she deserves to do so freely, without fear. Without fear for her safety, privacy or dignity. Without fear of being judged or publicly humiliated because of her choice. Speaker, without fear of being

threatened with violence, harassment or any form of intimidation. Speaker, no woman should have to take such things into account when making her own health care decision and that is why, Speaker, this fall our government will introduce legislation that will propose to create safe access Zones around specified health care facilities to protect the safety and security of patients, staff and visitors.

>>Minister Martins: Thank you, Speaker. And I would like to thank the Attorney General for his response. I know many people across this province would agree that this is an important issue that touches every woman and goes beyond economics, cultural or geographic differences. All women across this province have fought and laboured hard throughout the years to build up this country and province we can now call home. A woman's fundamental right to choose is one that should be enshrined and protected under the law. In fact I understand that Newfoundland and Labrador and British Columbia are among the few jurisdictions that have legislated safe access Zones to ensure protection of health care centres and women. I believe that our government will introduce strong protections that guarantee much needed protections for health care centres across the province. My hope is that the members opposite -- Will report the government's actions to ensure women in Ontario can continue to exercise their fundamental right. Can the Attorney General inform this House on our government's next step?

>>Minister Naqvi: Speaker, thank you very much. The member is correct. British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador and province of Québec have implemented similar laws in their provinces over the past decade. Speaker, these laws provide for protection to all women and health care providers in those jurisdictions. Over the summer months, Speaker, my ministry and I will continue to look at laws passed in other jurisdictions and we will consult with legal and health care experts, advocacy groups and local clinics to determine the details of the proposed legislation. Speaker, we have a lot of work ahead of us on this very important issue over the next few months and I believe that policies like this are more important than ever. Speaker, I commend and salute all champions of women in this House. I know that they all believe that this is not a partisan issue. Speaker, I know that they all believe that women have a right to choose. To make decisions about her own health care, and I'm confident, Speaker, and I hope that all members will support this very important legislation when it's tabled in the fall.

MPP Martow to Minister Coteau Re: Autism Support Funding

MPP Gila Martow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of children and youth services. Autism is widely considered the fastest growing neurological disorder in Canada. It now impacts an estimated one out of 58 children. Individuals with autism and their families face unique challenges over their life span, often leading to families in crisis situations, and that is why today in the federal House of commons there will be a vote to increase support for families and children with autism. Mr. Speaker, have the government members been calling on their cousins in Ottawa to support the Canadian autism partnership?

>>Minister Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for the question. As the member knows, we have a new autism program here in the province of Ontario that will begin implementation in June of this year. So that's in a few days from now. And we will help full implementation of the program in 2018. And, Mr. Speaker, this plan is going to create 16,000 new spaces here in Ontario over five years and increase the amount of spaces for A.B.A. During the transition period. And it's going to ensure that we have a six-month or less wait list. We're also going to increase diagnosis. We've opened up five new treatment centres and we're going to make sure that if a young person here in the province of Ontario needs any type of Autism treatment, regardless of age, they will get the treatment that they deserve.

>>MPP Martow: Mr. Speaker, provincial plans are wonderful but we need to support the federal plans for autism as well. Mr. Speaker, this motion is simple. It calls on the federal government to grant \$19 million of -- This motion is simple. The motion is simple. It calls on the federal government to grant \$19 medical I don't know over five years, as requested by the Canadian autism partnership working group, self advocates advisory group and the Canadian autism spectrum disorders alliance, in order to establish a Canadian autism partnership. It would go a long way to support families and it would address key issues

such as information sharing and research, early detection, diagnosis and treatment. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister personally make a phone call to Ottawa? Why not call one of your Liberal friends and guarantee Liberal support of this important motion?

>>Minister Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There seems to be a difference of opinion between the caucus and their leader. And I'll tell you why, Mr. Speaker. Because the leader of the opposition, the leader of the official opposition, when he was in Ottawa I believe for his nine-year period, had an opportunity to stand up and advocate for a national program. There was an actual vote that was presented in the House of commons to create a national autism program. And maybe the member doesn't know his - her leader's record on this issue, but he voted against that. Instead of picking up the phone, maybe she can walk two or three rows up and talk to her leader about his record when it comes to a national -- Here in the province of Ontario.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Ballard Re: Toronto Housing

MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. My question to the acting Premier. Nearly 20 years ago, the Conservatives downloaded responsibility for social housing to the municipality. They had no way to pay for it. This action created a permanent crisis for affordable housing, most acutely in Toronto. Instead of fixing this crisis, the Premier made things worse by cutting \$129 million per year in annual funding for Toronto's housing program. Half of Toronto community housing homes will reach quote-unquote critical status within five years due to a lack of funding for capital repairs. The NDP has repeatedly urged the province to fund one third of those capital repair costs. Will the Premier do that and undo at least part of the damage -- Her cuts have caused?

>>Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. You know, Speaker, every Ontarian deserves to have an affordable and safe place to call home. We know that people's lives are better when they do. And that's why, Speaker, that's why, Speaker, this government has invested \$1.4 billion in the city of Toronto for affordable and sustainable housing. That's \$1.4 billion, Speaker. And we're continuing to build on these investments. You know, Speaker, over the next five years we're investing an additional \$173 million in social housing repairs and retrofits in the city of Toronto. Things like \$43 million for repairs and retrofits to social housing. Another 130 million in additional funding for social housing repairs in Toronto over the next 40 years. So, Speaker, this government gets how important -- This housing is to residents of the city of Toronto. We're on it.

>>MPP Tabuns: Speaker, again to the acting Premier. By 2019, Toronto city staff estimate that provincial funding for Toronto's housing programs will have been cut by nearly 60 per cent from 2011. This Premier is responsible for most of these cuts. The Premier's cuts mean that the thousands of Toronto families risk losing their homes due to disrepair. No other government in Canada or the developed world ignores its social responsibility to fund social housing programs the way this Premier has. Will the Premier stop, reverse her funding cuts and fund the province's fair one third share of TC's capital repair costs?

>>Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. You know, I enjoy this opportunity to get up and talk about the importance of social housing, affordable housing in the city of Toronto and to reiterate time and again the significant massive investments that the province has made in the city of Toronto. I'll just name the high level one again, Speaker. \$1.4 billion. That's not anyone walking away from their responsibility in the city of Toronto. Speaker, I welcome Toronto council's 10-year commitment of about \$200 million in funding and tax exemptions. That's good to go towards it. It's also good to have the federal government at the table, you know, through the national housing strategy. They'll be allocating \$11 billion over 11 years across 13 provinces and territories. But what we've done, Speaker, is we continue to invest. In fact we've just announced \$100 million in land in the city of Toronto.

MPP Colle to Minister Leal Re: Local Food Week

MPP Mike Colle: I've got a question for the Minister of agriculture and rural affairs. I know, Minister, how excited you are, because our farmers are back in the fields for the growing season. And very soon we will

be celebrating local food week whereby we can pay tribute to our \$36 billion agriculture economy, which supports 800,000 jobs in this province. So on June the 5th or 11th, we're going to be celebrating our wonderful locally grown safe, reliable, tasty and affordable Ontario local food. What are you going to do to celebrate, Mr. Minister ?

>>Minister Jeff Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the member from Eglinton- Lawrence who's a champion for local food. Local food week is a nice opportunity to highlight the great work our partners are doing to promote local food for Ontarians. We have the great fund which is providing \$3.8 million to support 77 local food probably equities. I also want to highlight the work of the dietitians of Canada, the Ontario food and vegetable growers association, fresh on the farm. The only school fund-raising Ontario grow fruits and vegetables. Starting this October schools can apply. Of course the culinary terms of alliance which has been deliver ago feast on program to encourage restaurants to support locally sourced ingredients, beer and wine. Local champions happy to bring farmers and consumers together so they can help us enjoy the good things that are grown in Ontario.

>>MPP Colle: As you know, Minister, this afternoon Ontario beef farmers are going to be having a barbecue on the front lawn and they're going to be featuring succulent Ontario locally grown beef. I get tired of people who say, well, I'm going to go get some Alberta beef or Texas beef. Why don't more people ask for Ontario beef when they go to restaurants? Forget that expensive imported foreign beef. Forget that expensive foreign cauliflower. Buy local. Eat local. Shop local. Save local.

>>Minister Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the supplementary from my good friend the member from Eglinton-lawrence. Yes, today is the beef farmers of Ontario annual barbecue. I encourage all members and their staff to get out to enjoy it. Ontario has the most culturally diverse population in Canada for more than 200 countries and more than 200 foods grown in the province Ontarians can already bring home the world by shopping at their local farmers' market or finding the foodland Ontario logo. We'll be working to get the word out this summer about the tremendous opportunity of the world food spring. With this in mind, foodland Ontario is partnering with the culinary alliance of Canada for a wonderful pop-up clinic at the yonge- Dundas square this Thursday, June 1st. I suggest everybody take the opportunity to go there. This event will feature feast on centre restaurants who are partnering with Ontario farmers. To showcase the diversity recipe that can be made with Ontario foods. I invite you all to this picnic and come home for the taste Ontario advantage, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Miller to Minister Mauro Re: Northern Development

MPP Paul Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of northern development and mines. Speaker, in 2011, this government announced the growth plan for northern Ontario, promising to create a stronger, more diverse and sustainable northern economy. Northern Ontario has lost 5,000 full-time jobs and more than 6,000 part-time jobs between 2011 and 2016. During the same time, the value of building permits issued in northern Ontario has declined by 25%. The Minister 's own quote in the 2011 news release was that this plan would, quote, help ensure the development of northern communities as places where people will want to live, work and play for future generations, close quote. But after the first five years of this plan, there are 10,000 fewer adults living in northern Ontario. Speaker, based on those statistics, how would the Minister characterize the success of the government's growth plan for northern Ontario?

>>Minister Bill Mauro: Speaker, thank you. I want to thank the member for the question. I think it is fair to characterize and say that northern communities and rural communities, just like all communities that are small and rural right across Canada, and I would say right across North America, are facing a unique set of circumstances and challenges. It is not only in Ontario where small northern and rural communities are facing these challenges, Speaker. They exist in all jurisdictionss. I would say certainly in Canada. It's been a consistent problem, Speaker. But I would say absolutely. I would say unequivocally that our government since being elected in 2003 has provided support to northern and rural communities across a broad range of policy investments, Speaker, that I can speak to more in the supplemental. The member knows that. He would suggest and stand in his place and try and say these problems just occurred. Has been some population reduction, Speaker, but I would say the situation in northern communities would have been much greater had it not been for the investments that we've been making since forming government some

years ago.

>>MPP Miller: Mr. Speaker, the challenges he's talking about are the ones his government has created. And I recognize this is a 25-year plan, but we're five years and so far it's a dismal failure. The population of northern Ontario is declining. Employment is declining. Less is being built. Businesses like great Lakes graphite are leaving. One of the promises of the growth plan for northern Ontario was this to quote -- immediately develop a long-term strategy to create a more integrated transportation infrastructure system for air, rail, road and water, close quote. Speaker, that promise was made six years ago. And the most recent document is still a discussion paper. Where's the strategy and when will we see shovels in the ground on new roads, new rail lines, new shipping docks or new air strips?

>> Speaker, by way of example, one of the investments we've been making in northern Ontario for quite some time now is to reverse a decision that was made by the Conservative party when they were in government is well and had been started by the NDP. And that is providing support for forestry companies in northern Ontario to a forestry roads access program. Since bringing this project back into investment in the province of Ontario since 2005, we've invested about \$700 million in primary and secondary forestry roads in the province of Ontario to support forestry companies primarily a northern-based operation. As well, Speaker, since coming into government we are investing now somewhere between five and \$6 hundred million annually through a northern highways program. Speaker, when they were in government for all eight years from '95 to 2003, the high water mark for northern highway was two to 250 million in any one given year. We're going to be doing 650 million this year. Speaker, that's only one more example of the main or investments that we've been making in northern Ontario since forming government some time ago.

MPP Horwath to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Funding

NDP leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the acting Premier. Health care should be there when you need it. But cuts and underfunding by both Liberals and Conservatives have pushed the -- the Sault area hospital to the brink. It's now the second most overcrowded hospital in the entire -- Now the second most overcrowded hospital in the entire province. Experts tell us that occupancy rates over 85% put patients at risk but the Sault area hospital has been forced to run at an average occupancy of 106% for the past five years. And instead of fixing the problem, the Premier's budget short changes Ontario's hospitals by over \$300 million. Why is this government forcing people and seniors in Sault Ste. Marie to pay the price for Liberal cuts?

>>Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to admit that I'm absolutely mystified at this question. Well, that's really classy, some of the comments that we're hearing. Mr. Speaker, the reality is, with the Sault hospital, both the leader of the third party and the official opposition went specifically to the Sault area to criticize the fact that the government is providing a 5% increase to the operating costs -- Of that hospital this fiscal year. So on the one hand, Mr. Speaker, consistently the third party has said we need to invest more in our hospitals. And as they go out of their way during a by-election, I might add, to the Sault hospital and the leader of the third party was critical of the fact that -- and suspicious of the fact. That somehow a% increase to the budget of that hospital of over \$6 million I don't know, I should add, is unnecessary or inappropriate, I fundamentally disagree.

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, there have been nine years of cuts and frozen budgets by this Liberal government, and that's something that this health Minister and the ones prior to him need to Fess up to. But the people in Sault Ste. Marie know exactly what's happening to health care. Both are waiting longer than ever. Admitted patients are waiting up to 53 hours in the emergency room to get a proper bed. People who need a C.T. Scan are waiting three times longer than the provincial target. And the Sault area hospital is so overcrowded they've actually stopped using their code for gridlock. It's now meaningless because they were using their gridlock code every single day. When will this government stop making excuses and actually repair the damage they've done to hospitals in Sault Ste. Marie and right across the whole province, Minister ? Across the whole province.

>> Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I -- I am almost without words. Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the leader of the third party wants. Does she not want us to provide \$6.6 million more dollars to the Sault hospital and increase this year alone of 5%, Mr. Speaker ? Or does she? And simy her party has advocated for more funding, but it con found me that they also voted against -- confound me that they also voted against the budget that provides -- the budget of the two hospitals. They voted against the budget that provides over half a billion dollars more to the operating costs of budgets across this province. They voted against a budget that -- Has an additional \$9 billion in capital infrastructure. I don't understand where the party -- where their policy is, Mr. Speaker. But I know where we stand.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister MacCharles Re: Access for Persons with Disabilities

MPP Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister responsible for accessibility. Mr. Speaker, this is national access awareness week here in Ontario. It's an important week which celebrates people with disabilities and raises awareness about supporting access in all our communities. It's a week that puts a spotlight on the cultural shifts we are exp Eriencing, one where all people can participate equally in our society. We've come a long way to make our province more inclusive and we are working hard to reach our goal of an accessible Ontario by 2025. Mr. Speaker, could the Minister tell us more about the national access awareness week and provide an update on some of the great work that we are doing to make Ontario accessible?

>>Minister Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. And I want to thank the member from Barrie for this very important question and being national access awareness week makes the question all the more important. Because this week is of course the chance to show what we've done and focus what we can do, Speaker, to empower businesses, enlighten communities and embrace inclusion. Our government is committed to breaking down Barriers and raising the profile of accessibility. We know, Speaker, of course accessibility is far more than just building ramps. It's about the small things you don't see, like getting everyone to the places they need to be on time and comfortably, and accessible transit or making sure we provide information that meets everyone's needs. It's about connecting people with disabilities to the labour market and engaging and supporting businesses. And employers. I'll speak more to our government's recent developments and how people can get involved when I speak in supplementary.

>>Minister Hoggarth: Thank you for the Minister for her answer. National access awareness week helps raise awareness and continues to promote a cultural shift. We need communities, businesses and individuals all across Ontario to understand that inclusion is important for building a strong society and developing a dynamic economy. The Martin prosperity institute report outlines that an inclusive Ontario would result in a \$7.9 billion increase to the G.D.P., and more than \$150 billion is lost in tax revenue annually due to the limited inclusion of persons with disabilities in the work force. The message is clear, Mr. Speaker. Increasing accessibility and fostering inclusions is worth it. That is why it encourages many individuals, organizations and communities. To get involved. Speaker, could the Minister explain how our government is working hard to promote inclusion and increase accessibility in Ontario?

>>Minister MacCharles: Again thanks to the member from Barrie for the question. Speaker, under the accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities act, we've created a number of standard development committees, which are either reviewing current standards or establishing new ones. So we have ones in areas such as information communication. We have a review in the employment standard and, Speaker, I'll be speaking more about the employment strategy for persons with disabilities in the coming days. And, Speaker, we are currently developing Ontario's first accessible health care standard, and last year the Premier announced we'll also be working on an accessible education standard. And we recently launched a survey, Speaker. Of the education standard and it invites people to get involved in that practice. I would like to encourage everyone to be part of national access awareness week.

MPP Walker to Minister Thibeault Re: Small Business Hydro Fee

MPP Bill Walker: Mr. Speaker, my question's to the Deputy Premier. Peter dipple and Gail and rob Fullerton run independent grocery stores in Bruce- Grey Owen Sound. They and other small businesses are urt hurting under this Liberal government's failed energy plan. Electricity costs skyrocket waste and incompetence. On February 23 your Premier ensured the House and I quote small business grocers would

receive the 8% rebate as part of your fair hydro act announcement. Sadly it turns out this was a pure Liberal electioneering. I want to know through you, Mr. Speaker, is it fair to break a promise Deputy Premier? Is it fair to exclude small-town family grocers the Premier's supposed fair relief scheme?

>>Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleased to be able to stand here and talk about the fair hydro plan, which is going to be reducing bills by 25% for small businesses and farms and every residence right across this province, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to grocery stores, Mr. Speaker, we have the save on energy program and the save on energy program specifically targets and works with grocery stores. We have loblaws come to Sudbury, Mr. Speaker, to make an announcement that their large stores and their small stores, Mr. Speaker, are actually saving up to 22% on their bills if they participate in the save on energy program. And so what loblaws is doing is working with all of their local retailers, their franchisees to make sure, Mr. Speaker, that they take part in this program. Because it's this program that this government has brought forward on top of the fair hydro plan that is going to continue to help small businesses right across the province.

>>MPP Walker: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the -- maybe, Minister you should come to Bruce- Grey Owen Sound and talk to independent growers -- grocers and get a real taste of life. Integral part of small communities across Ontario. We want and need them to stay in rural Ontario. Like 60% of rural Ontario they're independent small businesses and finding it harder and harder to stay in business. Unlike your ideology they can't turn freezers and fridges off overnight to qualify for the 8% rebate your government promised them. Is it fair to arbitrarily exclude small-town family grocers from relief caused by your mismanagement and your ideology?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I was in Bruce and Owen Sound area, Mr. Speaker, and I did talk to small business owners, they all recognized that this fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, is going to help them. And also Francesca Dobbyn the executive director of the United Way is applauding this plan. Maybe he should talk to his own people and see what they think about this plan. Mr. Speaker, when we're talking about plans, I find it very interesting that a question comes from a party that doesn't have an approach to energy. Doesn't have an approach on how to lower energy bills for families. Doesn't have an approach on how it's going to lower bills for small business. Nothing for farms. Nothing for long-term care homes. Nothing for greenhouses, Mr. Speaker. We've acted. We've heard. We've listened. We've helped greenhouses now remote customers, conservation programs that will continue to help others, Mr. Speaker. The list is endless. That's what happens when you have a plan. We have a plan, Mr. Speaker. They don't. We're --