

CO Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Wednesday, October 18, 2017

From: "Herman, Alan (MCI)" <alan.herman@ontario.ca>
To: "@MCI-L-Comm-MCI Top Issues" <mci-l-comm-mcitopissues@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "@MCI-L-Comm-MCI-MO Top Issues" <mci.l.comm.mci.mo.top.issues@ontario.ca>, "@MCI-L-Comm-OSS Top Issues" <mci.l.comm.osstopissues@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "@MCI-L-Comm-OSS-MO Top Issues" <mci.l.comm.oss.motopissues@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "@MCI-L-Communications" <allcomm@msgov.gov.on.ca>
Date: Wed, 18 Oct 2017 12:29:33 -0400
Attachments: 20171018 - Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript.doc (117.25 kB)

Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Wednesday, October 18, 2017.

MCI did not receive any questions of interest.

MSA receive a question of interest from MPP Lou Rinaldi who asked about the sprinklers retrofit program for retirement homes. In her response, Min. Dipika Damerla's mentioned the government's investment of \$20-million into the program.

Opposition party questions were largely about the government's hydro rates reduction plan. The Progressive Conservatives also asked about the horse-racing industry. As well, the NDP also asked about dental care access and air quality in the Sarnia region.

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

From: Stinson, Jeffrey (CAB)
Sent: October 18, 2017 12:15 PM
To: @CAB-ProvLegQP
Subject: Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Wednesday, October 18, 2017

Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Wednesday, October 18, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

Table of Contents

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Thibeault)
Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Sandals)
Re: Hydro-Rate Reduction Plan

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Thibeault)
Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Sandals)

Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault
Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault
Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

MPP McMeekin to Minister Milczyn
Re: Community Poverty Reduction Plan

MPP MacLeod to Minister Sandals
Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

MPP Gelinas to Minister Hoskins
Re: Dental Care

MPP Des Rosiers to Minister Hoskins
Re: Access to Healthcare

MPP Pettapiece to Minister Hoskins
Re: Horseracing Industry

MPP Fife to Minister Ballard
Re: Chemical Valley Air Quality

MPP Rinaldi to Minister Damerla
Re: Long-Term Care Homes

MPP Fedeli to Minister Thibeault
Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. First of all I just want to say, on behalf of the Ontario P.C. Caucus, our deepest condolences for the loss of Gord Downie, to his family, his friends and his fans. He will be missed in Ontario and in Canada. Mr. Speaker, the auditor general's report was a scathing indictment of Liberal political corruption and their contempt for the people of Ontario. She said the scheme -- Withdraw. She said the scheme was needlessly complex that the government is improperly accounting for billions of dollars, that Ontario will be paying \$4 billion more than necessary. This is an egregious abuse of power, and someone must be held accountable. Mr. Speaker -- Who will this Premier hold responsible? Which Minister is she going to hold responsible?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to answer this question but I also want to extend my deepest condolences to the family, to the friends and all of the fans of Gord Downie, Mr. Speaker, across in the country. Gord lived every single day of his life with grace and resilience. His music was a quintessential part of being Canadian, Mr. Speaker, and I know that there are millions, literally millions of Canadians who are in mourning today, and I want to just say that he will be greatly missed by all of us. Mr. Speaker, families in this province, in Ontario asked for real and immediate relief on their electricity bills because, Mr. Speaker, there had been billions of dollars of investment in --Mr. Speaker, in 2003 the electricity system. built up, Mr. Speaker. We made those investments, and our fair hydro plan --

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The question was who will the Premier hold responsible? The auditor general's report is very clear. We're going to waste \$4 billion because the method this government chose. \$4 billion that families are going to have to bear the cost of, because

of the calculations that this government made --

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question once again, given that we're going to see \$4 billion wasted, given the auditor general saying the government's making up their own rules, which Minister is the Premier going to hold responsible? Who is she going to fire?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I'll just finish what I was saying which is that the fair hydro plan is delivering that relief, Mr. Speaker, an average of 25% rate cuts to residential ratepayers and a guarantee, Mr. Speaker, that electricity rates will not rise -- Electricity rates will not rise beyond the rate of inflation for four years. We've been clear from the start, Mr. Speaker, that our plan does smoothing out of the costs over a period of time and that there is a cost associated with that. We've been very clear about that but we've also been clear that the fair hydro plan -- Get that relief immediately, Mr. Speaker, and it smooths out those costs and keeps the costs within the rate base.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. One newspaper read -- hiding billions of dollars the Ontario government is borrowing to lower electricity bills for a few years will cost hydro users an extra \$4 billion. This is what it's about. It's about an additional \$4 billion that families are going to have to pay. The newspaper article continued -- the government, citizens, auditors and giant institutions that lend the province money are pretty much operating in a post-truth universe where what the Liberals say is going on with Ontario's finances have begun to drift from any previously understood shared reality. It's the Liberals' world and we are just living in it. A world where they can spend \$4 billion for an unfair hydro plan that is nothing more than a self-interested election ploy. So, Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. Nowhere else in Canada would making up your own rules be acceptable. Nowhere else in Canada would blowing \$4 billion be acceptable.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: So I know, Mr. Speaker, families in this province as the Premier said really asked for real and immediate relief on their electricity bills and that's what we delivered, Mr. Speaker. We made a policy choice, Mr. Speaker, a policy choice to ensure that we continue to have a clean, reliable and affordable electricity system for ratepayers of today and the ratepayers of tomorrow. The fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, keeps the cost of borrowing within the rate base, not the tax base, because that's the logical thing to do, Mr. Speaker. Electricity financing should remain within the electricity system. While the auditor general is welcome to her opinion, Mr. Speaker, our plan has been approved by her peers as some of -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our plan has been approved by her peers at some of Canada's top accounting firms, including Ernst and young, KPMG and deloitte. In the development of the fair hydro plan, we also consulted with numerous third-party advisors in the application of -- IESO's management, IESO's audit committee. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Even the office of the provincial controller all support this accounting treatment, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Sandals) Re: Hydro-Rate Reduction Plan

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Speaker, again to the Premier. I can't believe she can sit here and accept an attitude by the Minister of energy that is so condescending to an officer of the legislature. It's shameful, Mr. Speaker. This is an independent officer of the legislature and frankly the auditor general know a lot more about the accounting rules than the Minister of energy. Frankly knows a lot more about energy than the Minister of energy. The reality is this is all about politics. This is all about partisan self-interest. Mr. Speaker -- Mr. Speaker, this is about politics over people. \$4 billion wasted and they're trying to spin their way out of it. Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. Given the fact you've got a Minister who has been caught deliberately hiding the facts the government's making up their own rules. You've wasted -- Withdraw. What am I withdrawing? Mr. Speaker, my question for the Premier, you've got instance where the government according to the auditor general is making up their own accounting rules. \$4 billion is being lost. Will the Premier do the right thing and fire her Minister

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as the leader of the

opposition knows, we adhere to Canadian public service accounting standards, work closely with experts from KPMG, from deloitte, from Ernst and young, Mr. Speaker. And the reality --Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as government we have to solve problems in this province. We have to find practical solutions to problems. The first problem that we had to solve, Mr. Speaker, was a degraded electricity system, a system that was not reliable, Mr. Speaker, and was not clean. The second problem that we had to solve, Mr. Speaker, was that the cost of investing in that system to make it clean and reliable had a cost that was burdening residents and ratepayers across this province. That's the problem that we had to solve, Mr. Speaker. People needed rate relieve and -- rate relief and we've delivered that, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. This government created this mess. They're about solving problems? They created the problem. This is their legacy. They're the ones that put Ontario in this hydro mels. And I know they're trying to put a spin that this is not as bad as it appears, the \$4 billion is not as bad as it appears. But it is. Mr. Speaker, just listen to what the auditor general had to say. She said the scheme would be unacceptable in the private sector and we maintain that it is also unacceptable in the public sector. She continued if the consolidated financial statements are so unreliable that an adverse opinion is warranted terms like balanced budget, deficit asset and net debt will be meaningless under this government. The reality is they fudged the numbers. The numbers are an absolute --Withdraw. The numbers do not add up. The numbers are an absolute scam. So, Mr. Speaker, how can the Premier defend her Minister of finance? She's here -- Minister of energy. How can you stand in the House and defend the Minister of finance when the numbers are not believed by anyone?

>> Minister Sandals: Yes. Thank you very much. Speaker, our government, our Cabinet made a very simple decision. When we listen to the people, when we listen to the people of Ontario who asked to have their hydro bills lowered, we decided that social programs should go on the tax base and that electricity should go on the rate base. Now the leader opposite is saying that somehow we made up the accounting rules --Rate regulated accounting is the norm in the electricity sector. The Ontario O.T. G. Using rate regulated accounting. It has been approved by this and other auditors and continues to be. Hydro One uses rate regulated accounting. It has- Hydro One's rate regulated accounting has been approved by this and all the other auditors general.

>> Patrick Brown: Page 8 of the report reads I quote, the government's ongoing spending on private sector external advisors had exceeded \$2 million when we completed this special report. The president of the treasury board pulls the purse strings, and yet she allowed the government to spend millions on lawyers and consultants it try to hide the true state of the books. Mr. Speaker, that's not right. It's unacceptable. It's shameful and it's disturbing. Mr. Speaker, can the Premier tell us if the president of the treasury board still has her confidence when clearly it's not the opposition saying you made up the rules. It's the auditor general. How can the Premier still have confidence in her treasury board? It's shameful, Mr. Speaker .

>> Minister Sandals: So let's continue to talk about the rules. The Ontario power authority, when it existed, used --Ontario power authority when it existed used rate regulated accounting which was approved by this and others auditors general. When O.P.A. Was consolidated into ieso, iso decided it should use rate regulated accounting for that part of the business which came from O.P.A.. It received a clean audit from their auditors. Now, let me tell you about other -- other organizations like the ieso in north America. The equivalent organization, Alberta, new York, Michigan, Texas, midwest, eastern seaboard and new England have equivalent to ieso. They all use --

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I'm also going to take the opportunity on behalf of new Democrats to extend our condolences to the friend, family, family, band mates, fans of the iconic Gord Downie. He and his band the tragically hip were inspirational artists of Canada and they gave us a goodbye and long tour that I think will always live in all of our hearts. My question's for the

Premier, Speaker. Yesterday the auditor general told Ontarians exactly how bad the Premier's \$40 billion hydro borrowing scheme really is. So bad that the Premier's putting an extra \$4 billion on people's hydro bills just to cover it up. Once again it's the Premier putting herself and her party first and the people of Ontario last. Why did the Premier sign off on a scheme that will cost Ontario families an extra \$4 billion?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me just say again that what the fair hydro plan does is put the people of Ontario first, Mr. Speaker. The people of Ontario said to us, because of the costs that had been incurred, because we had to invest in an electricity system that was degraded, Mr. Speaker, over years, that their electricity costs were going up too high and they were going up too fast. Mr. Speaker, the leader of the third party was hearing those same voices and she brought those voices to the legislature just as I did, Mr. Speaker. And so we acted. We put in place a reduction, Mr. Speaker, keeping that reduction on the rate base, Mr. Speaker, understanding that people needed immediate relief and that's exactly what we have done, Mr. Speaker. We also were very clear that the smoothing out of costs over time would have a cost associated with it. We were very, very clear about that, Mr. Speaker, but the -- Motivation for us, Mr. Speaker, in the first instance was to respond to people who needed to see rate relief and they need today see it immediately.

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, Ontario families and businesses know that they're paying far too much for hydro. They see it every month when they open their electricity bills. The Premier's solution, Speaker, is to implement a plan that will actually end up costing Ontarians more in the long run, and then use public money to hide the damage that she is doing. Why is the Premier putting her party's ambitions ahead of the well-being of Ontario families yet again?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is important again to reiterate. Families in this province, 500,000 small businesses and farms are seeing real relief and immediate relief, Mr. Speaker, thanks to the fair hydro plan, which was, Mr. Speaker, a policy decision. A policy decision that we made, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we continue to have a clean, reliable and affordable system of electricity here in the province that is there for the ratepayers of today and for the ratepayers of tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. The fair hydro plan keeps the cost of borrowing within the rate base, not the tax base meaning electricity financing actually remains within the electricity system, Mr. Speaker. It is important to see that we keep that cost within that rate base. Because for example, Mr. Speaker, when Guelph hydro goes out and builds a new transform early and they borrow money or when O.P.G. Builds a hydroelectric dam Mr. Speaker -- All of that money stays in the rate base. It doesn't come on to the tax base which is the way it's always been done.

>> Andrea Horwath: This government concerned for families, businesses and farms when they increased their hydro rate by 300% -- Electricity system? Where was their concern? This Premier has never even opened a hydro bill in the last decade. She and her Liberal government are completely out of touch with what Ontario families are going through. The Premier is making Ontarians spend an extra \$4 billion. No matter where they decide to put it in the books. It's an extra \$4 billion that they're costing Ontarians while families are struggling just to hide the damage her hydro scheme is going to do. How can the Premier defend this massive breach of trust with the people of Ontario?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again 25% reduction for families, small businesses and farms is immediate and real relief for the people of Ontario, Mr. Speaker, something that we've heard loud and clear and acted upon, Mr. Speaker. But when it comes to what we've talked about, Mr. Speaker, today, it was a policy choice, a policy choice of this government to ensure that we continue to have a clean and reliable and affordable electricity system, and that all of the borrowing done within the electricity system, Mr. Speaker, stays within that system. It does not make sense, Mr. Speaker, for Hydro One, for O.P.G., for any of our utilities that need to borrow money, that need to invest to keep that clean and reliable system going, that that money would then come onto the tax base. It doesn't make sense, Mr. Speaker. It's never worked that way. And so what we've done, Mr. Speaker, is we've kept with common practice. We've kept with accounting standards and we're making sure that we're keeping bills as low as possible with a clean system and a reliable system in this province.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Sandals) Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: My next question's also for the Premier. You know the auditor general also revealed that the government knew that the costs to hide their borrowing scheme was going to reach the astonishing additional amount of \$4 billion. When did the Premier know what the cost of this scheme was going to be and when did she decide that \$4 billion was an acceptable price tag?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I know the president of the treasury board will want to comment but, Mr. Speaker, we heard from Ontarians across this province. They said quite clearly that the costs that had been incurred because we had to rebuild the system, Mr. Speaker, the system was degraded. It was unreliable. It was dirty, Mr. Speaker. It's clean. It is reliable. We made investments, Mr. Speaker, so that it would be --

[Interjection] That's a cost associated with making those improvements. We made a decision, Mr. Speaker, that we would smooth out the cost of making those improvements over a longer period of time. We were very clear that there would be a cost associated with that but that this was an asset that would be in place not just for this generation, Mr. Speaker, but for the future. And I've said quite clearly, Mr. Speaker, that we understand that. We understand there was a cost associated with smoothing those costs. But, Mr. Speaker, in the immediate term, people need today see relief and they are.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the auditor general has been very clear about this. The government knew that this financial trick would cost the people of Ontario an extra \$4 billion, and they did it anyways. The A.G. Has the emails that prove it, Speaker. Was the Premier or any member of her office one of the officials that the auditor was referring to when she told Ontarians that the government knew the cost of this scheme?

>> Minister Liz Sandals: Yes. Thank you very much. I do need to note the number that keeps getting thrown around here is an estimate that came from the F.A.O.. He's not a number that ever came to Cabinet for decision making. So the fact that it's out there is something the F.A.O. Put out there. But I want to go back to the issue around the accounting dispute, because clearly, with all due respect to the auditor, we are having an accounting dispute with the auditor. And the auditor did a very peculiar thing yesterday. The auditor announced in advance how she would rule on the province's books a year from now based on a transaction which has not yet occurred. Now the auditor says that the transaction is debt that should be treated like credit card debt.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, after the gas plants, cover-up which two Liberal staffers are on trial for right now and the Sudbury bribery scandal, which another two Liberal operatives are in court for right now, the Premier promised that she would finally be open and transparent with the people of this province. Here's the Premier's opportunity to be true to her word finally. Will she release those emails that the auditor general referenced immediately?

>> Minister Sandals: Thank you. As I was saying, the auditor says that this is just like credit card debt. It's just like the stranded debt, that we can't turn that debt into an asset. On the other hand, we have three firms, Ian white, deloitte, KPMG, provincial comptroller who all say no, we should be using write regulated accounting. We clearly have a dispute. But the interesting thing is the transaction hasn't occurred. The market will decide who is right. Because if the market buys the asset, it's a regulated asset. The market will be the referee when O.P.G. Completes that will transaction.

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Todd Smith: Thanks, Speaker. My question this morning is for the Minister of energy. Speaker, it may be a new Minister of energy, but it's the same old lack of transparency and accountability and openness from this Minister. Minister, every single ministry and government agency was able to comply with the order to produce emails to the auditor general in advance of her report. But your ministry was singled out for failure to comply. How come every time, how come every time this Liberal government makes a multibillion-dollar energy decision -- and let's be honest, to save its own political hide -- it ends up in another email scandal?

>>Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I not member opposite heard the answer from us yesterday in estimates so I'll repeat that. When it comes to the release of emails, over 13,212 emails to be exact, Mr. Speaker, have been released by the ministry of energy to the auditor general and we're continuing to provide the auditor general with more. When the scope of the ask came from the auditor general, there were 80 custodians that were identified with 40 actual words or phrases that needed to be captured. That produced over 2 million e-mails, Mr. Speaker. All of those emails then had to be worked through, Mr. Speaker. 145,000 of those, 2 million emails, were then identified. We have the ministry of energy going through all of those emails, Mr. Speaker. We continued to keep the auditor general updated. On the progress of this, but, Mr. Speaker, we've ensured that we've complied with that and provided over 13,000 emails to date.

>>MPP Smith: Speaker, with all due respect to the current Minister, we've seen this movie before here in the legislature. Minister s of energy said no, no, no. We've complied. We've turned over all the documents. And then another couple of weeks would pass. No, no, no. You now have all the documents. Then a few more weeks have passed. No, now you have all the documents. It ended up in a billion-dollar gas plant scandal and we're seeing the same kind of ethical deficit coming from the ministry of energy again. We learned that the government has retained a major bay street lawyer firm. When a retain early of \$500,000, a half a million dollars to help them to decide which emails they were going to turn over, Mr. Speaker. Does the Minister not understand that the act that governs the auditor general says that it's supposed to get any and all documents that she asked for? We're seeing a court case downtown right now on this issue. Speaker, why is the government spending thousands of dollars on lawyers to tell them which documents to trun over?

>>Mlister thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'll have to explain the process of what we're going through, Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite. We've already complied. As the auditor general has said yesterday, we continue to work with our office provider with all of the emails, Mr. Speaker. Over 13,000 emails have already been brought forward to the auditor general's office. We're going to continue to work, Mr. Speaker, and provide her with all of the emails that she asked for. But when you start with 80 custodians, 80 people that actually would be involved with this, Mr. Speaker, and 40 catchphrasees or words, that created 2 million emails, Mr. Speaker. We wanted to make sure she got access to this, Mr. Speaker. We brought that down and recognized that there were 145,000, 145,000 of those -- those emails. We have the ministry of energy. Working through this, Mr. Speaker. 13,000 have been provided right now. We'll continue to work with the auditor general and provide those emails.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. My question to the Premier. The people of Ontario deserve to know who authorized an accounting trick designed to hide the cost of the Premier's hydro borrowing scheme. The auditor general's been clear based on emails she accessed as part of her investigation that the Liberal government knew the astronomical cost and did it anyway. But the Premier won't admit that she knew and when, and neither will the Minister. Will the Premier stop telling Ontarians that she is open and transparent and actually be open and transparent and release those emails right now?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, when it comes to the emails that we are providing to the auditor general, when it comes to the fair hydro plan, we are in compliance, Mr.

Speaker. We're continuing to work with her office. We've identified 80 custodians of the request, Mr. Speaker, with 40 catchphrases or words. That produced 2 million emails, Mr. Speaker. We then had the firm narrow that down to the specific file, Mr. Speaker. That produced 145,000 emails with these grades. We then had the entire ministry of energy, Mr. Speaker, working on identifying all of the emails that will comply with the ask from the auditor general, Mr. Speaker. So we are complying. We are acting right now. Those emails, we have over 13,000, 13,212 to be exact, Mr. Speaker. We've made sure that we're going to continue to provide those emails to the auditor general and we'll continue to work with her office.

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you. Speaker, the people -- sorry, Speaker. To the Premier again. The people of this province have had enough, enough of this Liberal government's partisan manoeuvring. They've had too many vag statements, too much political doublespeak and way too many "I don't recall" from the Premier. The government set aside \$500,000 for a lawyer to assemble these emails for the auditor general. It should be easy for the Premier to release those emails to the public. Will the Premier release those emails now? Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said before and as I'll say again, Mr. Speaker, there were 80 custodians identified that were involved in the fair hydro plan. Of those 80 custodians 40 catchphrases or words were then identified that needed to be turned over. That produced 2 million emails, Mr. Speaker. Those 2 million emails then were reviewed by the firm in which we've paid approximately \$40,000 to. We will not be going over \$60,000 in this, Mr. Speaker, but that firm then identified those 145,000 emails which the ministry of energy is now identifying as and releasing. We've released 13,212 emails to the auditor general. We're going to continue to work with the auditor general's office. We're going to continue to provide the emails as we identify those - 145,000 that pertain to this case, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to work with the auditor general on this file, Mr. Speaker.

MPP McMeekin to Minister Milczyn Re: Community Poverty Reduction Plan

>> MPP Ted McMeekin: Thanks very much, Speaker. My question's -- question's for the Minister of housing and responsible for poverty reduction. We know that the local poverty reduction fund is an important component of our government's renewed poverty reduction strategy. These funds help community organizations provide innovative and local solutions to poverty in their area. Yesterday, sir, I was pleased to join with you, announcing that food for kids in Hamilton will receive 250,000 as part of the local poverty reduction fund for their weekends without hunger program. This program helps single-parent families by delivering food directly to their homes on weekends when school nutrition programs are not running. I was please today hear this round of funding has a special focus on food security issues much that's good. Speaker, can the good Minister tell us more about -- Poverty reduction fund and what kinds of initiatives were supported through the third round of funding?

>> Minister Peter Milczyn: I want to thank the member from Ancaster Dundas glanbrook west Dale for the question and for his career-long commitment to poverty reduction. Through the local poverty reduction fund, Ontario's helping to break the cycle of poverty for children and youth, increased employment and income security, increase food security and end homelessness in Ontario. The local poverty reduction fund announced in April 2015 is investing \$50 million to support sustainable community-driven initiatives that measurably improve the lives of those most affected by poverty. Through the third round of the oprf, Ontario's providing more than \$16 million to 48 projects across Ontario, including specifically \$4.5 million for food security. We know there's much more to do and we will continue to make strategic investments such as these to help break the cycle of poverty.

>> MPP McMeekin: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the Minister of housing and the Minister responsible for poverty reduction. I'm pleased to hear that the third round of funding for the local poverty reduction program has been distributed to such helpful programs. Speaker, I urge all members of this House to be aware of the local poverty reduction fund and to highlight the successful work we're doing together to reduce poverty across Ontario. What makes the local poverty fund Ewen sick we are in fact Collect, the data and we can measure whether it's successful

and whether it should be replicated or not. Can the Minister tell this House how the local poverty reduction fund is helping to gather evidence to measurably improve the lives of those most impacted by poverty?

>> Minister Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our poverty reduction strategy sets bold targets to ensure that our efforts are having the greatest impact and ensure that we tackle poverty in a comprehensive and coordinated way. Through our government's local poverty reduction strategy fund we're evaluating what works so that we can replicate those successes elsewhere throughout the province and lift more people out of poverty, Mr. Speaker. These projects focus on local community pilot projects, including a third-party evaluation component, which is important because better data will help communities develop better solutions to increase food security, better employment, reduce homelessness and help people find jobs and keep their homes. Mr. Speaker, we're continuing to make sure that people have the resources they need. And they're able to take part in the economic growth that we know they can participate in.

MPP MacLeod to Minister Sandals Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Premier of Ontario. Like her government, Enron also hid large debts off of its balance sheet. It became one of the worst rate scandals of all time. Here the unfair hydro plan is on track to becoming Ontario's worst political scandal and that's a feat. Why? Let's put it in perspective. This costs more than the \$1 billion wasted at health, \$1.2 billion in cancelled gas plants, and the \$2 billion smart meter rip-off and it all happened under the treasury board president's watch. The unfair hydro scheme is \$4 billion in unnecessary interest payments that Ontarians will be paying for decades to come. The question for the Premier, does she condone the gross incompetence of her treasury board president?

>> Minister Liz Sandals: Oh, dear. Where to start. Let's go back to where -- let's go back to where this really did start, Speaker. This started with the people of Ontario who said to us, we appreciate the fact that you've got cleaned up the air and shut down the coal plants, but this is really costing too much on our hydro bills. And we said yeah, you're right. And Cabinet made two important decisions. The first of those decisions was to separate what was social programs out of the hydro bill and put them on the tax base. In fact that amount is over just to remind people because this number was also provided yesterday. That \$7.7 billion over five years that has been shifted because of social programs, to the tax base.

>> MPP MacLeod: The Premier does condone gross incompetence. If they want to start from what they said where to start, they don't know where to start. How about we start with the truth? This isn't the first time the treasury board president has proven to be incompetent when it comes to the public accounts of Ontario. She has had, quote, ongoing accounting disputes with the auditor over the pension assets which has left a \$5 billion hole in their budget the now the Minister is claiming, quote, accounting dispute with the auditor who found an additional \$4 billion in unnecessary interest. The auditor is using standard and accepted accounting practices. The financial accountability officer agrees the Liberals are just making it up again. They are making Bernie Madoff look ethical. Does the Premier condone this type of political corruption? -Withdrawn. Sorry. I put the wrong word in there.

>> Minister Sandals: So let's look at the one part of the decision was to put social program on the tax base. The other part of the decision was to put things that have to do with electricity systems onto the rate base. And that's where we get into an interesting conundrum because what the public sector accounting standard says is that no rule of general application can be served or combination of circumstances that may arise. As a result, matters may arise that are not specifically addressed in the primary sources generally accepted accounting principles. It is necessary to refer to other sources when the primary sources do not deal with the accounting -- Reporting and financial statements. What we have done is exactly what the public sector accounting standards ask for, which is to refer to other standards of -- accounting standards ask for, which is to refer to other standards of --

MPP Gelinas to Minister Hoskins Re: Dental Care

>> MPP France Gelinas: Across the province and want to applaud their work and advocacy. Community health centre know that in Ontario today, up to 3 million people cannot get the dental care that they need. Why, Speaker ? Because they cannot afford to pay for it and there's no government support to help them. The Premier has promised to expand the dental care for low incomes but she's making them wait until 2025. No offence, Speaker, but there's a good chance she won't be Premier by then which basically means that she's Mott going -- not going to help them. She's not going to do it. My question is simple. Why does the Premier think that she can leave the most vulnerable adult working Ontarians without access to the dental care they need and wait for another eight years?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'm also honoured that we're joined by so many frontline health care workers that represent the community care that's being provided through community health centres. And other important facilities, Mr. Speaker. And it is true that we are -- in fact we have expanded our healthy smiles program. We several years ago integrated six different programs, added 70,000 more kids that are eligible. So any kid in Ontario that is under the age of 17 or younger, Mr. Speaker, and meets the eligibility criteria through a myriad of options, are able to have that all-important dental care, which gives them that important start in life, because a healthy mouth means a healthy heart and a healthy body but it's so important for self-esteem and for everything from employment and other. So with regards --To health the Premier and this government have made the commitment that by 2025, because as everyone can appreciate it is a costly exercise but it's one that --

>> MPP Gelinas: Thank you, Speaker. New Democrats, frontline workers, community health centres, we all know that Ontarians, adult working Ontarians need access to dental care. Yet this Liberal government refuses to make it happen. People today with a toothache or mouth pain are force today go to the emergency room. Every nine minutes, someone visits an emergency room, and all they'll get will be painkillers. Those emergency room visits are not free, Speaker. They cost Ontario \$30 million a year but don't address the problem. Family physicians are also worried. They try to care for over 200,000 patients every year who need dental care but can't afford to see a dentist. Why is this Premier and her Minister refusing --To provide dental care to every vulnerable Ontarian who need it now?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely committed to this objective. I know the member opposite understands that there is a process under way, that we're working with our partners, that the nearly half a million Ontarian children 17 and younger that are now receiving access to dental work, including emergency but also preventive dental care through public health unit through private dentists' office, it's really a remarkable program working exceptionally well. We will and we need to expand that to other age groups including the working poor and adults of low socioeconomic income. That is a commitment that we've made. It is a commitment that I think needs to be captured in the essence of the other important investments that we are making in health care including ohip, plus for all those 25 and under. Who will get absolutely free access to 4,400 prescribed medications starting January 1st, Mr. Speaker

MPP Des Rosiers to Minister Hoskins Re: Access to Healthcare

MPP Nathalie Des Rosiers: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of health. To ensuring that Ontarians have access to health care close to home, and last year I understand we passed the patients first act, among -- which requires that the lhin pay attention to health equityment so we are

concerned obviously to reduce all health disparities between regions but also between different populations. Now given that this week is community health and well-being week, can the Minister explain how these community health centres bring us closer to reducing health disparities?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if I may, I want first to add my own condolences and that of my spouse, Samantha Nutt, to the family and friends of our friend Gord Downie. To Laura and their four children, to Rob and Gord and Paul and Bobby, we mourn with you., Mr. Speaker, it's safe to say that War Child Canada, the charity that's now and I founded would never have existed without Gord Downie and the tragically hip. At the charity's benefit concert launch in 2000 in Winnipeg outdoors at the forks, in front of 80,000 people, Sam was on stage imploring the crowd to donate cash into buckets, buckets being carried through the crowd. Only \$10,000 had been raised. Then Gord walked on stage, took Sam and microphone by the hand and calmly said six words -- put the money in the cup. Half an hour later, we had raised over \$300,000. That's the impact Gord had. Gord was an incomparable artist, poet, champion of indigenous rights, immeasurably talented and incredibly generous. And he put Bobcaygeon on the map. He will be missed. Thank you

>> MPP Des Rosiers: Yes. I want to congratulate the Minister for expressing all our feelings today about the great loss that Ontario and Canada suffers. There may be at this point can explain a little bit more how we are getting to reducing health disparities in Ontario.

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I had the opportunity to make an announcement in my riding of St. Paul's, in the observing Irlg wood Vaughan area, which is a challenged area if I can describe it that way -- Oakwood. \$1.6 million for a new clinic that will provide preventive care for people living in poverty. Satellite of a community health centre run by Unison. Seniors, vulnerable youth and people with mental health issues. It will help nearly 1,000 residents in that underserved community with high needs and allow them to access regular health services from a doctor, a nurse practitioner, a registered nurse, a social worker and a health promoter. But we're also making improvements across the province, where we invested \$46 million between now and 2019, 2020 towards recruiting and retaining health care professionals for primary care teams. \$100 million over three years to support the expansion of interprofessional primary care teams. Many investments that reflect the vital importance of our frontline community health workers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Pettapiece to Minister Hoskins Re: Horseracing Industry

>> MPP Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. As reported on news talk 1010, senior Liberal officials worked in secret to cancel the slots-at-racetracks programme in 2012 knowing full well the devastating impact it would have on the horse racing industry. Court documents and e-mails so that the Liberals ignored all evidence and abruptly cut off the program with no transitional support to racetracks and horse people. The result was catastrophic. Former Liberal MPP John Wilkinson predicted 23,000 job losses and 2,000 dead horses. The lawsuits coming our way will likely add up to \$500 million and you will be lucky to settle for \$250 million. My question is why did the government ignore all evidence and scrap the slots-at-racetracks programme at the expense of rural Ontario, thousands of beautiful horses and good-paying jobs?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. The member opposite references a decision to ensure more of the money that's being raised throughout the industry goes to the horsemen and the horses. And frankly we not only looked at the way it was being done, which was not as transparent and not to the benefit of the horsemen. That is why we are committed to the long-term sustainability of the horse racing industry. This Premier took it upon herself specifically to make sure more money goes to them. \$100 million more annually is going to the horse racing partnership right where the horsemen. We are doing everything to make it a sustainable industry on an ongoing basis recognizing the importance where the money should be. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the government is being sued by a group of

standardbred horse breeders over their political decision to kill slots at racetracks. The government is trying to block witnesses from testifying, including former Premier Dalton McGuinty, former finance Minister Dwight Duncan and the current Premier of Ontario. Now we know that the Liberals have been lying -- have been trying to hide. A long trail document shows that senior Liberals conspired to scrap slots at racetracks. A top advisor to Premier McGuinty wrote in an email and I quote -- meeting with the Premier just ended. He was inclined to go to zero dollars for horse racing. They crushed -- they rushed to cancel the program without doing any real economic analysis or consulting with the horse racing industry. Again to the Premier, why was your government willing to devastate the horse racing industry with 23,000 job losses, 27,000 dead horses? Was it because -- Damage would fall on rural Ontario?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to supporting the horse racing industry. It is why we are taking and obtaining the resources necessary to provide for the revenues. We are supplementing much, much of the horse racing tracks right now, both operations and their purses, Mr. Speaker. We are providing a funding program. We have the Ontario race -- informed to provide transparency and oversight with Horsman and the horses at the top of the chain of command, Mr. Speaker. We support transparency within the industry. We support greater use of funds. We are providing more money through slots than they had before. More money going to where it needs to be, to the horses to protect them and planning for their years to Kol. We recognize that cycle does take time. We want to partner with the horses. We are doing so, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MPP Fife to Minister Ballard Re: Chemical Valley Air Quality

>> MPP Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. This week we learned that, since at least 2009, engineers at the ministry of environment and climate change have been raising sorry I couldn't say concerns about safety at Ontario's petroleum refineries. We also learned this government has been muzzling these engineers and they buried a 2014 report showing the health impacts of air pollution on families living in south Sarnia and the first nation. The engineers claim the ministry meets regularly with industry officials while shutting out its own engineers. Why is your Minister more interested in listening to industry lobbyists than your own engineers and your own ministry of the environment?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you for a very important question. You know, Speaker, as I said yesterday, Ontario takes the quality of air very seriously. Everyone across this province has the right to breathe clean air. My ministry is carefully reviewing the report that was provided to them by the union representing engineers, and we take very seriously the concerns that it brought to our attention. Speaker, we take advice from a wide variety of people. Inside our ministry, we have a very transparent methodology to collect information and move it through the pipeline. We post that publicly, Speaker. We talk to a variety of stakeholders, from right across in order to get it right. Speaker, I will reiterate that I'm taking this very seriously. My ministry's reevaluating it and I'll have tough questions for them.

>> MPP Fife: In order to get it right. Speaker, I will reiterate that I'm taking this very seriously. My ministry's reevaluating it and I'll have tough questions for them. Mr. Speaker, again back to the Premier. It would be good if you listened to your own engineers and your own ministry. Here are some of the concerns that have been raised by the Minister's own engineers. Poorly regulated flaring of acid gas and emitting unsafe levels of dioxide. After a hydrogen sulphide incident in 2010 children at the Ojibway day care began vomiting and needing medical care. Even US Regulators have flagged Ontario's lax air pollution standards and enforcement. But instead of taking action this government told its own engineers to remain silent which is actually against their own code of ethics as engineers. When will the Minister stop muzzling his only engineers and take the necessary action to keep Ontario families safe in this province?

>> Minister Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker. Again, thank you for the follow-up question, because I think it's very important to talk about what we're doing in our ministry. You know, I've managed to --

I visited two first nation communities in Sarnia recently and had these conversations with their leadership and with members of community about the air quality that they have, about the qualities of water and the quality of land, within their communities, and they have concerns and I share those concerns, Mr. Speaker, and have committed to moving forward. We will continue to improve air quality for the folks who live in first nations Sarnia and, quite honestly, Speaker, right across Ontario. I can tell you in Sarnia specifically, Speaker, we have reduced --Sulphur dioxide by 64%, nitrogen dioxide by 23, and

MPP Rinaldi to Minister Damerla Re: Long-Term Care Homes

>> MPP Lou Rinaldi: "QUESTION NOT AVAILABLE"

>> Minister Dipika Damerla: About our new sprinkler retrofit program. And I'm proud to say, Mr. Speaker, that Ontario became the first province to make the retrofit of fire sprinklers mandatory in licensed retirement homes. We're not stopping there, Mr. Speaker, because, as the MPP For northumberland-quinte west pointed out, some retirement homes, they've come to us and said it's going to be a little bit challenging for them to be able to retrofit with sprinklers. And so, Mr. Speaker, because as a government, we are so committed to the safety of our seniors, we have announced funding of up to \$20 million --In funding to address the financial challenges the retirement homes across Ontario have the raised Through a balanced cost sharing --

>> MPP Rinaldi: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister for her answer. I'm pleased E- it's a good answer. I'm pleased to hear that we are making investments that will enhance fire safety in retirement homes for Ontario seniors. I am appreciative of this government's action in ensuring that vulnerable Ontarians are given the safety and protection they need. While the number of seniors in Ontario is growing to record numbers, with more seniors moving to retirement homes, it is important that they feel confident in their safety so they can live healthy active lives. Could the Minister of seniors affairs describe to this House the T expected impact of this program in Ontario retirement homes?

>> Minister Damerla: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I again want to thank the member from northumberland-quinte west for this very important question. As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, I was earlier last week, along with the MPP For Trinity- Spadina, I announced up to \$20 million in funding to address financial challenges at retirement homes across Ontario have so that they can go ahead and retrofit their homes. The model that we have, Mr. Speaker, is cost sharing with our new program. Over 150 small or rural licensed retirement homes representing over 6,000 people, Mr. Speaker. Once again I want to emphasize that 6,000 suites are now eligible for funding to provide them with the assistance they need to become fully equipped with fire sprinklers. By January 1, 2019 deadline. The funding followed a cost sharing model as I said that the government's providing between 50% and 75% --

MPP Fedeli to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Speaker, good morning. My question is for the Premier. The worst thing we learned yesterday from the auditor general is that this government knew, Speaker. They knew that the cost was billions of dollars more, yet they plotted to do this anyway. They co-opted crown agencies to be complicit in their cynical multibillion-dollar election ploy. The auditor's report clearly states, quote, Cabinet was regularly briefed and provided detail. The Premier, the finance Minister, the energy Minister. In fact all of Cabinet, they knew that families would be on the hook for \$4 billion more, and not one of those people had the integrity to stand up and say whoa. This isn't right. Instead there was that Minister, that Minister, that Minister or that Minister, none of them stood up, Speaker. To the Premier I say why in god's green Earth should families ever trust a word

you say again?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: It's because this government stays true to its word and brought forward a 25% reduction Families right across the province., Mr. Speaker, when families in this province asked for real and immediate relief, it was this government that delivered. We made a policy choice, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we continue to have a clean, reliable and affordable system that ratepayers can enjoy today and of course it will be there for ratepayers of tomorrow tomorrow. The fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, keeps the cost of borrowing within the rate base, not the tax base, Mr. Speaker. Electricity financing should remain within the electricity system, Mr. Speaker. And of course we've worked with KPMG. We've worked with Ian wise. We've wokd with de polite, Mr. Speaker. We've worked with the provincial comptroller. All of them agree that the accounting standards are accurate, Mr. Speaker .